



March 27, 2009

## 3 local projects get stimulus funds (video)

### Nothing for Cherry Valley Road interchange

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NEWARK -- Hebron and Newark will receive economic stimulus money for transportation projects, but funding remains elusive for a Cherry Valley Road interchange on Ohio 16.

Gov. Ted Strickland on Thursday announced 149 infrastructure projects in Ohio will be fully or partially funded using federal stimulus money, including three projects in Licking County.

Strickland said \$774 million in federal money will create or retain an estimated 21,257 jobs.

Ohio Department of Transportation District 5 spokeswoman Kate Stickle said the Licking County projects are: the realignment of Waterworks Road to meet Deo Drive at Mount Vernon Road in Newark; rehabilitation of High Street from U.S. 40 north in Hebron; and resurfacing of a rail crossing on Ohio 79, likely near Hebron.

About \$1.8 million was allocated for the Waterworks realignment. The High Street project, which covers about 1.5 miles, is estimated at \$450,000, and the rail crossing is estimated at \$100,000.

"It's been a pretty good day," Newark Mayor Bob Diebold said. "This was a big one for us, and a lot of credit goes to Brian Morehead, our city engineer. This is the one he thought it would be."

The project will connect Deo directly to Waterworks Road, closing the current Mount Vernon-Waterworks intersection, where traffic becomes congested and backed up because of its close proximity with the Mount Vernon-Deo intersection.

## INTERCHANGE OMITTED

Elected officials from across Licking County had hoped funding for the Cherry Valley Road interchange also would be announced, but it was not among the 149 chosen projects out of 3,100 submitted statewide.

"I'm disappointed because it was our top priority, but I'm not surprised," State Rep. Jay Hottinger, R-Newark, said. "We'll just have to make ODOT aware of the importance of the entire corridor."

Hottinger and other local officials have been frustrated because it seems money is not dedicated to the \$30 million construction project because the studies have not been completed, but the studies aren't done because construction funding remains a long way off.

U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi, R-Columbus, said in a Thursday press release he secured \$1.8 million in federal funding in 2005 to finish an environmental study and do preliminary engineering work, but ODOT refuses to allocate the money.

"I am sorely disappointed that the Cherry Valley Road interchange will not receive stimulus funding," Tiberi stated in the release. "I did everything I could to let the Strickland administration know improvements at Cherry Valley Road should be a high priority."

The cost of the project might have been too high to get stimulus funding, Hottinger said, because the

state was trying to spread the money to every county.

"What we've got to get ODOT to do is fund the study," Hottinger said. "Any time money is not spent, it could be taken away. The state has not come up with its share."

Rick Platt, executive director of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, joined with Hottinger in questioning the state's fear that a study could become outdated before construction starts.

"The former (ODOT) director said last year that has never happened in Ohio," Platt said. "We've got to continue to emphasize this is a top project and be energized by this disappointment."

## **A FAIR SHARE?**

Platt said Licking County and ODOT District 5, which includes Licking County, were shortchanged on stimulus projects.

"I don't know what Licking County's fair share is, but I don't think we've hit it yet as Ohio's 18th largest county (in population)," Platt said. "I remain hopeful we could still see Cherry Valley funded."

State Rep. Dan Dodd, D-Hebron, said Licking County got about what he expected from the stimulus funding. He said the U.S. 33 funding in Fairfield County also was a critical need in the area.

"It was roughly in line with what I thought would get funded," Dodd said. "One of the requirements is it had to be in economically distressed areas and I don't know if (the Cherry Valley-Ohio 16) area would qualify."

## **FUNDING WILL SAVE NEWARK MONEY**

The \$3.1 million Waterworks Road project will occur regardless of the stimulus funding, but Newark will not need to borrow as much to make it happen, City Engineer Brian Morehead said.

The city borrowed \$1.2 million for right-of-way acquisition and \$1.8 million for construction from the state infrastructure bank

"So now we'll be paying \$1.2 million back instead of \$3 million, and the rest can now go for other projects," Morehead said. "It's a stimulus for Newark for probably 10 years because we won't be paying back that big of a loan in coming years."

Construction should start by the end of this year, after the remaining right of way has been acquired and a final plan submitted, Morehead said. All studies have been done.

## **'A GREAT BOON TO HEBRON'**

Hebron Village Administrator Mike McFarland said the High Street funding comes at a great time, because the road, which formerly carried Ohio 79, is deteriorating.

"That is a great boon to Hebron," he said. The railroad, too, while not within the village limits, is helpful, he added.

Because the rail line is a spur serving Newark Industrial Park, it's not maintained by a railroad, McFarland said. Rather than ask the businesses in the park to come up with money, he said the decision was made to submit it for stimulus money instead.

"It's is critical to the success and operations of those businesses," he said.

Both road projects are expected to begin this fall and be completed in 2010, Stickle said. No timetable was listed for the rail crossing work.

The roadway, bridge, pavement and maritime projects will take place in 87 of 88 counties. Strickland said Noble County did not submit a federally eligible project.

Strickland said the stimulus funds are being targeted broadly to benefit all Ohioans. Decisions on the spending of another \$161 million has been left to regional planning groups in Cleveland, Akron, Dayton, Youngstown, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo and Canton.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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