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## Bill allows work on Cherry Valley/Ohio 16

### Interchange years off, but studies permitted

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NEWARK -- Construction of an interchange at Cherry Valley Road and Ohio 16 remains a long way off, but a bill recently passed by the Ohio General Assembly allows for preliminary work on such Tier II state projects.

The bill, approved by legislators and signed last week by Gov. Ted Strickland, clarifies language some interpreted that prevented any work on Tier II projects until all Tier I projects were completed. Environmental, engineering, design and planning studies are needed years before construction.

The Transportation Review Advisory Council establishes highway-project priorities for the Ohio Department of Transportation, with Tier I projects funded and of highest priority. Tier II projects have tentative approval but are not funded yet.

"We don't want to stop all preliminary work on those (Tier II) projects," said Rep. Jay Hottinger, R-Newark. "Otherwise, you could complete projects on Tier I and not have anything to do. It was never the intent we would not move forward on preliminary work on Tier II and Tier III."

The busy intersection, where traffic comes to a screeching halt at a traffic signal, follows 13 miles of a limited-access divided highway under construction from New Albany to Granville. The widened and relocated Ohio 161/37 project will be completed next year.

"This becomes clearly the No. 1 need in Licking County, but we're competing with projects all over central Ohio and the entire state," Hottinger said.

Licking County and municipal governments recently approved resolutions of support for the interchange, which in January 2006 appeared on TRAC's Tier II list of new highway projects for 2007 through 2012.

An overcommitment of funds for highway construction has placed such state projects in jeopardy, but a \$2 million federal earmark, including a \$455,000 local match, might be available toward the interchange project.

Sandy Mapel, director of the Licking County Area Transportation Study, said the organization's preliminary long-range planning document estimates construction on the interchange won't occur until 2016 to 2020.

"It allows ODOT to move forward," Mapel said of the bill's passage. "It means no state legislation stands in the way of any new project moving forward in development."

"A \$2 million federal earmark can be used to advance studies, but it requires a 20 percent match and ODOT must allow the earmark to be used."

Strickland spokesman Keith Dailey said the gap between TRAC's priority projects and ODOT funds for those projects show a deficit of \$1.2 billion in the next seven years.

"The way TRAC prioritizes is something that needs to be looked at and improved," Dailey said.

State and local planners and transportation officials also have worried that a long gap between preliminary studies and construction will make the studies worthless.