'Sustainable Pittsburgh' Would Destroy Final Leg Of Mon-Fayette Expressway

Based on their recently released "Sustainability Assessment" it appears Sustainable Pittsburgh (SP) has joined the effort to delay and ultimately destroy the prospects for completing the Mon-Fayette Expressway.

> **"[The] Assessment's intent is to raise issues to which we the public should expect to find answers in connection with the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to be released by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission in May 2002."**

That is the first "highlight" of Sustainable Pittsburgh's "Assessment," revealing their intent to launch a preemptive strike against the Turnpike Authority's environmental report, and to raise phony "issues" in order to delay, delay, delay. SP "recommends" that the Southwest Pennsylvania Commission and the Port Authority reinvent the transportation wheel in the Mon Valley; essentially substituting the "regional transit vision" of those local agencies for the perceived (by Sustainable Pittsburgh) highway bias of the Turnpike Authority. SP asks that further construction of the Mon-Fayette Expressway be delayed until myriad unsubstantiated allegations and concerns can be addressed to their satisfaction--concerns that will never be addressed satisfactorily if highway construction is the result. But here's a clue: For the foreseeable future, people of this region will travel by automobile. Simply refusing to accommodate automobile traffic is not a "sustainable" growth strategy. Then we read in the "Sustainability Assesment" that:

> **"The merit of the Northern Sections…has not been examined."**

SP knows this assertion is false. The justification and mission of the Expressway has always been linking Pittsburgh with the transportation arteries serving other, rural areas of Southwestern Pennsylvania in order to foster regional economic development. But highways don't fit the "vision" of Sustainable Pittsburgh and its members and affiliates, who see *"Southwestern Pennsylvania's destiny to be a sustainably* (sic) *developed metropolitan area."* That Sustainable Pittsburgh has its offices in the Regional Enterprise Tower should alarm those who are hopeful that private sector driven economic development will actually occur in this region.

Unwittingly, perhaps, SP has become the voice—a very public one—of those opposed to connecting Pittsburgh with the completed sections of the expressway. Advocates of the "no toll road" position demand that transit absorb all future tax dollars "invested" in new transportation infrastructures, claiming that highways are an outdated solution to the region's needs as they existed in the 1950s. Worse, if that's possible, is their idea that the $1.9 billion (their number)

that would fund construction of the remainder of the expressway could be better invested in transit "alternatives." The theoretical existence of the extravagantly costly Maglev project is touted as justification for abandoning the Expressway's Northern Sections in favor of something called a "multi modal" system. But the fact is that the money has been appropriated for an express, toll road, and may not be used for anything else—use it or lose it, if you will.

The alternatives that SP would like to pursue fit its "sustainable," that is, centrally planned, environment-enhancing, and more socially "equitable" approach. While SP wants "proof" that the Expressway will result in economic development and insists such proof must be extensive and detailed and based, of course, on science, they demand nothing similar of the alternatives—transit, light rail, and the preposterous Maglev—for which no scientific evidence of actual economic deliverables is possible. In fact, the "alternatives" are so costly they will require endless taxpayer subsidy; but they are, in SP's view, superior environmentally and socially.

It is increasingly clear that SP desires central planning and government control of future economic development in the region. The following comment by Court Gould, director of SP, regarding the troubled Deer Creek Crossing project in Harmar, reveals a decidedly anti-private sector bias:

"The question of whether the area needs two new, large retail developments so close to each other, especially considering the amount of existing retail, has not been addressed." He goes on: *"Unfortunately, this is strictly a market decision.…"*

Gould would obviously prefer "regional planning," read: government control using "sustainable principles" to decide what, where, and how development will occur. Gould believes municipalities are "caught up in bidding wars for development" and, therefore, "don't consider alternatives." But the point is that government has no business doing commercial development; that is the job of the private sector. Government does infrastructure. But, should Gould and the SP have their way, infrastructure projects would be limited to those targeted to curing a multiplicity of perceived social ills—an approach that has proved to be a fool's errand everywhere it has been attempted.

Allowing the SP to delay completion of the Northern Sections of the Mon Fayette Expressway would set a dangerous precedent. It would virtually guarantee that major highway development in this region will be nonexistent for the foreseeable future, and that economic development here will be held hostage to the whims of those who seem to feel that progress must be compatible with their radical environmental and social "vision."

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