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Pa. Turnpike Taking On New Debt At Difficult Time

By Mark Scoloro

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HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) – Even before gas prices spiked and the economy turned sour last year, the Pennsylvania Turnpike was saddled with daunting financial challenges.

A major 2007 transportation law required it to generate billions of dollars for roads, bridges and mass transit through borrowing, higher fees and the proceeds from introducing tolls to Interstate 80.

The I-80 tolling plan has failed to get federal approval, but the rest of the law remains very much in force, and on Thursday the turnpike commission raised \$317 million by selling bonds as part of the deal.

"We've given the turnpike a heavy load to carry, and that's not their fault," said Rep. Joe Markosek, the Allegheny County Democrat who chairs the House Transportation Committee.

Matthew J. Brouillette, president and chief executive of the conservative Commonwealth Foundation and a turnpike critic, said the borrowing has put taxpayers and the state's infrastructure at risk.

"The numbers just don't add up," Brouillette said. "We can't keep raising tolls on turnpike users."

Problems with the bond market have recently increased the cost of borrowing, but that has hardly been the agency's only financial headache these days.

Revenue on the 531-mile turnpike system has been down about 5 percent, a remarkable drop-off considering that passenger car use has typically increased by about 3 percent annually over the past two decades.

Commercial traffic fell more than 12 percent in November compared to the same month a year ago, a sharp decline even taking into account that November 2008 contained two more low-truck-traffic weekend days than November 2007. December traffic figures, however, were more encouraging, the commission said Saturday.

A Jan. 6 study produced by consultants Wilbur Smith Associates as part of the latest bond offering estimated that total vehicles on the system will end the year about 2.5 percent under what was recorded during 2007-08, and remain below that level until 2012-13. The turnpike served 185 million vehicles in 2007.

According to the study, revenues are projected to climb, boosted by the 25 percent toll rate increase that took effect Jan. 4 and expected 3 percent annual toll increases in subsequent years.

The turnpike commission has undertaken a belt-tightening effort, shedding 60 employees in the past two months, most of them midlevel management.

Seven months into its current fiscal year, the commission still has not adopted an operating budget as it scrambles to adapt.

"Certainly we're in a recession now that is very severe, and it's something that we all have to address," said turnpike chief financial officer Nick Grieshaber.

Craig Shuey, an aide to Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Rob Wonderling, R-Montgomery, said he has seen no evidence the turnpike's challenges are any more serious than what is happening elsewhere in state government.

"No one can say fat-and-happy days are just around the corner with any certainty, so everyone's going to have to figure out how to maneuver in the economy," he said.

Ratings agencies have not lowered their assessment of the turnpike's ability to repay its borrowing, last week's bond sale was deemed a success, and Grieshaber says wiggle room was built into the 2007 transportation law.

Turnpike officials say the recession has brought a silver lining by reducing the cost of construction materials such as asphalt and steel. Federal stimulus money may be on the way, and the Obama administration might approve I-80 tolls.

But Markosek worries an influx of federal money may relieve the pressure on state officials to adequately deal with transportation needs. He hopes the Legislature will support responsible but politically difficult solutions.

"We need to make some tough decisions this year," he said.

FROM DAYS GONE BY

20 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 19, 1989

'89 Getting around both by car and on foot was extremely hazardous on Saturday night due to icy roads and sidewalks. Traffic on Tuscarora was backed up from top to bottom due to road conditions.

Dr. and Mrs. James Witt of Burnt Cabins and Emil Mellott and Son of Needmore again captured multiple awards in sheep competition at last week's Farm Show in Harrisburg. Witt and his wife captured 14 prizes, including reserve champion ram and first in fall ram lamb. In addition to those first-place finishes, the Witts captured a second-place finish in yearling ram; thirds in yearling ewe lamb, breeder's young flock; fourths in pair of ram and ninths in yearling ewe and spring ewe lamb. The Mellotts captured 13 prizes in the Corriedale sheep judging. They garnered four first-place finishes, along with several second- through fifth-place finishes. Other county winners were Betty Shelly, a first in crocheted afghans, and Nettie Chubb, in other crocheted items. Southern Fulton High School took 10th place in the school exhibits award, and Brian Lake of Big Cove Tannery paid \$560 for the grand champion spotted swine during the two-day swine gilt sale.

