

Joint Transportation/Policy Hearing

**Testimony
May 27, 2010
Hershey, Pennsylvania**

**Fred Query
Director
Planning and Community Development Division
Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development
Commission**

Good morning Secretary Biehler and members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. I am Fred Querry, Director of the Planning and Community Development Division of the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission. The Commission is the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) responsible for the Transportation Planning/Programming for Bedford, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Somerset Counties in PennDOT District 9. We are also a Local Development District (LDD) of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), an Economic Development District (EDD) of the US Economic Development Administration (EDA), and a Work Force Investment Board (WIB) for Pennsylvania.

The RPO is responsible for planning, prioritizing, and programming in partnership with the four rural counties, PennDOT District 9, and PennDOT Central Office. The Southern Alleghenies Region and PennDOT District 9 boundaries are identical as to the six county region and encompass a vast network of transportation infrastructure vital to the region, state, and the country, that includes interstates, rural highways, bridges, airports, railroads, rural and urban transit, and nonmotorized (walking, hiking, and bicycling) facilities. Our region's transportation system supports a wide range of employment centers, transportation facilities, recreational sites, and tourist attractions. Our transportation infrastructure must support all of these in a geographic area characterized by river valleys, mountains and ridges, and mountain plateau.

Per the guidance for today's testimony, the Southern Alleghenies RPO will respond to the questions asked in your letter of May 14, 2010.

As a Local Development District for the Appalachian Regional Commission, the LDD contains the RPO and the two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), the Blair and Cambria MPOs. The focus of the testimony is on the RPO, but at times, I will mention the MPOs especially where transportation projects cross county boundaries or are of a regional significance beyond the rural counties or the LDD region. We believe that the RPO's state highway and bridge systems are in financial crisis along with the rural transit system. As a snap shot of today, across the RPO numerous highway and bridge projects are on going and many are approaching letting. At the May 19 Coordinating Committee

Meeting the Construction Progress Report covered 41 ongoing projects. The Upcoming Lets Report included 25 projects. This appears to be a proactive and aggressive schedule for maintaining our transportation system. However, as crisis is defined, “a stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, esp. for better or for worse, is determined; turning point,” we are there now. The near and long term future for funding that drives the actual maintenance effort is not there. More on this point is detailed later in the testimony.

The current situation: The Southern Alleghenies RPO has approximately 291 structurally deficient state bridges and 368 miles of state roadway in poor condition. Our Transportation Improvements Program base funds have decreased by 23% from the 2009 update (\$212M) to the current 2011 update (\$163M) significantly reducing our ability to continue the effort without additional funds above the base allocation. Our focus is maintenance and preservation of the current system. As to increased capacity, our priorities are the two Appalachian Development Highway (ADHS) corridors that cross our region, Corridor M (US 22 from Lewistown to Duncansville) and Corridor N (US 219 from Somerset to I-68 in Maryland) that have significant miles to be completed. Corridor O (I-99) through Bedford and Blair Counties is completed. As to rural transit, our two rural providers the Huntingdon Fulton Bedford Area Agency on Aging and the Somerset Transit Authority both report current and future funding issues with the Shared Ride Program. Declining ridership, especially in the winter months, continues to reduce operating revenues with no long term funding offset. The 15% riders share is a negative incentive for their services compared the former 10 % share. No payment for empty vehicle time is increasing operational fixed costs. The respective county governments are in no position to assist in offsetting the increased operational costs.

Pennsylvania’s deficient infrastructure has directly impacted our ability to improve the regional transportation system and the region’s economy. Specifically, in Somerset County the section of US 219 between Somerset and Meyersdale and the section between Meyersdale and the Maryland border are a major economic deterrent to the economy along the US 219 Corridor in Somerset and Cambria Counties. The US 219 Corridor completion impact extends to the state level as part of Continental 1, transcending

through north central Pennsylvania to the New York border. Based on ARC studies as to the economic effects of the ADHS system, we assess that completion of US 219 would be comparable to the what I-99 is having on Corridor O through Bedford and Blair Counties into Centre County with expanding logistics, manufacturing, retail, tourism, and technology clusters.

