

Public-private partnership needed to develop Route 422 rail corridor, official says

Philadelphia-area business leader estimates Route 422 rail corridor cost at \$500 million

By **Greta Cuyler**
Reading Eagle



Private and public partnerships will be needed to develop a rail system along the Route 422 corridor, a Philadelphia-area leader told a group Saturday in Wyomissing.

Rob C. Wonderling, president of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, said a rail system could be put in place quickly if there were funding for it.

"We could get rail service up and running in years, not decades," Wonderling told a crowd of about 50 at "Vision of Smart Growth in Berks County," a presentation sponsored by the Reading-Berks Association of Realtors in the Courtyard by Marriott hotel.

For years there have been debates on how to improve the Route 422 corridor.

Highway traffic between Amity Township and King of Prussia has jumped more than 50 percent in some areas over the past decade. More than a third of nearby farmland has become housing developments and strip malls.

Wonderling said the corridor is a prime target for smart growth, a method of development that mixes commercial and residential, offers diverse housing, and provides open space and multiple transportation options.

He estimated a rail project between Wyomissing and Norristown would cost at least \$500 million, using the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks between Route 422 and the Schuylkill River.

It could be paid for by charging tolls to Route 422 motorists or assessing a fee to developers that build near the rail stations, said Wonderling, a former state senator who once led the Senate transportation committee.

The main source of the rail project funding would be from the private sector, not the federal government, he said. The line would be operated privately, similar to the rail service that runs between Camden and Trenton, N.J.

Tolls along Route 422 only would work if the money raised were earmarked for improvements to the corridor, including improvements to the on and off ramps to ease flow and access, Wonderling said.

Any rail system must be built with the cooperation of county and local governments.

"It's important not to have an arm's length, confrontational relationship with government, but a collaborative relationship," Wonderling said.

At least one audience member wondered if tolls would work.

Jeff Rocket of Lower Heidelberg is a Realtor who travels to Philadelphia at least six times a year. He said he uses the Pennsylvania Turnpike (Interstate 76) rather than Route 422 and wonders if more drivers would take

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that route if there were tolls along the road from Douglassville to King of Prussia.

"If both cost money, people might use I-76 and then revenue projections (for the Route 422 corridor) might go down," Rockett said.

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