

*Our opinion*

# Route 22 needs connection to west

The U.S. Route 22 expressway through Jefferson County will connect with something more than the existing two-lane highways in Harrison County in the future.

That much is definite. What is less definite is just what the new roads will be and when they will be built.

To find out what residents want, the Ohio Department of Transportation held two public information sessions last week in Harrison and Belmont counties to determine future desires for highways in these areas.

The meetings were important to Jefferson County because they are, in a way, part of the continuing long fight for U.S. Route 22.

Area residents will recall the fight to build a four-lane highway around Steubenville and Wintersville was one that took more than 30 years, including local fights over location as well as fights over federal and state support.

Some of the new roads to the west being considered by the Ohio Department of Transportation are long-term, taking more than 20 years if everything goes well and funding in the hundreds of millions of dollars can be found. Others are a bit easier and could take about five years.

One of those connections is the so-called "super-two" two-lane limited access highway to be built to run U.S. Route 250 from Cadiz to St. Clairsville. This is the Harrison County version of a Route 22 battle.

The proposal has been on the books for years and has been stumbling over environmental and funding problems.

What is closest to being built is a state Route 9 bypass of Cadiz, which is considered the first part of the Route 250 relocation project. There is about \$19 million in federal highway funds available for the estimated \$24 million project. ODOT wants to find out if local support is still strong enough to go forward with finding additional funds to complete the highway or if the money should be reallocated.

Also being considered is a proposal to develop a study to build a highway connecting Cadiz directly with a four-lane network of highways that starts around Newcomersown and connects (with a bit of two lane west of Newark) all the way to Interstate 270 at Columbus.

ODOT projects the study would be the first step in a process that would take more than 20 years before traffic would be able to use any new road as part of what is being considered as an alternative east-west route for the heavily traveled I-70.

Also being considered, and perhaps the project that first should be considered, is the addition of two lanes to U.S. Route 22 through the Harrison State Forest area, where Route 22's limited-access route stops for about three miles before picking up again near Cadiz.

ODOT District 11 Director Myron Pakush said the idea is that ODOT wants to be driven by highway needs and traffic statistics, but it does not want to leave out the public's desires for future highways, either.

And, no matter what, with an average of just \$300 million for new construction statewide to spend, ODOT has its hands full when selecting future highway projects.

The next step is to have the public input and the highway data considered by a statewide panel for inclusion on future applications for federal highway dollars.

We would support any project that sees Route 22 connected into the interstate system to the west, meaning that, for the near term, beginning the bypass of Cadiz makes sense, but only if it leads all the way to I-70 in the future.

Otherwise, the area would have a highway network that simply connects to Pittsburgh to the east and falls a bit short to the west.

And ODOT needs clear direction to give to U.S. Rep. Bob Ney, R-St. Clairsville, so that he can pursue future federal highway funds.

**The Herald-Star**  
MONDAY, AUG. 26, 2002