

# MIDDLETOWN JOURNAL

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## Interchange decision sought

By CHRIS DUMOND

HAMILTON — The time to make a decision on the Liberty Interchange is growing near, Butler County Transportation Improvement District Director John Fonner said Monday.

Fonner said he is in talks with Burgess & Niple, a Columbus-based engineering and architecture firm, to review cost estimates for the project, which was originally projected at about \$40 million.

"We're going to reach a point later this year (or) early next year where we have to pull the trigger on this project," he said. "We need to have the most accurate assessment we can to make sure both the revenue and the cost projections on this project are current so we can make the proper decision moving forward with that."

The planned improvements include a new interchange at Hamilton-Mason Road and Interstate

75, widening Hamilton-Mason and extending Cox Road to the Green Crest Golf Course.

At September meeting of the TID, some members questioned whether the tax diversion programs proposed to pay for construction costs would be adequate.

To augment the established Tax Increment Financing district, which would use increased property taxes from new commercial development to pay for the project, Residential Incentive Districts (also known as residential RIDs) and a Joint Economic Development District have been proposed.

Under the proposed JEDD, workers in the area of the project would pay city taxes, which could be used to build or maintain the infrastructure.

Dina Minneci, Liberty Township administrator and TID member, said Monday that township administrators have passed resolutions of intent to create three

RIDs and are considering creating seven more by the end of the year.

Minneci said work continues on fine tuning legal descriptions of property to be included in the JEDD.

Fonner said the Ohio Department of Transportation has also expressed some concern with traffic flows in the design and that is being reviewed. If the project moves forward, transportation officials could begin securing right of way by the end of the year.

In other business, Fonner reported that state funding for widening Bypass Ohio 4 could be in jeopardy.

Fonner and Butler County Engineer Greg Wilkens said the delay in approval of the federal highway appropriations bill could leave the Ohio Transportation Review Advisory Council reluctant to fund the project this year.

*Cox News Service*