

Road linking Bright, I-74 may be studied

*Some local elected officials
have wait-and-see view of idea*

A proposal for a connector road from the Bright area to I-74 -- an idea that has been in the pipeline for nearly a decade -- may get further study.

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana (OKI) Regional Council of Governments' 2040 Transportation plan includes a recommendation for the connector, along with two other Dearborn County projects. OKI is the federally mandated planning organization for the region.

At a Dearborn County Commissioners' meeting Jan. 20, County Administrator Terri Randall, on behalf of County Engineer Todd Listerman, received permission to ask the County Council for \$40,000, which would be the county's share of a \$200,000 OKI study.

In an interview with The Beacon, County Commissioner Kevin Lynch, the newly elected president of OKI, characterized the idea of a connector from the State Line Road-N. Dearborn Road area to I-74 as "very preliminary...as to whether this thing is even feasible to look at."

"If everything lined up, we would be looking at 2021 or 2022 before any dirt would start being moved," he said. Mr. Lynch said the proposed project -- which could cost as much as \$54 million -- "came out of the OKI 2040 Transportation Plan probably 10 years ago."

"When I came on to OKI, I saw it and started asking about it. We are just getting to the point now of having a consultant do some studies to see if it makes sense."

He said the possible connector is envisioned to be something like the portion of State Route 1 outside St. Leon that links State Road 46 and U.S. 52.

Mr. Lynch said he sees economic development and infrastructure benefits to the idea.

"Whites Hill, Jamison and North Dearborn Roads were not constructed to carry the number of vehicles and school buses they carry. There are safety issues with the number of slips we have had. If we could put a road in, it would be a better route for emergency services," he said.

Mr. Lynch noted that the county has a contract with Harrison, Ohio Fire Department to cover the I-74 area -- where new development such as Whitewater Mill is taking place -- because departments such as Bright "can't get there in a timely manner."

"We could spend that money inside the county instead of outside of the state," Mr. Lynch said.

He said the project has the potential "to provide a bump for the whole Bright area...I think every business along State Line would see a 10 percent or more boost in property values because it would be easier for people to get to those businesses." It would also be more convenient for local residents who commute to Cincinnati, he said.

In response to inquiries from The Beacon, three County Council members and the County Commissioner who represent the area had a wait-and-see view of the project.

"OKI has, of course, given the matter consideration and decided it has potential for our local citizens and for economic development," Council member Liz Morris of Bright said. "When I first heard of this, I was rather surprised as this is nothing I had ever had the vision for. It does have some merit, both for local residents and potential economic development. At this point, I am still uncertain...I will be interested in learning more about it when it's presented to Council for consideration. The \$40,000 could be transferred from existing funds but the total cost of going forward with the project -- if the study shows it is feasible/beneficial -- is concerning. Because of the scope of the project and the potential benefits to our county, state and the Greater Cincinnati region, it would be my expectation that funding from various sources would be available for the project to become a reality."

Council member Charlie Keyes of Bright said, "I'm OK with the study but I would like to look into it further to see the reasoning for the route they're taking. Is it to help with traffic congestion in the Bright/Logan area or to help the TIF district in West Harrison and how will that benefit the Logan and Bright residents? What will the total cost be to Dearborn County? There are a lot of things sort through before a project like this can be funded with matching funds from the county."

Council president Randy Lyness of Logan was traveling out of state at press time and said he wants to have discussions with Mr. Lynch and others to understand the situation better.

Commissioner Art Little of Bright said it "may be pretty good for Bright but it's going to be expensive to go through those hills and 'hollers'."

Mr. Little said the ongoing effort to attract new business to the West Harrison TIF (Tax Increment Financing) District means employees looking for housing. "We might not have to close schools," he said, referring to the closure of North Dearborn Elementary in part because of declining enrollment.

"It could be just a dream," Mr. Little said. "It would take a lot to make it happen. But a lot of good things come from a dream."

Two other possible projects are in the OKI plan. One is to realign and add one lane from U.S. 50 to Nowlin Ave. in Greendale. The other is to widen State Road 350 to four lanes, including a new bridge over the creek, from North Hogan Road to U.S. 50.

(To see the OKI plan and map of Dearborn projects, go to The Beacon Web site, www.thebrightbeaconindiana.com.)