

# Demands threaten bypass widening

**Officials say Fairfield commitments to Ohio 4 projects delayed by JEDD.**

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**HAMILTON** — A major county highway project is once again being held up by disagreements between local municipalities over a special income tax district.

The often congested Ohio 4 bypass averages up to eight times more traffic accidents than other similar Ohio roads. Since a tentative commitment by the state in January to pay for half the engineering costs to widen the roadway, officials with the Butler County Transportation Improvement District have urged

Hamilton, Fairfield and Fairfield Twp. to strike an agreement to split the remaining \$1.2 million needed to move forward.

Last month, the Hamilton City Council and Fairfield Twp. trustees were poised to contribute about \$456,000 each, or 38 percent, for their share of the funding. Fairfield had been expected to contribute about 24 percent, or \$288,000.

However, the funding commitments have been put on hold following a decision by Fairfield officials to make their contribution contingent on the creation of a Joint Economic Development District with Fairfield Twp.

The district would allow both local governments to collect city income taxes in the township.

This isn't the first time a JEDD has snatched a TID highway project. Officials have been working for more than three years to create a JEDD in Liberty Twp. to help pay for the Liberty Interchange.

Likewise, Fairfield's decision — according to some officials close to the project — poses a major threat to the expansion of the bypass.

Fairfield Twp. Trustee Steve Morgan said that while the township is interested in forming another JEDD, he sees no reason to tie up the bypass project over it.

"We need this done as soon as possible. You've got safety issues for the people of the township, the people of Fairfield and Hamilton. ... I think the people's safety is more important than who it is we are in a JEDD with," he said.

On Thursday TID director John Foner said he was still waiting to hear from Fairfield officials about their next move.

"The TID is really stuck at this point," Foner said. "Until we're able to get a signed agreement for the funding of the engineering, it's wait and see. ... I just think Fairfield is leveraging this approval process to get something else they want."

Fairfield City Councilman Tim Abbott said the council's decision to tack on the requirement for the JEDD was one made in the best interest of his city's residents.

"We certainly feel that the project

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benefits the various political jurisdictions involved, but we want to make sure we're pursuing all of our economic development options before we actually get into the bypass project," Abbott said. "We didn't think this would come as a surprise to the other jurisdictions."

Hamilton Mayor Don Ryan, said he was taken back by Fairfield's decision. Ryan said he and Abbott were playing phone tag in reference to the issue.

"This is a critical issue for us," Ryan said, adding that the expansion of the bypass greatly will determine future development within the near-by Hamilton Enterprise Park. "The city of Hamilton and Fairfield have had a good working relationship and we're very anxious to resolve this outstanding issue so we can all move forward."