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Bypass project may be done in 3 parts

Officials want to find ways to get project started before 2012

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HAMILTON — Help may be coming for the nearly 20,000 people who use the clogged and often dangerous Bypass Ohio 4 each day, although local officials now say that help could be coming in three parts rather than all at once.

Last week, the state board that controls transportation funding released its draft six-year plan for major highway construction. Although the bypass has between three and eight times the average number of wrecks of similar Ohio roadways, according to engineering consultants M-E Companies, no construction money was pledged.

Representatives of the Butler County Transportation Improvement District, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Butler County Engineer's Office, the cities of Fairfield and Hamilton, and Fairfield Township met Wednesday afternoon to brainstorm ways to get construction started before 2012.

"What we need to do is get some hard numbers, look at those hard numbers, look at ways of financing it and making it happen," Hamilton Councilman and TID Trustee Ed Shelton said. "If we don't do that and if we don't set

a time table on it, we'll be talking four or five years from now and we'll still be doing nothing."

The consensus among those present was to break the project down into three parts; likely from Ohio 4 to Symmes Road, then from Symmes to Ohio 129; and then from Princeton Road to the road's northern end at Ohio 4 again.

Although locals would still look to the state for roughly half the estimated \$32 million project cost, the township and cities — along with a \$3.5 million contribution from the Butler County commissioners — could start work with roughly \$10.5 million, officials said.

After the meeting was bogged down in talks over each municipality's fair share of that funding, County Engineer Greg Wilkens said it was important to focus instead on getting the engineering done as soon as possible.

With half the estimated \$2.4 million in engineering costs already committed by the state, Wilkens said the project wasn't going to go anywhere if the three groups couldn't figure out how to split the \$1.2 million cost.

At the end of the meeting, the representatives agreed to get verbal commitments from their respective jurisdictions to fund about \$400,000 in engineering costs before the TID meeting scheduled for Feb. 14.

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