

Truck lanes could boost Route 22

I-70 congestion among reasons for push for completion of network

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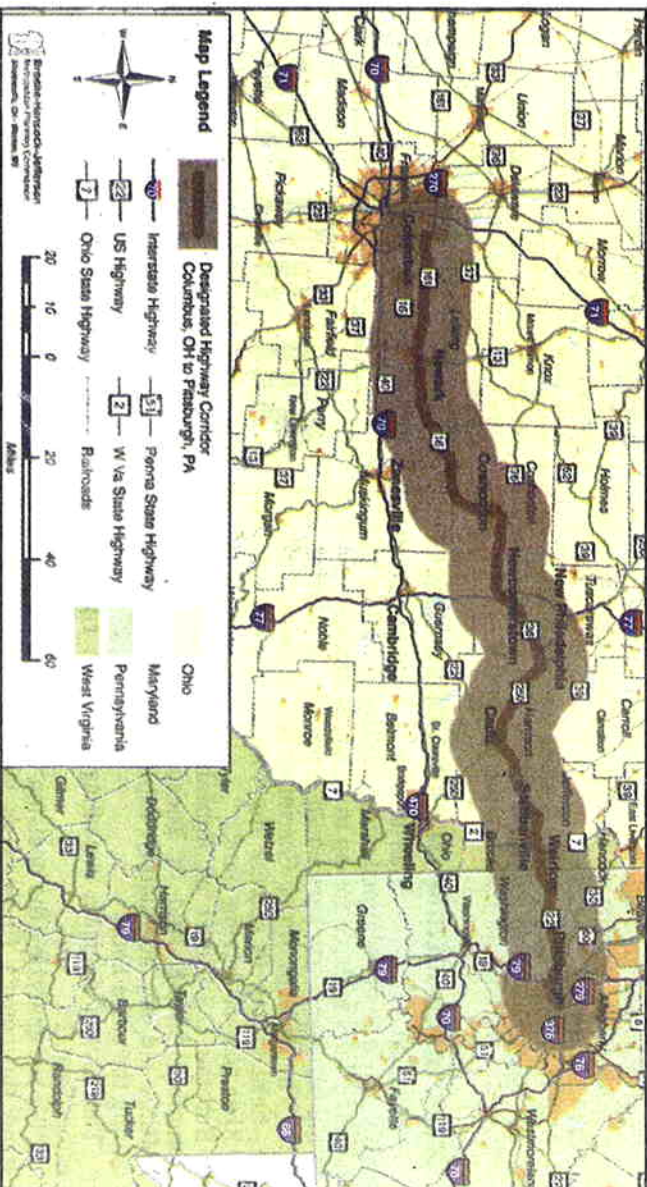
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STUEBENVILLE—Truck traffic along Interstate 70 has become enough of a problem that several states, including Ohio, are proposing 789 miles of truck-only lanes.

With that in mind, local officials are continuing to push for a four-lane highway route from Columbus to Pittsburgh, that would include U.S. Route 22 from Pittsburgh to Cadiz, as an alternative to using Interstate 70.

Ohio, Nevada and other states want to build or designate truck-only lanes on various stretches of interstate highways, though they're not yet sure how they would pay for them. Tolls are one option; public-private partnerships another.

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PROPOSED ROUTE – This map shows the proposed network of highways that would be used to create a direct route between Pittsburgh and Columbus.

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Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Missouri are suggesting a truck-only lane on a 789-mile stretch of Interstate 70.

The I-70 corridor rolls through or by Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis and Columbus and is within 25 miles of six major international airports and air-cargo hubs. The highway teems with trucks because of the high concentration of manufacturing, retail and other industries nearby. Much of the I-70 corridor is expected to reach or exceed capacity by 2030.

Travel on the nation's highways has nearly doubled since 1980, but the highway system has expanded by about 3 percent. There are 2.9 million large trucks traveling the nation's highways, up from 2.6 million in 2000 and that figure is expected to increase by 75,000 each year, according to the American Trucking Association.

Proposals for truck-only lanes are cropping up because freight being carried by trucks is expected to skyrocket at a time when population and passenger traffic continue to increase.

Some truckers question the wisdom of truck-only lanes. And many oppose having to pay tolls for special lanes without being given the option of using non-toll routes.

Trucker Earl Sylvain, 71, of the Dayton suburb of Huber Heights, said that if trucks were required to stay in one lane, slower trucks with heavier loads would hold the others up.

"You still would have the

TRUCK TENSION:

Several states are proposing to separate large trucks from smaller vehicles on highways by creating truck-only lanes.

■ **WHY?:** Reduce congestion, boost commerce and enhance safety.

■ **RESPONSE:** Some truckers question whether it will work. Many oppose having to pay tolls for special lanes without being given the option of using non-toll routes.

■ **STATUS:** U.S. Department of Transportation and a congressionally appointed commission are considering the idea.

meeting with ODOT executives and Gov. Ted Strickland to have the study proceed.

The addition of truck lanes could be more costly than adding just one lane.

Dan Middleton, program manager with the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M who is conducting a study on truck lanes, said they are a good idea for improving traffic flow, but truckers would want two lanes or some way to pass slower trucks.

David Schrank, a mobility research scientist with the institute, said one problem is figuring out how to get trucks smoothly back into general traffic once the truck-only corridor ends.

Nevada is pushing for truck-only lanes in areas along Interstate 80 and Interstate 15, which carry cargo east through Nevada from the ports of Oakland and Los Angeles, respectively.

Dennis Taylor, chief of program development for the Nevada Department of Transportation, said truck-only lanes would be especially effective in improving traffic flow because of steep grades that cause trucks to

become truck-only bypass highways. They include Phoenix and Houston.

The three proposals are among 14 semifinalists under review by the U.S. Department of Transportation, which will select five this summer to ease highway congestion. The agency will speed up the permitting process and help states find ways to finance the projects.

A congressional commission also is reviewing the idea of truck-only lanes and truck-only highways.

"Our freight-rail system and interstate national highway system is basically saturated," said Jack Schenendorf, vice chairman of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission. "In some really high-traffic corridors, it may make sense to try to separate freight and passengers."

Financing is a sticking point.

Trucking pays 43 percent of the annual \$35 billion in user fees for federal highways, according to the trucking associations. Truckers also pay a federal diesel fuel tax of 24.4 cents a gallon, a 12 percent excise tax on new trucks, an annual

with other vehicles and 4,932 of them fatal, the most since 2000. However, the number of people killed in large-truck crashes is expected to be down 3.7 percent in 2006, according to projections by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Karen Kuhn, 60, of Fairfield, said it is sometimes difficult to maneuver on interstate highways because there are so many trucks.

"It can get a little tense when you're hemmed in on three sides by these truckers," she said. "I'm trying to get into the fast lane, and they're trying to get into the right lane, and it's a stalemate. A truck lane would improve flow."

(The Associated Press contributed to this report. Giannamore can be contacted at pgiannamore@heraldstaronline.com.)