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# The Intelligencer

## Transportation authority to play key role on policy

By: **MARGARET GIBBONS**  
 The Intelligencer

TEXT SIZE

**The nine-member panel will recommend policy to the Montgomery County commissioners, oversee local transportation matters and wield eminent domain powers.**

The nine-member transportation authority commissioners created Wednesday is not a ruse, insisted Montgomery County Commissioner Chairman James R. Matthews, responding to the suggestion that the agency is in place to deal with the potential tolling of area roadways such as Routes 422 or 309.

"This agency will have authority, and only through the commissioners, over only county-owned roads and bridges and I don't see us tolling Germantown Pike," said Matthews.

Instead, said Matthews, the authority will recommend transportation policy to county commissioners and, under the direction of commissioners, oversee local transportation matters and use eminent domain powers.

"Eminent domain is its only power," said Matthews. "It will not own anything and it will have no money to do anything else."

As envisioned by Matthews and Commissioner Joseph M. Hoeffel III, the authority will play a vital role in recommending projects for and overseeing a local transportation improvement program that the commissioners hope to develop if they can win voter approval next year for a \$150 million bond issue to fund such a 10-year program.

However, neither the ordinance creating the authority nor its articles of incorporation specify the authority's limitations as outlined by Matthews.

The articles do state that the nine directors cannot serve for more than 10 years, will not be compensated for their services and shall conduct their business in accord with the county's policies on ethics and procurement.

Commissioner Bruce L. Castor Jr., who was the lone negative vote in the 2-1 vote to create the authority, said the goals outlined by the commissioners for the authority are "laudable."

But these goals of using infrastructure to bring about revitalization or relieving traffic congestion can be just as easily reached by creating a committee or board that does not have the quasi-independent powers of an authority, according to Castor.

Admittedly, an authority is needed for using eminent domain powers to condemn properties for road, bridge and transit projects, said Castor.

However, the three county commissioners should serve as a three-member authority "so that there is no question that it is us who are responsible for the decisions that come out of the authority," Castor said.

"I am afraid this could go down the road where we are shifting away authority from ourselves to others who are not elected," said Castor.

Some six officials and representatives of the business community, many of whom are directly involved with the revitalization of Norristown, spoke out in favor of the creation of the authority.

Several Norristown area residents voiced their opposition to the authority, noting that members are not elected officials and, therefore, not responsible to the public in wielding their powers of eminent domain.

The commissioners tapped Stephen A. Prousi, a former Montgomery Township supervisor, to chair the bipartisan authority. Matthews said he specifically picked Prousi for the post.

Other local residents who will sit on the authority include former Horsham Township Manager Michael J. McGee, Towamencin resident John R. Wichner, who has expertise in transportation and design work, and Hatfield Township Commissioner Chairman Scott Brown.

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