

Addressing Traffic Congestion, Sinkholes in Lebanon County

By Rep. Frank Ryan (R-Lebanon)

In the past year, our office has received a number of comments and concerns relating to traffic congestion on Route 117, Airport Road, Route 322 and Route 422. The concerns are related primarily to traffic flow issues due to increased development in South and North Londonderry as well as South Annville Township on Route 422 near the quarry and bordering North Londonderry Township.

Traffic questions and concerns are apparent as well throughout Lebanon County as development continues in almost every community.

To get a perspective on potential solutions to the problems, we reached out to the Lebanon County Planning Department to identify the problems, determine the status of projects to remediate, and evaluate if legislative assistance is necessary.

We had an outstanding planning meeting with Jon Fitzkee, the assistant director/senior transportation planner and Song Kim of the Lebanon County Planning Department about three issues, two of which impact Palmyra, and North and South Londonderry.

1. Warehouse development and impact on near route 422
2. Traffic on route 117 and Airport Road
3. Jake brake prohibition on route 72 northbound in West Cornwall near Alden place.

We also discussed the sinkhole impact in the area and the geological study that was done of the county decades ago. The geological formations are important because of the potential for road closures and the impact of heavier vehicle traffic on potentially unstable formations.

Our area has been plagued by sinkholes for centuries. The state, in the 1970s timeframe, commissioned a study entitled [“Geology, Mineral Resources, and Environmental Geology of the Palmyra Quadrangle, Lebanon and Dauphin Counties,”](#) which should serve as an invaluable resource for planners at the township, borough and county levels.

Our meeting focused on the issues relating to the coordination that needs to exist in transportation planning. Loopholes in coordination requirements between communities suggests that a legislative fix may be required to solve the problem.

For instance, a warehouse planned near Route 422 and the quarry in South Annville Township may pose significant problems for North Londonderry, Palmyra and North Annville communities depending upon the traffic flow anticipated.

It was clear that with current state laws, one township can approve a development with little to no input from the surrounding communities. While the county planning department and PennDOT are involved, cross township/borough coordination is not guaranteed.

The inter-municipality coordination of development projects is a pretty important issue that we should all take seriously. As an example, when Route 422 was closed due to a massive sinkhole near the Sinkhole Saloon a few years ago, the rerouted truck traffic onto side streets that took traffic directly through residential neighborhoods. Such logistics must be reviewed with local community leaders and citizens to ensure safety for our residents before a major project is undertaken.

There is a fantastic [interactive map](#) from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) which shows the geology of our area and specific formations.

The DCNR provides great insight into the nature of our geology. The site states:

“Sinkholes, along with caves, are a definitive part of Pennsylvania’s landscape we call *karst*. The chemical and physical processes that have helped to form this unique landscape have taken place over hundreds of millions of years.

“Karst is common to areas underlain by carbonate bedrock (limestone and dolostone). These rocks are more easily dissolved than other rocks by a weak, naturally forming acid formed by the mixture of water and carbon dioxide....

“The water-driven nature of karst systems lends them to be more sensitive to changes in land use. Rapid and widespread groundwater contamination or the sudden “unclogging” of a karst drain is a public safety as well as an economic concern.”

Our county planning department and our local community partners are doing a great job for our communities. To improve our planning, we should work on:

1. Update the 1970s geologic study of Lebanon and Dauphin counties in light of recent construction and experience with sinkholes.
2. Improve communication and coordination between townships and boroughs when major industrial or commercial construction projects are planned, to ensure that road feeder access and emergency logistic backups are well thought out.
3. Ensure that PennDOT, who is working so diligently in District 8, works with county planning as it now does to include ALL affected communities when evaluating new industrial and commercial projects in light of the geology of our area.

We will keep you updated as we work with all stakeholders to develop effective solutions particularly as they relate to Route 117, Airport Road and Route 422.

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