George Truax, a member of the Needmore Fire Co. since its beginning, was given the prestigious Fireman of the Year award at the company's 19th annual banquet. Truax lives in Needmore with his wife Mary and has been active in the fire company since its beginnings in 1969.

A former Warfordsburg woman was found shot to death in her home in Antrim Township, Franklin County, last Thursday. Police said that Shawn Reitz, 21, died of massive blood loss after she was shot once in the chest, once in the back and once in the left hand. Police said her live-in boyfriend found her in a bedroom of her upstairs apartment of the stone house which sat back off the road. The couple's three-month-old son was apparently at home during the shooting but was not injured.

M. Eugene Stenger was named Fireman of the Year at the 27th annual banquet of McConnellsburg Fire Co. on January 11.

Deaths: Wayne Goldy, McConnellsburg; Reta McKinley, Hancock; Harold Morton, Needmore; Leona Decker, McConnellsburg; Reuben Worthington, Burnt Cabins; Shawn Reitz, Greencastle; Harold Shope, Hustontown; Dora Keebaugh, Hustontown; Donald Cowan, Fannettsburg; Denver Knepper, Blairs Mills; Robert Zeis Jr., Chambersburg.

Births at the Medical Center: a son to Mr. and Mrs. Jack Clark of Hustontown on January 6; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Michael Shaw of Needmore on January 8; a son to Mr. and Mrs. William Strait of Warfordsburg on January 8; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Marc Whiteside of Needmore on January 8; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Mark Seville of McConnellsburg on January 11.

Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Barnhart celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on December 28.

Sandra Clark and Curt Lynch were united in marriage October 15 at Pleasant Ridge Church of the Nazarene. Parents of the couple are Lee and Betty Clark, Warfordsburg, and Donald and Betty Lynch of Harrisonville.

30 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 18, 1979

'79 A capacity crowd at the McConnellsburg Volunteer Fire Company's annual banquet last Wednesday applauded the choice of 26-year-old John A. Cutchall as Fireman of the Year, one of the youngest firemen on record to be so honored. Hiley Shimer, who was the recipient of the coveted Chief's Award at the banquet, is a lifetime member of the company, having served more than 36 years.

Stanley Barber accepted the Needmore Volunteer Fire Company's coveted "Fireman of the Year" award Saturday night at the company's annual banquet in the village firehall. Barber has been a member of the company for almost a decade, serving as secretary most of that time, until last spring when he was stricken with a near-fatal illness. Though bedridden for weeks, Barber still managed to help out during the company's annual carnival, where he had been a fixture for years.

For the past several years, Emil Mellott of Needmore has been the big prize winner at the annual Pennsylvania Farm Show and this year the local sheep farmer's exhibits again proved tops in almost every class. Both his Corriedale ram and ewe were judged the champions in their class and the reserve champion ram Corriedale was also shown by Mr. Mellott. Bruce Bivens of Big Cove Tannery was also another first-place winner in the corn growers class. Gerald Culler of Central Fulton FFA was awarded the reserve champion for the Landrace gilt entered in the hog judging and the Central Fulton FFA chapter placed second in the state's chapter exhibits. Others listed as winners at the Farm Show include: Alexa Smith, Patty Suders, Teresa Houdersheldt, Gerald L. Culler and Donald Lake.

Robert and Mildred Fix and Omar and Margaret Mongold were among those from here attending Governor Richard Thornburgh's inauguration ceremonies on Monday and Tuesday.

Randy McGowan, Hustontown, and Shirley Reed, Orbisonia, applied for a marriage license at the local courthouse last week.

Specials at the IGA: Parkay margarine, 48 cents; Robin Hood flour, \$3.39, 25 lbs.; chicken legs, 79 cent lbs.; Del Monte fruit cocktail, 69 cents.

Birth at the Medical Center: a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Michael G. McCauley of Fort Loudon on January 10.

Engagements: Frances Fix wishes to announce the engagement of her daughter, Wanda "Jeanie" Fix, to Donald E. Sipes, son of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Sipes of Needmore. Mr. and Mrs. James Swain of Hancock announce the engagement of their daughter, Pamela Kay, to Gregory James Smith, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Smith of Big Cove Tannery.

