

Secretary Wicks June Commentary

June 10, 2007



By now you should have heard about our proposal to create additional revenues to fund needed transportation projects, services and initiatives. More than four months has passed since the announcement of a revenue package (go to www.deldot.gov for details) to make up the difference between the transportation work needed to be done and the amount of funds currently in place to do that work. In that time, I have heard many sound suggestions, provocative questions and

forceful opinions.

With this in mind, it is important to remind all that the additional revenue will fund a work program that is valid, realistic and continues the projects and services that many of you have already told us you need. My staff and I have been discussing this work program and our revenue needs to community groups, organizations and local governments throughout the state. We have relayed this same message at two sets of meetings regarding our Draft 6-Year Capital Transportation Program, and to two meetings before the legislative Bond Bill Committee. We have heard that transportation system improvements are needed, and it is why these projects, services and initiatives must be a priority now. If new revenues are not secured to help fund our 6-year work program, a sampling of projects that would be unfunded include:

- New Castle County: I-95/Rt. 1 interchange, Elkton Road, I-95 toll plaza improvements, and U.S. 13/Philadelphia Pike improvements;
- In Kent County: 5 new interchanges on Rt. 1, and West Dover Connector;
- In Sussex County: Rt. 24, Rt. 26, Rt. 54, and Western Parkway.

Also, with no new funds, our core business would see a reduction in the ability to provide essential services, meaning:

- A limited ability to replace DART and Paratransit buses, meaning less reliability;
- A limited ability to replace heavy equipment, meaning less response time in snow storms or disasters;
- A further reduction in paving projects;
- A limited ability to respond to safety concerns such as intersection improvements and pavement markings

Many other smaller projects could also be impacted with no new revenues.

I recognize that increases in motor vehicle fees, the gas tax and tolls would be impactful, but keeping the status quo will affect us in our everyday lives, and these impacts will grow more acute with time. I believe the result of no new funding would be more

detrimental to motorists than an increase in fees. Various studies show that congested roads cost drivers time and fuel and could increase the number of crashes. Also, substandard pavement conditions accelerate vehicle depreciation, increase tire wear, increase fuel consumption, and increase the frequency of vehicle maintenance costs.

Delaware, like many other states, is at a crossroads in the transportation system, and we need strong leaders and strong voices to support the effort to solve our safety and congestion problems. It is vital that you let your elected representatives know how you feel.

Here's how we got to this point. Our steady source of revenues (mainly tolls, gas tax and DMV fees) have not been able to keep up with the cost of doing business and the tremendous growth this state has experienced. I have been a professional engineer at DelDOT for 24 years, and I understand this complicated business, and how we have arrived at this difficult position over a number of years. I can confidently state our case to you now because my colleagues and I have worked diligently with many others (inside and outside state government) to make sure our internal operations match acceptable business practices, and that our communication with all is consistent and transparent. DelDOT can and must deliver the projects and services we have programmed, and we will use our revenues wisely and frugally.

Two issues that have been raised is our past use of consultants, and previously funding projects that have more than an apparent transportation element. In fact, we have reduced our use of consultants, partly due to stepped-up engineer recruitment efforts, new employees gaining enough experience to take on more responsibility, and the lifting of the hiring freeze that hampered our ability to produce a work program in 2002 and 2003. In addition, I have also looked critically at our work program to ensure it focuses on our core business, maximizes the use of federal funds, and provides multi-modal opportunities. While economic development and open space initiatives are important, others must lead those efforts.

In my travels throughout the state, I have heard complaints, concerns and praise for this department. What is important, however, is that we are all focused on a path forward from this point on, and that we take steps now to do what must be done.

I encourage you to reach out to us to share your concerns or ask additional questions. There are several ways to get more information:

- Go to our Web site at www.deldot.gov
- Call us at 302-760-2080, or toll free at 800-652-5600
- E-mail to dot-public-relations@state.de.us

Carolann Wicks, Professional Engineer, was appointed Delaware's eighth Secretary of Transportation by Gov. Ruth Ann Minner in February 2006. She began her career at DelDOT in 1983 as an entry-level engineer. She was most recently the department's Chief Engineer.