

TID to refinance debt for Ohio 129

By CHRIS DUMOND
BUTLER COUNTY BUREAU

HAMILTON — Butler County transportation officials Thursday moved to refinance \$93 million in highway construction debt at an estimated savings to taxpayers of \$2 million.

The refinancing takes advantage of current interest rates, which are lower than they were in 1997 when the Butler County Transportation Improvement District issued \$158.5 million in bonds to build the 10.7-mile strip of Ohio 129 now known as the Veterans Highway.

Although the TID issued the debt and managed the construction of the highway, it leased the road to the state in the late 1990s so that the Ohio Department of Transportation became responsible for both the debt payments and maintenance.

The TID, however, continued to own the roadway and surrounding right of way, and was ultimately responsible for the debt.

"By your actions today, we're closing that circle by letting ODOT take full responsibility and ownership of about \$100 million in debt once the financing is complete," TID Director John Fonner told the transportation board Thursday.

As part of the agreement, Fonner said, the state will pay all of the financing fees, as well as the cost of transferring about 1,000 different parcels associated with the highway.

He estimated those costs to be around \$250,000.

When refinancing was initially proposed earlier this year by Butler County Commissioner Michael Fox, who drafted the TID enabling legislation in the 1990s as a legislator and for whom the highway was initially named, he suggested that any savings from the refinancing should be dedicated to county road projects.

ODOT spokeswoman Lindsey Mendicino said Wednesday that would not be part of the deal.

Mendicino said the deal is expected to close on Jan. 4.

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