

## PA: Study Touts Extensions of Mon-Fayette Expressway, MLK Busway

*Ed Blazina On Aug 24, 2016*

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Aug. 23--The proposed extensions of the Mon-Fayette Expressway and the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway would reduce travel time and create more than 20,000 permanent jobs, nearly 13,000 of them in the struggling Mon Valley area, a study released this morning said.

The study, released at a news conference outside the Duquesne VFW just off Route 837, said improved transportation is a key element of rejuvenating the Mon Valley, which is still recovering from the collapse of the steel industry in the 1980s. The study was performed by TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation group in Washington, D.C., sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers, businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction, and labor unions, among others, according to its website.

The study said the projects would create 12,860 jobs in the highway and busway corridors and 7,920 additional jobs outside the corridor due to improved transportation. Another 5,850 construction jobs would be created over a four-year period for the two projects.

There are still about 1,000 acres of brownfield sites in Duquesne and East Pittsburgh that would benefit from the projects, the study said.

The job figures are based on a estimate of employment impacts of highway and transit investment generated by the President Obama's Council of Economic Advisors, the study said.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission is in the process of submitting revised plans for the 13-mile expressway extension from Jefferson Hills to Monroeville at a cost of \$1.6 billion. The revised plans eliminate a costly and unpopular wing that would have gone to Pittsburgh through Oakland and Hazelwood and substantially reduce the width of the toll road's median to reduce costs and lessen the property taken in local communities.

The Port Authority is in the midst of a study to extend the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway from Swissvale to an exit from the expressway in Turtle Creek or East Pittsburgh. That project, estimated at \$100 million, would include a large parking facility so commuters could take public transit into Oakland and Downtown.

Joe Kirk, coordinator of the Expressway Completion Campaign, said the highway extension would "address a long-term deficiency in highway access in the Mon Valley that has severely limited its economic recovery."

"The TRIP analysis of the Expressway clearly documents the value and benefits of the Mon Fayette Expressway," he said. "The busway extension would provide the added

benefit of improved regional mass transit access into Pittsburgh."

The study said the highway would reduce driving time from Monroeville and Duquesne from 30 minutes to 10 minutes; to East Pittsburgh to Duquesne from 17 minutes to 3; and from Monroeville to East Pittsburgh from 20 minutes to 7.

Using public transit would reduce travel time from East Pittsburgh to Downtown from 30 minutes to 20 minutes, the study said.

Maury Burgwin, president of the Mon Yough Area Chamber of Commerce, said the highway extension is the missing link to rebuilding the former steel communities.

"We have the river. We have the rails. What's missing is the road," he said.

The turnpike commission completed four public meetings this month to display the revised Mon-Fayette plans and will submit them for federal approval early next year. But the commission isn't fully committed to the project because of its own financial problems and is reviewing all proposed construction projects to make sure they are affordable and needed.

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