Inaction on transportation funding is not acceptable from the perspective of maintaining the current system, high priority increased capacity, and regional economic development. Maintenance, preservation, and high priority increased capacity for our highways and bridges are critical for the movement of goods, services, and people to further the knowledge, economy, and continued diversification of a regional economy historically based on coal mining, steel production, and railroad infrastructure and repair. Some facts about the rural counties: The current 24-month unemployment rate in the four counties is 7.13%, which is above the national rate of 6.08%. Their most current average unemployment rate is 12.3%; Pennsylvania's rate is 9.8 %. Even more significant is the counties' Per Capita income as of 2008: \$20,166 compared to the national per capita income of \$40,166. (Sources: Department of Commerce, Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.) The proven historic relationship between a region's transportation system and economic vitality continues today as it did with the Forbes Road, the Pennsylvania Canal, the Pennsylvania Rail Road, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

As to what level of additional funding is necessary for the current system we are advocating for the RPO, our assessment includes two options: maintaining the status quo and meeting the state established long term goals. They are:

- For the 2011-2014 TIP Highway Funding - **\$91.7M Shortfall.**
- For the 2011-2014 TIP Bridge Funding - **\$104.3M shortfall to allow a 4% annual SD reduction.**
- For the 2011 TIP Overall Total 4-year shortfall - **\$196M Shortfall.**
- For Maintaining the Current Level of SD Bridges: **+\$28.4M annually.**

- For a 40% Reduction in SD Bridges in 10 Years: **+\$49.3M annually to meet the statewide goal.**

As I said, these funding levels are for maintaining the highway and bridge systems and the long-term reduction in SD bridges to meet state goals. The referenced funding levels were developed in coordination with our partner, PennDOT District 9, and presented at the last State Transportation Commission (STC) hearing in State College for the 2011-2014 program update. Additional details are attached to the testimony.

I will now highlight a number of regionally important transportation improvements that should be accomplished with enhanced funding. We must continue to fund the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) in the Southern Alleghenies, Corridors M (US 22) and Corridor N (US 219). Completion of these corridors will finish the ADHS in our region allowing for the movement of rural freight, services and people through our most economically depressed areas. Corridor N is progressing with the design phases and is moving towards construction. On Corridor M, we must begin preliminary engineering in order to be postured for construction following Corridor N. Cost to complete is estimated at \$2.043B for Corridor M (US 22) and \$552M for Corridor N (US 219). Major importance for Corridor N is the completion of US 219 Somerset to Meyersdale currently on the TIP with \$35M required in state funds to match the ARC federal funds. Of note 80% of the ADHS is federally funded with 20% in state funds and/or toll credits if efforts to change the toll credit language is accomplished in the next federal transportation bill following SAFE-TEA-LU. The estimates are based on our integration of the ARC Cost to complete and current per mile cost for a four lane limited access highway.

We must continue safety improvements to SR 56 connecting I-99 at Cessna in Blair County with US 219 at Johnstown. This is an important cross connector to give the Johnstown area connectivity with I-70/76/99 at Bedford. The most pressing safety improvement is the Peggy Westover/Pleasantville Mountain Curve Project west of Pleasantville on SR 56. This is a safety project that is critical to anyone traveling from Cessna to Johnstown. Cost is estimated at \$45-50M for the 3.2 miles of three lane highway.

