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Bright, I-74 connector idea takes another step

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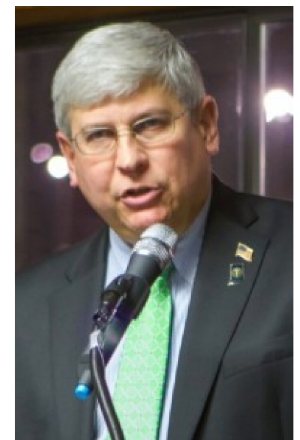
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While still being characterized as preliminary, discussion of a possible connector road from the Bright area to I-74 is moving forward.

Two recent actions have been taken:

- The Dearborn County Council voted to approve \$40,000 toward a \$200,000 study by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana (OKI) Regional Council of Governments. OKI's 2040 Transportation plan includes a recommendation for the connector.
- OKI has issued what is known as a statement of qualification to firms that may want to bid on the project. Dearborn County Commissioner Kevin Lynch, the new president of OKI, said submissions are due by May 7. A committee including representatives from OKI and the Indiana Department of Transportation, along with Mr. Lynch and Dearborn County Engineer Todd Listerman, will make a selection by June 3.



Dearborn County Commissioner and OKI president Kevin Lynch

Mr. Lynch said the study "would basically say whether it is feasible, if it can be built, and what possible routes the road would take. There would be several options that would still be very preliminary."

Mr. Lynch and other officials have said that the benefits of a connector road include better emergency response time to the I-74 corridor, where development is taking place; shorter commutes for local residents who work in

Cincinnati; and making the Bright area and North Dearborn more attractive to new residents and businesses. Mr. Lynch said it would take some of the stress of truck traffic off North Dearborn, Jamison and Whites Hill, which were not constructed to handle it and which are showing the effects with slips and other problems.

Regarding the emergency-services response to the I-74 area, Mr. Lynch noted that Dearborn County has a \$111,000 contract with the Harrison, Ohio Fire Department to help provide coverage.

"Harrison is doing a great job for us, but I would rather spend the money on emergency services in Dearborn," he said. A connector road "would turn a 20-minutes drive into 5 minutes... It's just amazing the contributions that could be achieved with emergency services in the northern part of the county. That's where the growth is... Harrison will always be there with us for mutual aid. They have always been good neighbors. Likewise, we could be there to assist them a lot quicker as the U.S. 52 area grows.

"All sorts of things come into play with it (a connector)," Mr. Lynch said. "It would open up the northern part of the county... It's the idea of having access from I-74 via Stateline all the way down to U.S. 50. We don't have good north-south roads because of the topography."



If a connector road is deemed feasible, the next step would be some design work, selection of a pathway and cost estimate, which currently is about \$54 million. Eighty percent would be federal funds; the county share would be about \$10 million.

"People are saying, 'Every time we turn around, you guys want to spend more money,' " Mr. Lynch said, referring to recent jail expansion and the possibility of a courthouse annex. "I look at it as these projects have been looked at and studied for a long time and it's time to get things done to help Dearborn County grow." The connector idea has been in the OKI pipeline for about 10 years, he said.

"Other funding opportunities are being looked at to help us get through this," Mr. Lynch said. State and federal representatives have been approached and they have expressed support for the project, he said.

During the County Council discussion last month on the \$40,000 contribution to the study, council member Dennis Kraus Sr. expressed concern about the potential \$54 million price tag.

"We can't afford an \$11 million project," he said referring to a potential courthouse annex. "And if we can't come up with the funding, we have wasted \$40,000."

Mr. Lynch said there would be a significant public-input component should the project move forward.

"People are not just going to show up one day with bulldozers," he said. "There will be public meetings so the community will be informed and provide insight in the project. There are always nuances that people at the local level can provide when looking at the big picture."

(Check back for updates on this story.)

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24486 Stateline Rd. Ste F
Bright IN 47025
Phone : 812.637-0660
Email:

brightbeacon1@comcast.net



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