The marriage of Sheila Mae DeShong to Kermit Paul Swope took place on Friday, November 17, at Antioch Christian Church. Parents of the couple are Mr. and Mrs. Baltzer Deshong of Needmore and Mr. and Mrs. Paul C. Swope.

Deaths: George O. Plessinger, Warfordsburg; Mae Duval, Mount Union; Gertie H. Stanley, Hancock; Alice Hull, Williamsport; Max Edwards, Mechanicsburg.

MEMORY JOGGER



This week's Memory Jogger, submitted by Dorothy Knepper Spade of Needmore, pictures the Waterfall Grade School, located one mile south of Waterfall along Rt. 655. The last year the school was in operation was the 1954-55 school year. The school was bordered on two sides by streams; you entered from Rt. 655 across this bridge. Ronnie and Edith Foreman lived in the school while they built their new home. The building was then dismantled.

40 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 30, 1969

'69 The State Weather Modification Board is organizing a system of ground observers and high speed aircraft for detection of cloud-seeding activities in southern counties of the state.

A letter of commendation honoring her for her high performance in the 1968 National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Tests has been awarded to Janice Eichelberger, a senior at Forbes Road High School. Miss Eichelberger is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Eichelberger of Wells Tannery.

Sgt. and Mrs. Lester Hoover Jr. of Camp Lejeune, N.C., announce the birth of a son, Christopher Phillip, on January 16. Mrs. Hoover is the former Frances Keebaugh of Hustontown.

Woodrow Strait, administrator of the Fulton County Medical Center, has announced that the restrictions on visitors to the hospital have been lifted. However, it is requested that relatives and friends of patients limit their numbers to two visitors per patient during visiting hours.

A little son was born on January 20 to Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Mellott of Hustontown at the Medical Center. There are now two little boys in the Mellott home. Mrs. Mellott is the former Doretta Knepper.

A marriage license was applied for this week at the local courthouse by Robert L. Gordon of Big Cove Tannery and Deborah K. Ward of Needmore.

Specials at the IGA: turkey drumsticks, 25 cents lb.; Libby corn, 1-lb. can, 19 cents; Crisco, 79 cents, 3-lb. can; Campbell tomato soup, 12 cents, 10-1/2-oz. can.

Births at the Medical Center: a son to Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Mellott of Hustontown on January 20; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Charles Lane of Greencastle on January 20; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Willard E. Hann of Needmore on January 26; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Shaffer of Crystal Spring on January 15; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Merle Gordon of Mercersburg on January 16; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Fluke of Everett on January 16; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Neil Covalt of Needmore on January 18; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Gary Peck of Mercersburg on January 18.

Charles Gobin III, after returning from a visit to the home of a school friend in Venezuela, left Saturday to begin studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Deaths: Mrs. Goldie Baker, Pittsburgh; Mrs. M. Pearl Fischer, Buck Valley; twin daughters of Harold and Mary Hunsecker of Cumberland, Md.; Harry A. Grissinger, Chambersburg; Lillian E. Deneen, Buck Valley; Mrs. Mary Peightel, McConnellsburg; Ahimaaz Mellott, Shippensburg; Mrs. Elnora Straley, Mercersburg.

50 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 29, 1959

'59 Mr. and Mrs. Albert Foster spent three days in Philadelphia last week where Mr. Foster attended the meetings of the Pennsylvania Bar Association.

Denny Richards, son of Mr. and Mrs. K.G. Richards, has returned home from the Medical Center where he was quite ill with glandular trouble.

Dr. and Mrs. Francis Shunk Downs of Swarthmore visited friends in McConnellsburg a day this week on their way to a Presbytery meeting at State College.

Mrs. Helen Bender left on Tuesday to enter the Pittsburgh Diagnostic Center.

Mr. and Mrs. D.A. Washabaugh have returned to their home here after a trip to Florida and New Orleans. In renewing their subscriptions to the News, Margaret Tritle of Spirit Lake, Iowa, says she has been reading this paper since B.W. Peck founded it, and Mrs. Etta Stains of Three Springs, who is 91 years old, says she has been a subscriber to the News for 59 years.

Clair Lininger has entered the employment of the Fulton County News to learn the printing trade. "Buster" is a son of Mrs. Goldie Lininger and the late Harry Lininger, who was also a printer.