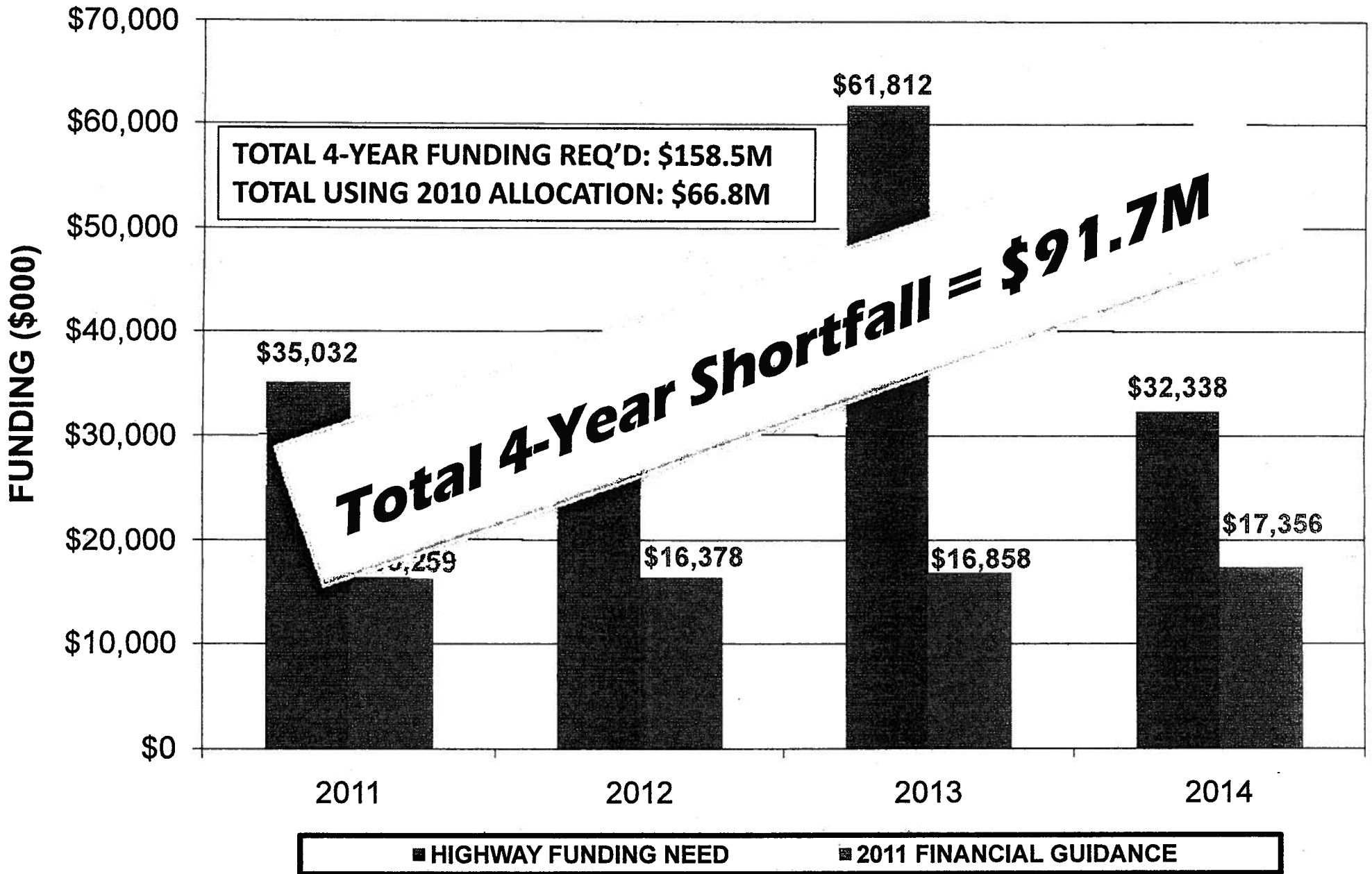
Next is the realignment of US 522 at Gem Curve that allows for safety and improved access to the McConnellsburg area via I-70 in Fulton County. McConnellsburg is the economic center of gravity for the county and a regional employment generator with a new industrial park, and improved access is necessary. Gem Curve is a very sharp switchback curve, which large trucks supplying and delivering for Oshkosh Truck, formerly JLG, in McConnellsburg have difficulty negotiating, and is a safety problem for motorists. Oshkosh Truck is a major defense manufacturer of combat vehicles for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Estimated cost is \$30-40M. We currently have a \$2M project ongoing for line improvements at Gem Curve.

The last project involves SR 453 between Water Street on US 22 in Huntingdon County to Tyrone, Blair County on I-99. Efforts by Huntingdon County are ongoing to move ADHS miles off US 22 between Water Street and Duncansville, Blair County onto SR 453. This would allow Huntingdon County to have a shorter and more direct connection to I-99. The move would decrease the four-lane ADHS construction by approximately 11 miles (cost savings of \$330M). Both the US 22 and SR 453 alignments traverse mountainous and environmentally sensitive terrain. An engineering study is needed to confirm or deny the feasibility for the realignment. Estimated project cost is \$279M for 9.3 miles of highway.

