

PennDOT outlines minority contracting gains for Chamber

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Statewide DBE/MBE contracting totaled \$156 million in 2005



GREETING GUESTS—Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams chats with guests at the PowerBreakfast meeting.

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PennDOT secretary Allen Biehler was a featured guest at a special breakfast meeting of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania last Friday, and shared information on how chamber members can be involved in upcoming transportation projects.

The relationship between PennDOT and communities are inextricably linked in terms of sustaining and spurring additional economic development in the commonwealth, Biehler said. The former Port Authority executive also outlined how transportation projects have been a source for increased minority contracting over the past three years going back to 2003.

Statewide, DBE/MBE contracting totaled \$68 million in 2003. In 2004, that number nearly doubled to \$122 million, Biehler said. The numbers for 2005 reflected a \$34 million increase from the previous year to \$156 million.

Biehler attributed much of the increase to a more simplified minority certification process developed with Cheyney State in partnership with PennDOT. So far this year, some 215 minority businesses of the 450 firms certified have received a total of \$86 million, a pace that he said should continue the steady gains in contracting dollars for transportation projects.

To provide prospective, a total of \$1.5 billion in federal and state funds is allocated for the construction and design, preliminary engineering and start-up phases.

One of the biggest challenges, Biehler said is in identifying new MBEs to get in the game.

"We have made good progress, but we have much more to do. We've noticed that many of the

consultants have overused the same DBE firms over and over again.”

To widen the resource for DBE/MBE participation, Biehler cited some collaborations, including Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato as a partner and Connie Parker and the NAACP's job fair as examples of continued outreach.

In regards to transportation funding, Biehler said 51 percent is earmarked for transit use and commuters, with the balance distributed between schools and other line items. He also cited formation of a transportation funding committee, which includes local members Hex Schuller of Mellon Bank and Jim Rodin of the Port Authority.

Before Biehler's comments, chamber president Doris Carson Williams introduced special guest Charlie Batch of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Batch spoke about the need to reinvest in the community, particularly through youth. The Homestead native's non-profit foundation, Best of the Batch, is working with the Josh Gibson Foundation to construct an athletic complex in Homestead.