Dolores Bivens left Monday to enter Shippensburg State Teachers College.

Judge W.C. Sheely made an official order of appointment on Monday, naming Merrill W. Kerlin, McConnellsburg attorney, to fill the unexpired term of the late John W. Mentzer as district attorney of Fulton County. Kerlin will serve until January 1960.

Flames completely destroyed the home of David Seville on the Peach Orchard Road last Thursday. Lack of an adequate water supply prevented firemen from saving any part of the building or its contents, which were already engulfed in flames upon their arrival. Mrs. Joy Merrell, manageress of the White Swan Restaurant here,

is heading a drive for donations to help the burned-out Seville family and has offered her place of business as a collection point. Some insurance was carried, but not enough to cover the loss.

A 1949 truck, owned and operated by George Lynch of McConnellsburg, swerved to the opposite side of the road south of Needmore and collided head-on with a car driven by a Delaware man. Lynch was taken to the Medical Center and kept 24 hours for observation and the Delaware driver was treated the next day for three broken ribs. Lynch told police that he had fallen asleep and thus lost control of the truck. Damage was set at \$400 to the car and \$200 to the truck.

High honors came to the Forbes Road High School during State Farm Show Week. Fred D. Lamberson, supervising principal, received the coveted Honorary Keystone Farmer Degree from the Future Farmers of America State Association, leaders who help to advance vocational agriculture and who render outstanding service to the FFA and the people they serve. Wilkie Mellott, son of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Mellott of Harrisonville, and Harry Hawkins, son of Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Hawkins of Harrisonville, received the Keystone Farmer Degree. All three recipients are pictured on the front page.

A mistake made in The Fulton County News has originally been corrected – after 30 years. In the 30-year ago items in the Remember column a few weeks ago, it was told how Junior Black escaped injury when run over by a truck driven by Wells Peck. Last week, Mr. Peck told the News that someone 30 years ago had made a mistake, saying that he didn't drive a truck at that time. He said he didn't know who the driver was but he was certain that it wasn't he.

The Army has issued a draft call for 8,000 men for March, 1,000 fewer than the first two months of this year.

Death: Clyde Barr of Pittsburgh. Mike and Mark Fraker, twin sons of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Fraker, and David and Eddie Sheffield, sons of Mr. and Mrs. Derald Sheffield, all of Fort Littleton, have been ill with the chicken pox.

Births at the Medical Center: a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Kahn of Mercersburg on January 19; a son to Mr. and Mrs. George Shives of McConnellsburg on January 19; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Deshong of McConnellsburg on January 21; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Earl Keefer of Warfordsburg on January 23.

Mr. Leon McCray of Warfordsburg has been a patient in the Medical Center where she underwent major surgery.

Word was received at Knobsville last week that Lucius Hann had been injured while at work. His family went to see him on Sunday.

Ralph McKee of Amaranth was taken by ambulance to the Veterans Hospital in Pittsburgh last Sunday night.

Announcement has been made of the engagement of Gail Faith Hann to Richard D. Horton.

Deaths: Howard A. Truax, Needmore; Mrs. Eward Yonker of Little Orleans; Mrs. George M. Fisher, Chambersburg; Riley Truax of Chambersburg; Mrs. Sarah R. McQuade of Altoona; Dr. Carl Spencer Lashley of Davis, W.Va.

60 Years Ago

From The Files Of February 3, 1949

'49 If President Truman's proposed \$41.9 billion budget of 1950 is approved by Congress, the share of the bill for every man, woman and child in Fulton County will be \$152.36.

Fulton County's oldest citizen, John W. Comer, quietly celebrated his 90th birthday on Sunday at the home of his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Ott. More than 75 percent of the 200 pupils now attending the Fort Littleton School are now eating in the school cafeteria, which is in its third year of operation.

William Logan Kendall, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Kendall of the Cove, has been commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

Births: a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. George Barton of Knobsville on January 30; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Frank D. Sipes of McConnellsburg on January 31.

Hanse Lamberson and Walter Taylor of Hustontown are painting the interior of the new home of Mr. and Mrs. George Bard of McConnellsburg.

Death: J. Harvey Mellott of McConnellsburg.

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DON'T FORGET
Parade Of Little People
Deadline Is This Friday, January 23!