

OUR OPINION

COLTS tries to pick up pieces

As federal prosecutors pursue sweeping corruption charges against former Lackawanna County majority Commissioners Robert C. Cordaro and A.J. Munchak, it's up to the county government and its related agencies to clean up an assortment of messes resulting from the alleged corruption.

Some of that work will not be obvious because it is procedural — ensuring, for example, that as much work as possible is put out to bid and that contracts are subject to scrutiny.

It falls to the County of Lackawanna Transit System to see that a glaring physical manifestation of the alleged corruption and confirmed poor governance is rectified.

The 40-count indictment cites a number of instances of Mr. Cordaro and Mr. Munchak allegedly receiving bribes or kickbacks in exchange for contract awards on public projects. In most cases, the descriptions of those projects are vague but one such project is clear — development and construction of a central hub for transportation near the Mall at Steamtown.

According to the indictment, Mr. Cordaro received \$30,000 and Mr. Munchak received \$60,000 from an architectural firm after using their influence to give it the transit hub's design contract, without bids.

Even before the indictment the Federal Transit Administration had ordered COLTS to repay \$900,000 to the federal agency because the design award to Highland Associates of Clarks Summit violated federal standards.

COLTS announced last week that it will shelve the Highland design and seek a new one through a national design competition. Robert Fiume, COLTS executive director, said the agency's aim is to have the \$12 million to \$14 million center open in two years.

Moreover, COLTS hopes to make the best of a bad situation by mandating a high-tech, energy-efficient design for the structure, which will become the downtown hub for local and interstate bus service, taxi service and, eventually, interstate passenger train service.

The transit hub is an important project for economic development reasons. Due to the corruption scandal, its completion has taken on added importance in restoring public confidence in county agencies' ability to carry out important projects with competence and transparency.

COLTS has taken a substantial step in that direction.