

Bypass plan may bypass Fairfield

By Chris Dumond
Staff Writer

HAMILTON — If Fairfield won't cooperate, Hamilton and Fairfield Twp. could go forward with the Bypass Ohio 4 widening project without the city.

A month ago, Butler County Transportation Improvement District officials expected the three governments to divide half the \$2.4 million cost to design the project, with the other half paid for by the state. Fairfield was to pay 24 percent with the township and Hamilton splitting the remaining 76 percent.

Then, at a conference between the three late last month, Fairfield officials said they wouldn't contribute a nickel toward the project until they could

establish an income tax district in the township.

The move caught some Hamilton and TTD officials by surprise.

At the TTD meeting Monday morning, board members voted to go forward with the design of 76 percent of the project — the portion of the highway in Hamilton and the township from Symmes Road north. That's only if Hamilton council members and Fairfield Twp. trustees take action later this month to finalize their share of the engineering costs.

"We want to do our portion of that highway," TTD trustee and Hamilton Councilman Ed Shelton said. "Now, if Fairfield chooses not to do their share of that highway and people continue

to get killed out there, that's their responsibility."

He likened Fairfield's late stipulation on its share of the funding to holding his city and Fairfield Twp. hostage.

TTD Director John Fomner said he's optimistic that Fairfield's issues can be worked out before it's too late. But Fomner also cautioned that city/township income tax districts, known as Joint Economic Development Districts, are rarely established quickly. He also reminded representatives from each of the three governments of the possible consequences of not reaching a deal in time.

"Knowing the state's financial pressures right now, I'd be concerned the state could pull that money out of Butler County and spend it some place

that doesn't have the controversy," he said.

Without the upgrades, engineers estimate that every intersection on the bypass will fail state standards for traffic flow by 2030. The often-clogged roadway saw 237 wrecks between 1999 and 2003, between three and eight times the average for similar roadways in Ohio, according to a study by engineering consultants M-E Companies.

The study found that more than 65 percent of those were rear-end wrecks typical in rush hour. It also projected that widening the road could cut the number of those crashes by more than a third.

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