

Millions marked for road projects

Tax set asides would
fund highway plans

BY CHRIS DUMOND
BUTLER COUNTY BUREAU

HAMILTON — Butler County transportation officials took steps Monday morning to solidify a few sources of money for two of the county's biggest highway projects.

The county Transportation Improvement District trustees approved resolutions to commit funding from residential Tax Increment Financing districts in Liberty Township and in Trenton to the construction of the Liberty Interchange and Ohio 63 extension, respectively.

TID Director John Fonner said the commitments were necessary to avoid tax law changes approved in this year's state budget that would have decreased the amount of money generated in the special tax districts. The resolutions claim that the \$30 million to \$50 million interchange and the more than \$100 million extension of Ohio 63 would be impossible without the tax revenues.

Both projects are expected to drive the creation of thousands of jobs in the county.

Mention of the Liberty Interchange instigated a few comments about a different earnings tax district proposed in Liberty Township to help fund the interchange project.

The controversial tax district would allow Middletown and Mason to collect an earnings tax in an area of the township near the proposed interchange. Butler County commissioners and some members of the TID have opposed Mason's involvement because city leaders earlier blocked a plan to link Ohio 129 with Interstate 71.

TID Trustee Don Dixon said he is opposed to the size of the Warren County city's share of the tax revenues. Liberty trustees said they included Mason because of the impact the interchange would have on the city's infrastructure.

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As the proposed district agreement stands, the first 5 percent collected would go to Middletown to collect and administer the tax. Of the net revenue, 2 percent would go to Middletown, 15 percent to Mason for local road improvements and the remainder to Liberty Township.

"I think everyone wants to see the project go," Dixon said. "I think overall it's a benefit. But, I think we have to look out for Butler County and I'm very reluctant."

Fonner also announced that the TID paid off a \$1.6 million loan from county commissioners. The loan was used to purchase about 15 acres of right of way near the intersection of Hamilton-Mason and Cox roads for the Liberty Interchange.

The TID had expected to pay the loan back after selling a portion of the right of way for commercial development. Fonner said the TID has not yet sold the land.

In other business:

► ODOT, rather than the TID, has been selected to manage the Oxford Connector linking U.S. 27 and Ohio 73 and improvements to the intersection of Ohio 73 and Ohio 177.

► Trenton pledged \$1,000 toward a \$125,000 study of the county's rail networks.