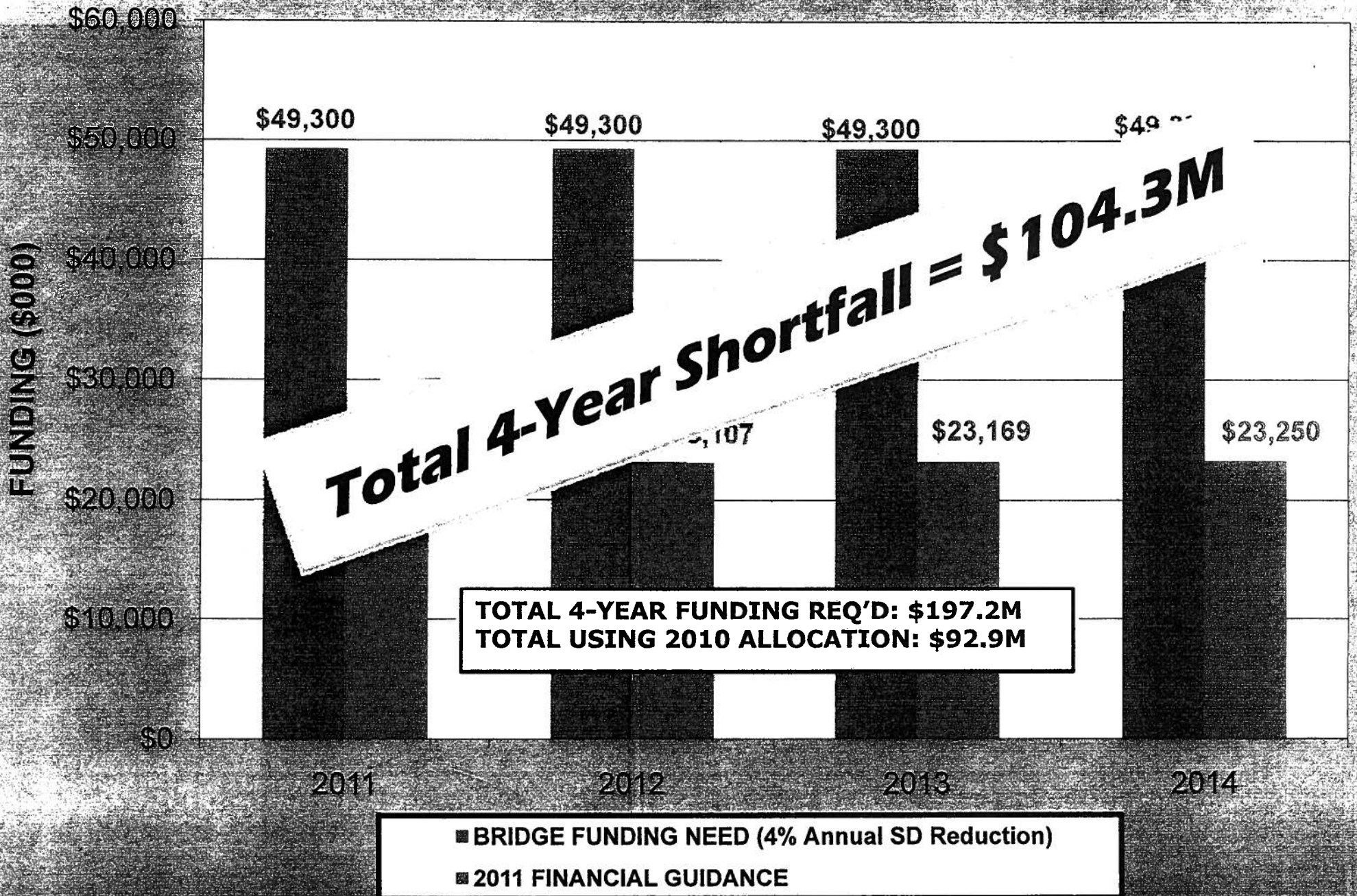
A final observation on funding for maintaining and selectively increasing the capacity of the regional transportation system; all funding options from legislative proposals and the most recent Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee Funding Study should be considered, analyzed, and debated by our representatives in Harrisburg to determine the State's actions. The reality is priorities must be set, decisions made, and projects implemented in a realistic time frame before Pennsylvania loses its competitive economic and geographic advantage in the world market because of bad roads and bridges. Do you have any questions?

