

County eyes possible transit center

Official: Group has had preliminary talks with ODOT about Bypass Ohio 4 location

By CHRIS DUMOND
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HAMILTON — Butler County officials are exploring new ways to fund local busing services plagued by financial woes.

During the Butler County Transportation Improvement District board meeting Monday, Ex-

ecutive Director John Fomner said he has had preliminary talks with the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Butler County Regional Transit Authority and Cincinnati Metro officials about the possibility of a mixed-use transit center at the southern end of the Bypass Ohio 4.

Fomner said the center could

connect bus service between Fairfield and Liberty townships, and Cincinnati, giving city workers access to jobs in Butler County and vice versa. Developing the property, now owned by ODOT, for other commercial uses could help fund the service extension and otherwise subsidize busing.

"This type of development can make a lot of sense," BCRTA Executive Director Carla Lakatos said. "We do know that people, when they use transit, also have

other needs while they're on their trip, whether it's day care or retail."

If the TTD developed the property, it could raise money through leasing fees, Fomner said.

As Lakatos says, "it's tight times" for public transit.

Last week, Cincinnati Metro officials said they would need more money from the BCRTA to operate park-and-ride services in Fairfield and West Chester Township in the future because of high gas prices.

Transit

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Continued from A1

Lakatos said federal and state governments usually play a larger role in public transportation funding, but in large urban areas such as Greater Cincinnati, operations are a local responsibility.

"It's a challenge because local folks are more and more reluctant," she said. "Typically, we're supported in some way by a tax."

Attempts to pass countywide transit levies here have failed three times, despite pleas about the economic importance of having public transit.

"One of the challenges when attracting business to a community is, do they have access to your labor force," she said. "It is a key thing people look at when locating industry, especially when they need a lot of entry-level people."

"This is about looking at an opportunity to provide access to jobs for Butler County residents and bringing people to jobs in Butler County."

Advertising on buses or at bus

Metro provides the services in the county on a contract basis.

If the BCRTA cannot come up with the money, it may have to cut services or increase rates. In Cincinnati, Metro rates are slated for an increase for the first time in 12 years and in Hamilton, the city council recently made an emergency appropriation of \$75,000 to keep three-day-a-week shuttle service running.

Please see TRANSIT | A4

stations are ways to find funding when the economy is soft and residents are reluctant to raise their own taxes, she said. Transit center developments are another way.

State transportation department spokesman Ron Mosby, like others, said the project is only in a conceptual phase. Mosby said other transportation-related plans for the unused site have been voiced, but none are concrete.

In other TTD business: ➤ Butler County commissioners have commissioned the University of Cincinnati Economics Center for Education and Research to update the economic impact summary prepared in 2002 for the Liberty Interchange project. Transportation officials are also working to update construction costs for the interchange and related improvements.

➤ Officials have determined that right of way purchased for the Bypass Ohio 4 widening will be sufficient in most places to allow for six-lane widening if needed. The initial widening process called for four lanes, but traffic studies have shown a need for possibly widening the road further between Symmes and Tylersville roads.

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