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The Butler County TID cinches deal with ODOT

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The Butler County TID cinches deal with ODOT to strike tolls from the Butler Regional Highway

The Butler County Transportation Improvement District (TID) and Executive Director Greg Wilkens have negotiated a deal with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) that will eliminate tolls on the Butler Regional Highway and, with the cooperation of ODOT, will complete the widening of State Route 747 to the highway.

Collaborating with ODOT, the TID was able to strike a deal that will allow Butler County residents - and many others - to drive on the new highway without paying a toll.

"The TID has always been innovative in finding new ways to fund and improve roads in Butler County. And in continuing to do what's best for the citizens of Butler County, we were able to negotiate this incredible deal that will allow drivers free access to the Butler Regional Highway," said Greg Wilkens, TID Executive Director.

Tolling the Butler Regional Highway has been discussed as a funding option from the very beginning. Under the lease agreement with ODOT, the TID was obligated to maintain the highway for the 20 years, construct the Union Centre Interchange, widen SR 747, and widen and extend Muhlhauser Road. The TID explored many alternatives to tolls, including overbuy, license tag fees, special assessments, local government and private sector contributions, and tax increment financing, but none provided enough revenue to meet its obligations to ODOT.

A revenue study, which supported the proposed toll and the resulting revenues, was completed and preparations for the first toll road in southwestern Ohio began. After discussions between ODOT and the TID, both began investigating additional ways to maximize usage of the highway and reduce traffic on secondary routes.

"Although the revenue study completely supported tolls and traffic on the Butler Regional Highway, and we are confident it would have been a huge success, we had no choice but to look at this opportunity in order to serve even more travelers," said Greg Wilkens, TID Executive Director.

Under the terms of the agreement ODOT agrees to fund the entire highway and maintain all aspects, including snow removal, landscaping and all repairs. In addition, ODOT will

provide funds for the first section of the SR 747 widening project, which will begin later this year. ODOT also agrees to take the remainder of the SR 747 project, which widens SR 747 to the Butler Regional Highway, to the Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) for funding. In discussions with ODOT officials, they feel very strongly that the widening of SR 747 will be funded through TRAC.

"Representatives from the Butler County TID deserve a great deal of credit for their diligent work in getting the roadway built and their thorough evaluation of the toll issue," said ODOT Director Gordon Proctor. "By avoiding the necessity of tolls, we will maximize the use of the new freeway and better serve the overall highway network. The local community owes a huge debt of gratitude to Greg Wilkens, Darrell Barger, Mike Fox and many others who have made the TID a success.

"We were staged and ready to meet our obligations, including the widening of SR 747 and maintaining the highway. This agreement presented a win-win situation for all involved. The citizens of Butler County get a toll-free Butler Regional Highway - which provides immediate interstate access - and the widening of SR 747 with the cooperation of ODOT," said Mike Samoviski, Chair, TID Board of Trustees. "And at the same time, ODOT gets a better return on their investment with increased usage of the highway."

The Butler Regional Highway Since construction began in May 1998, crews have moved forward at an unprecedented pace. Construction is currently 70 percent complete, which is approximately eight months ahead of schedule. The TID anticipates opening the entire highway to traffic in December 1999, with the possibility of some sections opening earlier.

The 10.7-mile Butler Regional Highway will be a four-lane, limited-access, divided highway connecting the City of Hamilton to I-75 through Fairfield and Liberty townships. The project begins at State Route 4 in Hamilton and runs east between Princeton and Hamilton-Mason roads. Interchanges will be constructed at I-75, Cincinnati-Dayton Road, State Route 747 and ByPass 4. The cost of the project is approximately \$158 million.

The Butler County Transportation Improvement District With a local focus on economic development and safer travel, the Butler County TID plans, finances and constructs local road projects. Limited state and federal funding mandated the search for alternatives for building and improving roads. As an innovative pioneer in the planning and constructing of transportation improvements, the TID continues to be a national model.

The TID serves a group of local member governments that have chosen to collaborate in achieving common transportation goals. Working toward the development of a major road system throughout the area, the TID's efforts are concentrated on local projects. The TID currently is working on several road improvement projects, including the Butler Regional Highway, the widening of Muhlhauser Road and SR 747, the Union Centre Boulevard extension, the relocation of Lakota West Drive, the extension of Symmes Road, and improvements to the ByPass4/Route 4 intersection and Reigart Road.

In 1998 alone, TID projects can be credited with encouraging the investment of more than \$190 million in new buildings, machinery and equipment and the creation or retention of 3,000 jobs in the Butler County.

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