

TGCC

The North/South Appalachian Highway Project



PACE 2013 w/ SHA representatives in Annapolis, MD.

We've Come a Long Way

With the completion of US-219 firmly within reach, a look back on the early roots of the project, as well as the many advances made possible through the leadership of The Greater Cumberland Committee (TGCC), we have certainly come a long way!

In 2009, Maryland Department of Transportation announced \$2.1 billion in cuts to State highway projects and as a result, it stops work on the US 220 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) with West Virginia DOT. The US 220 project is the southern leg of the North-South Appalachian Highway Project. It runs from I-68 near Cumberland to Corridor H in West Virginia along a possible US 220 alignment. At the same time, PennDOT ceases work with Maryland DOT on the US 219 DEIS project from Meyersdale to I-68 and a prohibition on usage of "toll credits" for state match stops the projects.

After sitting comfortably on a shelf for some time, TGCC's membership begins internal discussions about the viability of the project. As a result, the unanimous decision was made to identify the North/South Appalachian Highway advancement as the organization's anchor project, and it was added to the 2009/10 Work Plan Initiatives. Similarly, a Coalition was established to strategically consider the many dynamics of the project and organize outreach efforts within each state. Since that time, TGCC has served as the cornerstone for this project by fostering dialogue across state and county lines and making "regionalism" the new catchphrase of this generation.

In response to an appeal from PA Governor Ed Rendell, the Coalition secures support from MD Governor Martin O'Malley and WV Governor Joe Manchin in an effort to remove the prohibition on "toll credit" usage for Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) projects. All three Governors advised their respective Congressional delegations of their position.

The Coalition organized both Mountain Maryland County Governments and their respective state legislative delegations to secure a meeting with Governor O'Malley to request the reinstatement of funding for US 220 DEIS. Within six months, the Maryland DOT announced that they would be restarting the US 220 DEIS in partnership with West Virginia DOT by reallocating the necessary budget of \$750,000 in order to proceed. Likewise, a delegation of the Coalition began the first of several meetings with selected Senators and Congressmen to address the "toll credit" challenge for Appalachian Development Highway Systems (ADHS).

A 2001 four-state feasibility study examined several possible corridors within an area including: I-70/76 (PA Turnpike) to the north, ADHS Corridor H to the south, I-79 to the west and I-81 to the east. US-219 from Somerset, Pennsylvania to I-68 in Maryland and US 220 from Cumberland, Maryland to Corridor H in West Virginia was selected as the best route to drive economic development for the region. The total impact offered 10,000 permanent and 20,000 construction related jobs for the region. A request was made to the Center for Regional Progress at Frostburg State University to consider an update to this study and the Coalition grew to 135 members.

*Some of our key Pennsylvania Work Group members: (Left to Right)
Ron Aldom, Somerset County Chamber
Linda Thomson, JARI
Glenn Miller, VCS Group*



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Where we are now...

In our last newsletter we reported that after the new federal transportation authorization bill passed Congress and was signed by the President, PA Governor Tom Corbett authorized PennDOT to move forward with the construction project of 219 from Somerset to Meyersdale, PA.

It was anticipated that the first phase (earthwork) of this five year project would be put out to bid in the first quarter of 2013, but the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) expressed concerns over possible water quality impacts as a result of this project. The EPA's action required the US Army Corp of Engineers and PennDOT to respond with a series of conference calls and on-site visits by representatives to further refine the construction project and the protections planned in order to limit any negative impact to water resources in the project's area.

In May 2013, the EPA indicated it would not elevate its initial concerns requesting additional review. At that time, the Army Corp of Engineers issued the construction permit to PennDOT.

Both Senator Bob Casey and Congressman Bill Shuster continued to monitor this process and express their support related to the positive economic impact to Somerset County and the region. Congressman Shuster has been appointed as Chairman of the US House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Because this committee will be writing the next federal transportation authorization legislation – due by October 2014 - he and his staff took particular interest in this EPA action and its resolution.

PennDOT wasted no time in acting after receipt of the construction permit. A formal advertisement for bids on the earthwork phase of the project was issued on May 30, 2013. Bids will be open on July 25, 2013 and a contract award is anticipated by the end of August with work beginning by the end of September.