Attachments: Slides

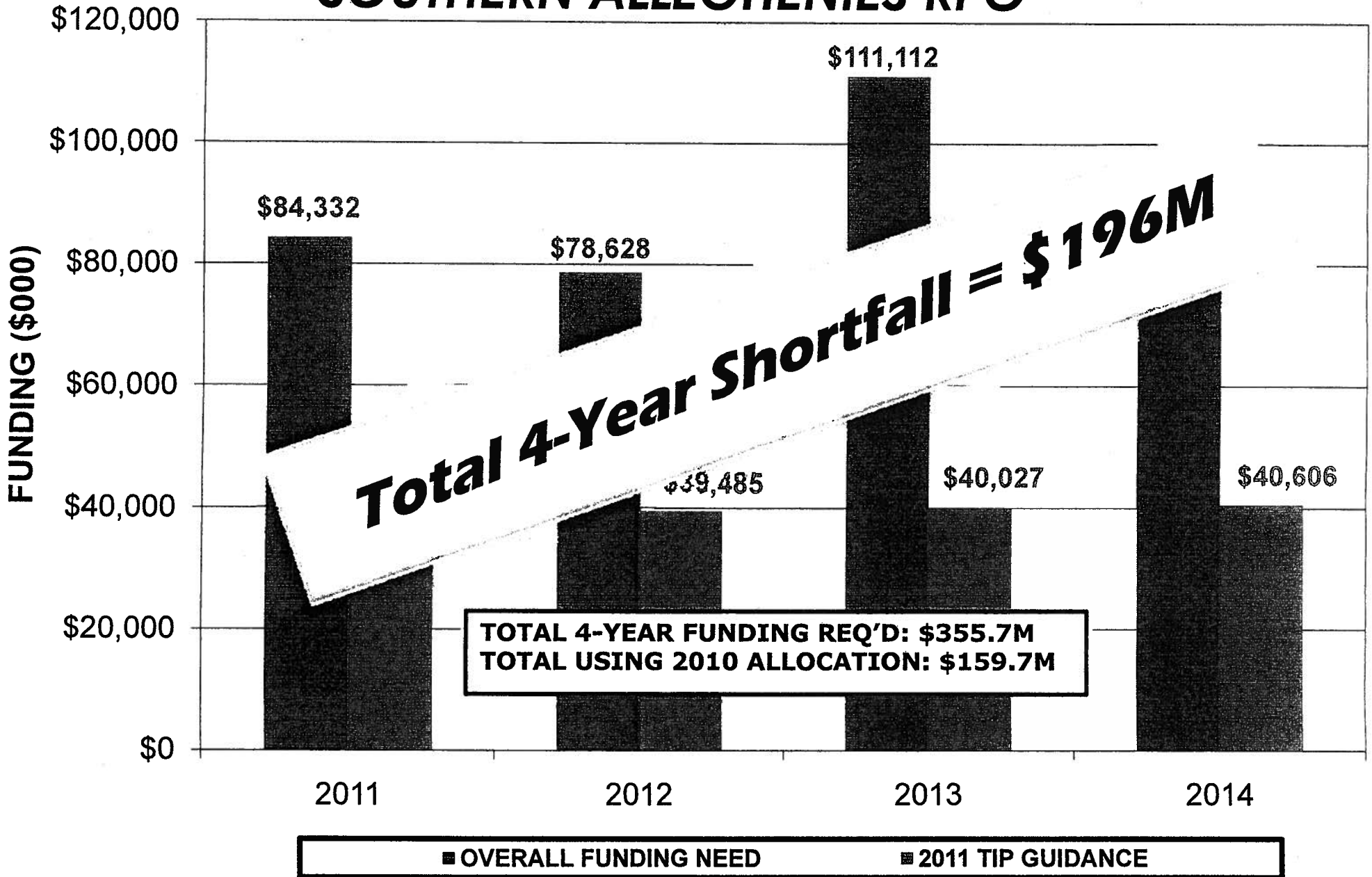
2011 TIP HIGHWAY FUNDING PROJECTIONS SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES RPO



