



WEDNESDAY, OCT. 15



**Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy** | State Secretary of Transportation Barry Schoch tells the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry Friday that more federal funding will be needed to pay for future transportation projects.

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## Transportation secretary: More federal funding needed

By Lisa Scheid

After basking in the glow of the hard bi-partisan work to pass last year's state transportation bill, state Transportation Secretary Barry Schoch addressed the issue important to the members of the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce & Industry: federal funding.

"I can't stress enough: It's not just about the money," Schoch told about 100 people at the chamber's transportation forum at The Inn at Reading, Wyomissing.

The forum included presentations from the region's congressional delegation, including U.S. Rep. Pat Meehan, a Delaware County Republican, and U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent, a Lehigh County Republican.

Meehan is a member of the House Transportation Committee, and Dent is a member of the House Committee on Appropriations/Transportation.

Chamber advocates said Berks County is at a crossroads: Its economy depends on more funding to improve the transportation infrastructure.

Schoch was lauded for the innovations and cost savings built into Act 89, which was put together through input from many groups and ultimately signed by Gov. Tom Corbett.

Among the initiatives Schoch mentioned was a new program launched last month, Green Light-Go, which will help upgrade traffic signals throughout the state. Municipalities can apply for matching grants from the state for 50 percent of costs.

Act 89 will increase funding from about \$330 million in 2014 to \$2.3 billion in 2019, but Schoch said the law assumes level federal funding. Right now, revenues are down about 30 percent.

The reason why funding is so inconsistent is that federal transportation funding is considered discretionary spending and not mandatory, Meehan said.

Congress passed the \$11 billion stopgap measure that will keep funding until May, but a new transportation bill is needed, both Meehan and Dent said. That bill can be an opportunity to find different ways to fund transportation needs.

Dent and Meehan agreed it's time to move beyond stopgap measures. Dent predicted work would begin in the first few months of 2015.

Dent said companies that have moved headquarters out of the United States to avoid taxes could be lured back, a process the business community calls "repatriation." Some of the regained tax funds then should go to transportation.

The chamber's position statement asks for an increased annual investment of \$16 billion for highways and bridges using motor licensing tax as a base, and an annual investment of \$11.5 billion for public transportation.

The chamber also advocates ways for safer routes to school, smooth design for walking/biking and conversion of abandoned rail facilities to multi-use.

The chamber also advocates for nontraditional means of alternative funding including tolling, energy taxes, repatriation and postal service savings.

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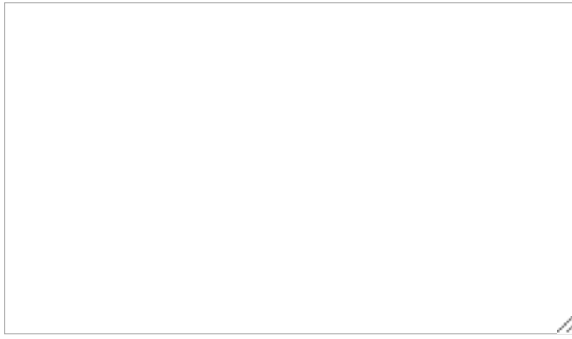
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