
Subject: Op Ed - Is DVRPC the Problem to the 422 Corridor Solution?

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Is DVRPC the Problem to the 422 Corridor Solution?

There's two things we can agree on: US 422 is a congested highway and transportation funding is a problem in Pennsylvania. In early July, DVRPC's Executive Director Barry Seymour asked readers to "consider the facts". The fact is, there are many red flags in DVRPC's 422plus-tolls proposal.

Norristown-Wyomissing Train: DVRPC is projecting 3,300 commuters for the Wyomissing-Philadelphia train. Yet it is unclear if these are "riders" or "trips". Before the line shut down in 1981, the train carried 690 people each weekday. DVRPC's projected 3,300 "riders" translates to a growth rate of 428% since 1981. What is more believable is: 1,650 people making one daily roundtrip (or 3,300 fares). DVRPC was asked under a recent FOIA request to release supporting information to verify their projection. The agency claims the information is privileged, making it impossible to verify their ridership claims.

Simultaneous Highway/Transit Expansion: DVRPC is proposing to add more lanes to US-422 to reduce congestion, along with reactivating the passenger train that runs parallel to the highway. If the highway improvements result in faster travel times and tolls are lower than train fares, drivers will ignore the new train and continue to drive to Paoli (where SEPTA is building a massive parking garage) to ride the faster, more frequent train at a station with ample parking. Will anyone ride the DVRPC train?

Drivers to Center City? The best way to predict ridership on the proposed train lies at the foot of US-422, where it merges with the Schuylkill Expressway, which would give "planners" an exact number of drivers from 422 who drive towards Center City. Yet DVRPC says they've never counted this ramp and have no plans to do so. Wouldn't that be the best place to start?

Adding Capacity to 422 to reduce congestion: Planners often sell the public on highway expansion as a means to fixing gridlock. History demonstrates that new development occurs along undeveloped expressways, and eventually lead to gridlock. That means high tolls in the future, followed by more traffic and pollution.

Tolls for Trains: While charging drivers more of the true cost of driving is the best way to fund our highways, using tolls to fund transit sets a bad example. It avoids the transit funding issue, and could mean no funding for transit in areas without tollable roads.

What are the real goals of 422plus-tolls? Is it creating a tolling authority? Or building highways to support further development? Amid the tolling controversy and flaws with the DVRPC plan, the best course of action is to scrap the current proposal and start fresh. A new emerging proposal calls for intercity rail service operated by Amtrak similar to the Harrisburg line. An intercity train could be extended to Hershey and Harrisburg, linking four major cities in Pennsylvania. Amtrak is a seasoned operator of long distance diesel trains and has existing equipment. All that is needed are stations and parking. Serving other parts of the state makes a legislative solution for transit funding more palatable to the state legislature instead of taxing small communities.

Instead of forcing tolls on drivers, Montgomery County could build segments of a new toll-only lane on 422, built with existing PennDOT programmed funds. Those who want to go faster can, at a price.

The region needs solutions, not studies designed to justify projects that don't solve transportation problems. On Tuesday September 13th, the public will have their chance to quiz DVRPC on the missing facts at the 422 forum at Pope John Paul II High School. Will there be answers?

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