

Bypass 4 widening doesn't rank on state's priority list

Officials receive \$1.2M of \$15M they sought

By Chris Dumond

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HAMILTON — Local transportation officials were looking for big money from the state Thursday to widen the often clogged and wreck-prone Bypass Ohio 4. Instead, they walked away from Columbus with a consolation prize.

The Butler County Transportation Improvement District sought from the Ohio Department of Transportation half of the roughly \$30 million needed to widen the bypass. The state's Transportation Review Advisory Council, which prioritizes funding for highway projects, instead suggested \$1.2 million for continued design work to be paid in fiscal year 2007.

The project was not included on a draft list of projects to be funded between now and 2012. The list

is subject to a 90-day public comment period before the council is scheduled to finalize it in May.

TTD Director John Fonner said the tentative \$1.2 million commitment will still allow the project to move forward.

"We heard from a variety of sources that the construction funding in this round of TRAC would be very limited because of construction resources being drawn away at the federal level to the Gulf states, because of the war

in Iraq and also that gas tax revenues were down because of (the) spike in price last year," he said.

Only one new project was added to the state's six-year construction plan, a \$6.4 million state highway widening in Columbiana near Pennsylvania.

Jim Blount, chairman of the TTD trustees board, said the project's ranking wasn't entirely a surprise to him either, given similar rumblings about the state of federal appropriations.

"I think it's just another indication that locally, we've got to get our act together and cooperate and get all the questions answered that the state might have and assure them that this is a major project," he said.

The latest funding proposal for the widening work puts half the cost on local governments, including the county, cities of Fairfield and Hamilton and Fairfield Township. Some representatives have

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suggested using that local funding commitment to get started on the worst parts of the bypass now, rather than wait on the state.

Fairfield Township Administrator Michael Rahall said stakeholders are scheduled to meet Wednesday to consider their options.

Aside from the TRAC list, Fonner said, the state allocated \$2.95 million for construction improvements in fiscal year 2009 at the intersection of Tylersville Road and the bypass. Fonner said the intersection has the highest accident rating along the corridor.

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