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PennDOT Secretary joins event celebrating federal grant for I-99/I-80 interchange

Transportation advocates highlight successful, collaborative advocacy effort, importance of the project to the Centre County region

BELLEFONTE, PA, Tuesday, July 31, 2018 – Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Leslie Richards joined Centre County officials and community leaders for a celebratory event for the high-speed I-99/I-80 interchange project. The event was hosted by the **Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County** and supporters of the 'DRIVE *Forward*' transportation initiative.

PennDOT was recently awarded \$35 million in federal *Infrastructure for Rebuilding America* (INFRA) grant funding, which will enable the eventual construction of a high-speed I-99/I-80 interchange and a local access interchange to replace the Bellefonte exit. The INFRA grant funding is leveraging another \$150 million from PennDOT to complete the total funding package of \$185 million needed to complete the project.

"It's always a pleasure to visit the Centre County region," Secretary Richards said. "To be able to do so for an event like today's celebration makes the visit even more special. The INFRA grant monies will have a positive impact on travel in and around Centre County and will make every destination in the region more easily accessible. PennDOT is thrilled to see this project move forward."

The gathering also gave congressional leaders and local officials the opportunity to offer perspective on the successful, collaborative advocacy effort that helped to secure the grant, and what completion of the high-speed interchange will mean for the regional generally and for travel to, from and through Centre County.

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"I am so pleased that after more than a decade of planning, the high-speed interchange at I-80 and Jacksonville Road will finally come to fruition," U.S. Representative Glenn 'GT' Thompson said. "The announcement would have never happened without leaders at every level acting as one unified voice for this region. This project is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that will have widespread benefits for the traveling public and surrounding area. I am proud to have played a role in this project, which will increase safety and benefit economic development for years to come."

In a statement, Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman said projects such as this are an important piece of local economic development.

"Working toward ensuring quality roadways is the keystone of our investments in the future of our communities," Corman said. "A convenient and reliable highway system combined with the efforts of the CBICC and our skilled workforce means employers will continue seeking out our region to provide family sustaining jobs."

CBICC President and CEO Vern Squier, CCE, PaCCE, said the project has significant economic implications not only for Centre County, but to central Pennsylvania.

"With Centre County being an importer of labor and a centrally-located transportation hub for both Pennsylvania and the nation's Mid-Atlantic region, completion of a modern connection that provides for safe and efficient movements between the two interstates will improve and enhance the economic position of Centre County and Central Pennsylvania on a national level," Squier said.

Officials from the Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) addressed local support for the project.

"The new interchanges have been at the top of the MPO's priority list for 20 years because the project will significantly improve safety for thousands of residents, commuters and visitors who travel through that area every day," said Eric Bernier, CCMPO Chairman.

Among those in attendance were supporters of 'DRIVE *Forward*,' a growing group of concerned businesses, individuals, and government and community leaders dedicated to ensuring a safe and efficient local transportation system to the benefit of Centre County and the surrounding central Pennsylvania region.

"The CBICC commends all who are engaging with the 'DRIVE *Forward*' initiative," Squier said. "State and federal officials were aware of the strong show of support for the interchange project as a result. Community collaboration is making a difference – in the transportation realm and beyond."

Squier said grant approval was a first, critical step. Much more work remains before construction commences.

"The 'DRIVE *Forward*' website will continue to be a source of information and updates regarding the high-speed interchange project and other major transportation infrastructure needs in Centre County," he said.

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*For more information about 'DRIVE *Forward*' and to sign on as a supporter, visit www.driveforwardcc.com.*

