

# Plan now to capture opportunities

## ■ Communities should prepare for I-99 opening.

BY ROSE M. BAKER  
AND DAVID L. PASSMORE

The entire length of Interstate 99 from Bedford near the Pennsylvania Turnpike to the Bald Eagle interchange at Interstate 80 could open for traffic by the end of 2008, as long as about 1 million cubic yards of environmentally troublesome pyretic rock near State College are relocated as scheduled.

Communities along the highway corridor can seize, if prepared, important economic opportunities that the completed length of I-99 will offer.

A fully open I-99 would help transform the central Pennsylvania economy by reducing travel time, accident costs, vehicle operating costs and environmental costs.

Travel time in the region will decrease through higher traffic speeds, fewer intersection stops and less traffic congestion along the I-99 corridor.

Reduced travel time means lower travel costs and allows better and wider access to a work force necessary for economic development along the corridor.

Commuters and people living along rural roadways have waited for years for this new four-lane, limited-access highway to open to

reduce safety risks. Among other rural road hazards, long-haul trucks make driving the region's narrow two-lane roads perilous.

Reduced traffic congestion on I-99 would lower accident rates and, in turn, would lower traffic accident costs. Individuals and companies in the region would enjoy any medical and insurance savings that result.

Delivery costs are part of the final prices of goods. Lower vehicle operating costs from less time on the road, fewer miles traveled and fewer trips to deliver the same amount of freight would lower prices of goods to companies and consumers. Lower delivery costs would make the price of central Pennsylvania's goods more attractive.

Less travel congestion and stop-and-go driving would lower greenhouse gas emissions in the region and ultimately would pare health care costs borne by companies and individuals.

The central Pennsylvania region along the I-99 corridor offers access to quality education, available and potentially productive land, zones of innovation and opportunity that provide government subsidies for industrial location, a strong work ethic, an outstanding quality of life and concentrations of innovations in fields such as nanotechnology, advanced materials science and similarly unique technologies.

A fully open I-99 highway in 2008 will launch these assets in even bet-

ter ways by making communities along the highway corridor more economically competitive.

But will central Pennsylvania communities be ready to harness these competitive advantages?

Without thoughtful strategic planning for the region, I-99 transportation improvements merely will allow goods and people to just pass by the region more efficiently. Origins and destinations outside the region, not central Pennsylvania, will capture the benefits of I-99 improvements.

The interstate will open soon. Fortune favors the prepared.

Organizations such as the I-99 Corridor Alliance (a consortium of Bedford County Economic Development Association, Altoona Blair County Development Corporation, Centre County Chamber of Business and Industry and the Penn State) already are considering I-99's role in the transformation of central Pennsylvania.

More community organizations and interested people from the region need to become involved as the opening of I-99 draws near.

---

*Rose M. Baker is the program manager of Penn State's Workforce Assessment Center in Penn State Outreach. David L. Passmore is director of Penn State's Institute for Research in Training and Development.*