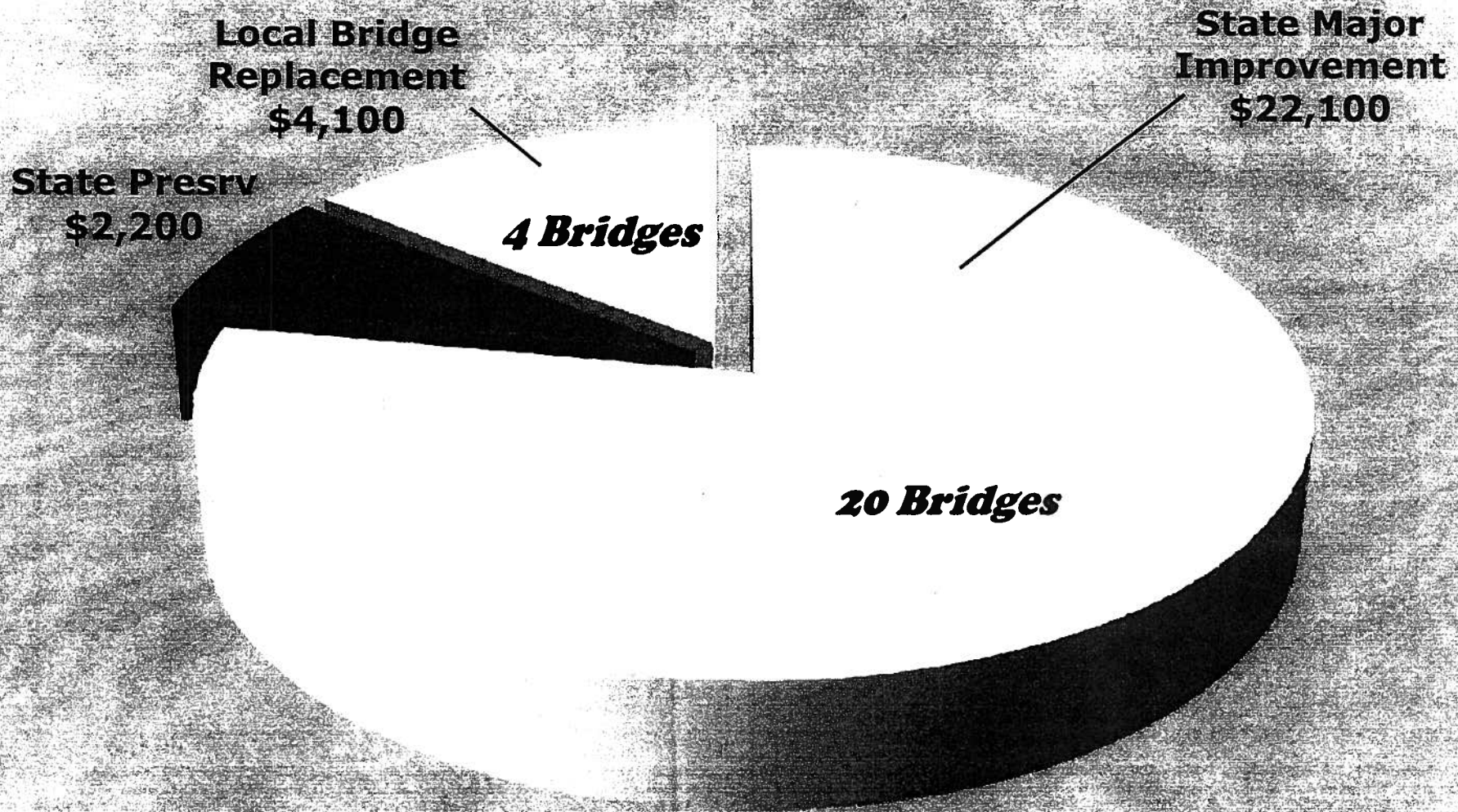
2011 TIP BRIDGE FUNDING PROJECTIONS SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES RPO



