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Shane Whitehair
West Virginia Association
of Regional Councils

Shane Whitehair is the current President of the West Virginia Association of Regional Councils. He is also the Executive Director of the Region VII Planning and Development Council located in Buckhannon, West Virginia. Whitehair serves as a member of multiple boards, including the West Virginia Economic Development Council, the Randolph County Development Authority, the Upshur County Development Authority, National Association of Development Organizations, and the Robert C. Byrd Corridor H Highway Authority. He is also a past board member of the Development District Association of Appalachia.

Regional Councils Will Play a Key Role in Maximizing Infrastructure Dollars

In the midst of numerous, recently announced economic development successes, West Virginia is presented with an historic opportunity to move the state's infrastructure forward and literally build the framework for the Mountain State's future economic success. Infrastructure development – roads, water, sewer, and broadband in particular – is one of the critical issues facing our state. West Virginia still has far too many residents with little or no access to these basic utilities. And many of our current systems are failing and in need of significant repair. Fortunately, current budget surpluses and the significant federal funds that have been made available through



Planning & Development Act. At that time, the Legislature mandated that West Virginia be divided into 11 regions to serve as development districts to “more effectively utilize funding resources and maximize small communities’ chances of attracting funds from federal, state and local organizations to foster community and economic development and intergovernmental cooperation.” In

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both the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) have given us the opportunity to invest in our infrastructure and our future.

The West Virginia Regional Planning and Development Councils have and will continue to play a key role in working with our state and local governments to facilitate such infrastructure dollars. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the West Virginia Regional Councils, which were established as part of the 1971 Regional

addition to its statutory mission, the Regional Councils provide a multitude of services, focusing on infrastructure improvement and expansion, broadband, transportation, and small business development.

With the dramatic influx of state and federal infrastructure dollars, the services of the Regional Councils are more important now than ever before. As these infrastructure dollars are put into circulation, more and more demands are being placed on the Councils to develop and manage projects



throughout the state. To meet the expected infrastructure demands of our communities, the Councils are preparing accordingly – adding new staff and generating additional resources – as the capacity of the Councils to assist will be key for our communities and state to be successful.

Through our existing partnerships with the West Virginia Department of Economic Development, the Water Development Authority and others, the Regional Councils are working to maximize these state and federal monies and ensure that any necessary matching funds are in place. With inflation and supply chain issues impacting the anticipated costs of projects, we're working to ensure that cost overruns don't derail currently planned infrastructure efforts. Moving forward, the Regional Councils will continue working with municipalities, public

service districts, local economic development authorities, county commissions and others to develop, design and implement these critical infrastructure projects.

Ultimately, I am confident that the Regional Councils' tremendous track record will translate to future infrastructure success for the State of West Virginia. From 2016 to 2021, the Councils secured \$192 in federal grants for every \$1 invested by the State of West Virginia. With the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of federal investments currently available to the Mountain State, and an increasing emphasis on matching dollars for such projects, the Regional Councils are prepared to continue to play a critical role in meeting our infrastructure needs. **W**