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I-75 exit first in line for money

By Jennifer Edwards
Enquirer staff writer

LIBERTY TWP. - Several road projects, two firehouses and other township improvements could wind up losing financial support to a bigger plan to build an expanded Interstate 75 interchange.

Liberty leaders dedicated money this week from four of 11 new residential tax districts to the interchange project. But now officials say they may need money from the other seven, too.

The interchange, estimated to cost \$30 million to \$50 million, would allow traffic to more easily travel east from I-75 onto Hamil-

ton-Mason Road, which would be widened from two to five lanes. Cox Road also would be extended.

The roads would open hundreds of acres to new commercial development, which township trustees and county commissioners say will create more jobs and more tax revenue from commercial sources instead of homeowners.

The new districts would not raise taxes, but would earmark new property tax collections from growing subdivisions to pay off special projects for up to 30 years.

Officials predict that four of those tax districts - involving the neighborhoods of Four Bridges, Trails of Four Bridges, Townhomes of Four Bridges and Cedarbrook Estates - will raise up to \$37 million for the interchange.

But on Thursday, Commissioner Mike Fox wanted to hedge those bets.

Liberty and Butler County previously approved using the other seven districts to raise up to \$35 million for other projects. But Fox told Liberty leaders to make sure they can use the proceeds, if needed, for the interchange.

Liberty might have to change tax-district allotments

The neighborhoods involved are Hawthorne Hills, Summerlin, Kyles Station, Allen Estates, Creekside Meadows, Aspen Trails and Falling Waters.

Roger Gates, an assistant Butler County prosecutor and Liberty's lawyer, said it wasn't certain if or how the township could legally change the projects to be funded by the seven districts.

One big concern is that, unlike the other four districts, these seven are not near the interchange, Gates said. Such districts are supposed to benefit from the projects they finance.

The unusual residential tax districts are part of a bigger, complex local funding plan for the interchange.

The plan was developed because local officials have been frustrated by slow action when seeking traditional state sources of money.

Liberty Township leaders told Fox they would do what they could to support the interchange. More discussions are planned at a Jan. 9 dinner between local and state lawmakers.

E-mail: jedwards@enquirer.com.