2011 TIP OVERALL FUNDING PROJECTIONS SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES RPO



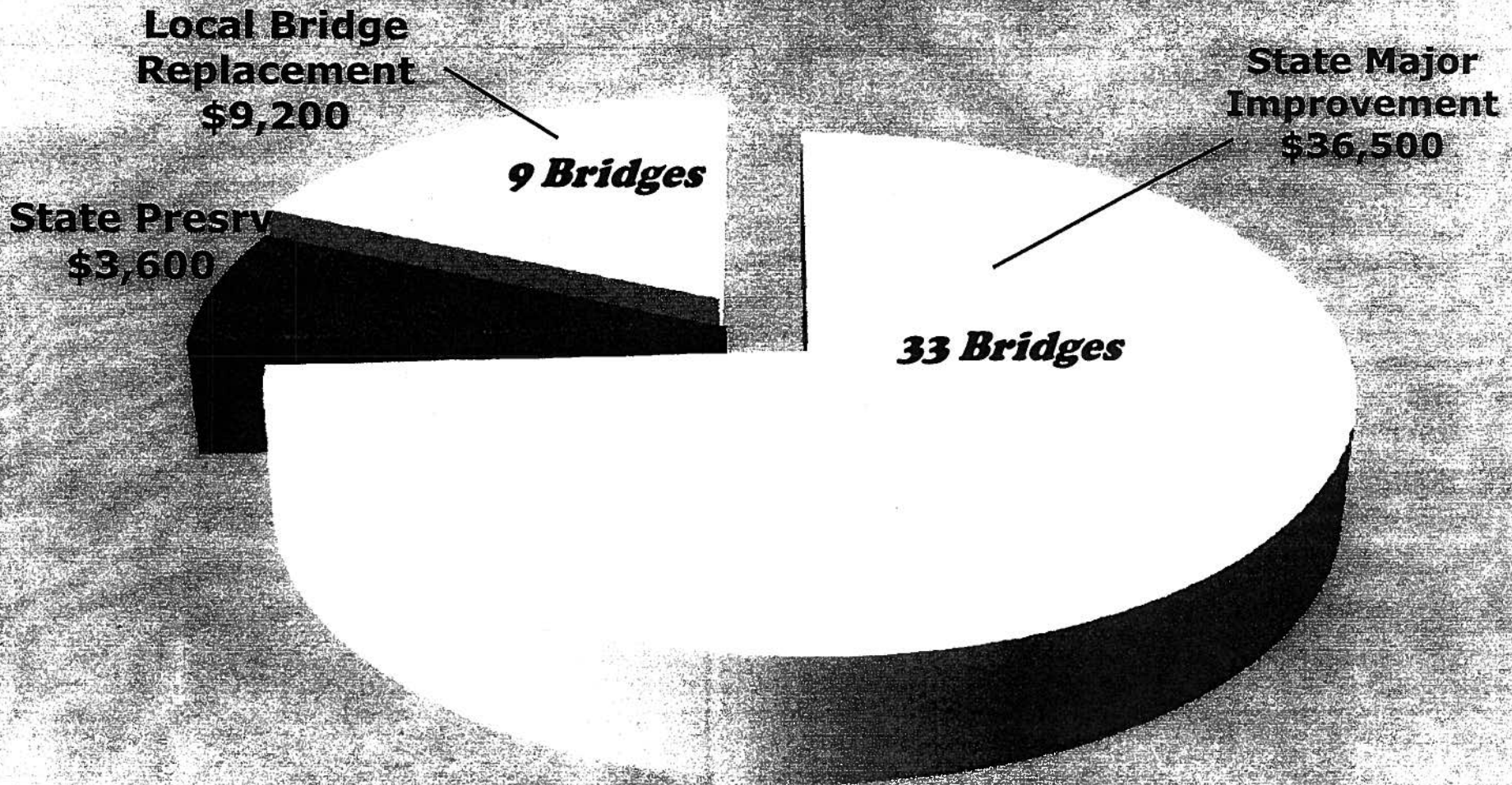
Funding Needed to Maintain Current Level of Structurally Deficient Bridges Southern Alleghenies RPO



\$28,400,000 Required Annually

Funding Needed to Meet 40% Reduction in Structurally Deficient Bridges in 10 Years **