This first phase of earthwork along the entire eleven mile segment is anticipated to take approximately two years. The second phase will be the construction of eleven bridges, which is anticipated to take approximately two years. The final phase – paving – will take approximately one year, giving an anticipated completion of fall 2018.



*2012 Coalition Meeting
Left to Right:
Tom Prestach (PennDOT)
Commissioner John Vatauvuk
(Somerset Co.), Robin Summerfield
(Senator Cardin's Office), Julianna
Albowicz (Senator Mikulski's Office),
David Moe (Coordinator—N/S project),
John Frick (Senator Toomey's
Office)*



*2012 Coalition Meeting at Morguen Toole
Company in Meyersdale, PA*

Where are we going?

In April 2002, PennDOT and MDOT/ SHA began a joint project for the last section of 219 and its portion of Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) Corridor “N”.

In 2007, after five years of information gathering and public hearings, PennDOT withdrew from the project citing the economic downturn and the loss of “toll credits” which were previously available for use by ADHS projects in the 2005 Federal Transportation Legislation, SAFETEA-LU. This stoppage occurred just before the two states were ready to submit their Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for its consideration and review.

In late August 2011, it became apparent that the newly proposed federal transportation legislation would allow “toll credits” to once again be used for ADHS projects in the proposed MAP-21 legislation. This action was a direct cause of committed efforts by U.S. Senator Ben Cardin and Congressman Bill Shuster. As a result, MDOT Secretary Beverly Swain-Staley wrote PennDOT Secretary Barry Schoch soliciting PennDOT to re-start the 219 project. Secretary Schoch declined and offered the following:

“The allowable use of toll credits on ADHS funded projects would greatly enhance the schedule and delivery of ADHS projects within the Commonwealth. However, until the use of toll credits becomes a viable option or the federal/state transportation funding picture changes significantly, PennDOT is unable to resume the joint planning study.”

The new Federal Transportation Legislation, MAP-21, passed Congress and was signed by the President in July 2012. This Act of Congress removed two of the three concerns previously offered by Secretary Schoch. First, it allowed for the use of “toll credits” for ADHS projects and secondly, it provided for the Appalachian states to use 100% federal funding, and the accumulated, unallocated ADHS funding for any ADHS project within their state. Furthermore, it continued to include funding for the ADHS in each individual Appalachian state’s surface transportation allotment. Congress did not discontinue funding for the ADHS, but merely included that funding in each individual Appalachian state’s total federal surface transportation funds and allowed those 13 states to use as much of those federal surface transportation funds as those states needed to complete their unfinished ADHS corridors.

Nine months after MAP-21 passed, Maryland’s Governor, Martin O’Malley, wrote directly to Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett requesting the states re-start the last portion of 219 from Meyersdale, PA to I-68 in Maryland.

In his letter, Maryland Governor O’Malley stated:

“If the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) is not in a position to complete their portion of the planning study, I would like to offer that the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) move forward and complete planning activities for the full length of US 219 between I68 and Meyersdale utilizing Maryland’s Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) funds.”

There has been no formal response to Governor O’Malley’s bold and unprecedented offer to date. Both state DOTs continue to communicate with one another regarding the 219 project. Additionally, the Pennsylvania state legislature continues to debate proposals which will generate additional revenue for their state transportation fund.

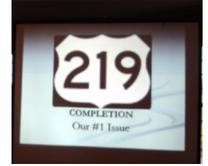
The Pennsylvania Senate has passed a measure that would raise needed transportation funds while the House has not. Committee hearings are ongoing. Should both legislative houses come together and help fund needed transportation projects in PA, the final leg of 219 from Meyersdale to I-68 in Maryland should have a good chance to re-start. This would allow for US Congressman Bill Shuster to accomplish his goal “to connect Route 219 to Interstate 68 in Maryland.”

Congressman Shuster is the Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the US House of Representatives. His committee will write the next surface transportation authorization legislation next year.

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In order to continue our work on the North/South Appalachian Highway project, private and public partnerships are key. If you are interested in making a contribution now or in the future, please contact TGCC staff for more details.

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You may also detach the form below and send in with a check to the address above. Thank you for your continued dedication to this project.

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