Southern Alleghenies RPO

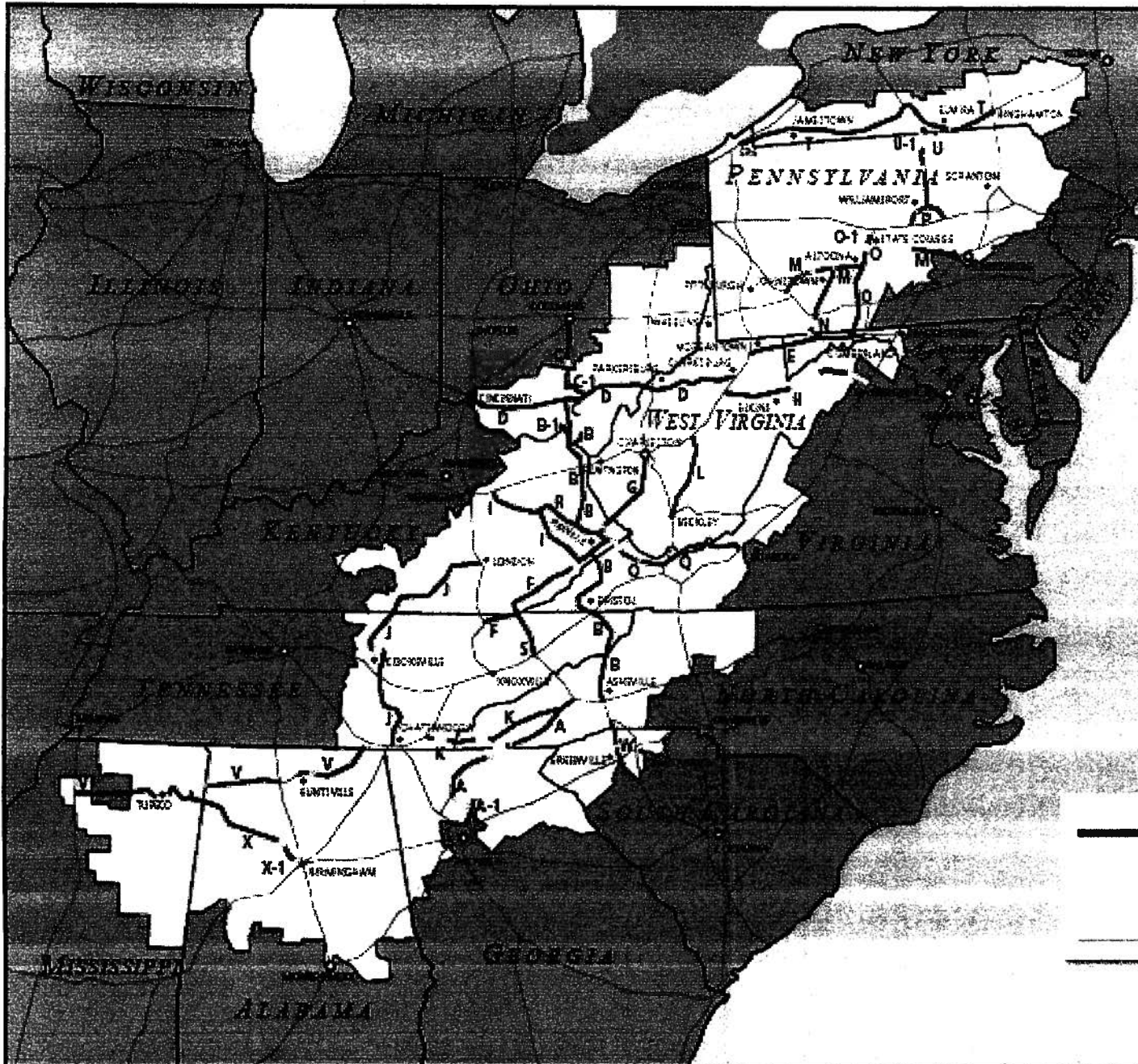


\$49,300,000 Required Annually

**** 40% Reduction In SD Bridges In 10 Years Is Statewide Goal**



Appalachian Development Highway System



ADHS Miles Open to Traffic--
September 30, 2008

ADHS Miles Not Open to Traffic

Interstate Highway System