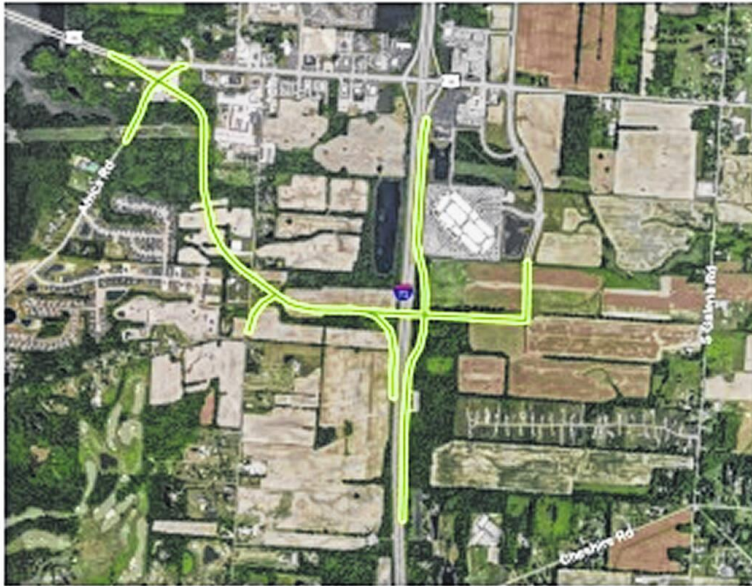


Delaware Gazette

## \$15M sought for Sunbury Parkway

By **GARY BUDZAK** - July 8, 2023



COLUMBUS — The Interstate 71/Sunbury Parkway and Interchange is one of 10 central Ohio projects seeking nearly \$350 million in funding from the Ohio Department of Transportation's Transportation Review Advisory Council.

ODOT has asked the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (central Ohio's regional council, representing more than 80 local government jurisdictions) to prioritize these projects, based in part on public comments.

The TRAC's final funding decisions will be made later in the year.

"The public is encouraged to provide comments or any additional information to help set MORPC's priorities, including the advantages and/or disadvantages of projects," said a news release issued by MORPC. "All comments must be submitted by e-mail to [trac@morpc.org](mailto:trac@morpc.org) or in writing to Elliott Lewis, Re: TRAC Public Input, 111 Liberty Street, Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43215. The deadline to submit feedback is 5 p.m. on Friday, August 11, 2023."

The 10 projects are in Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin and Licking counties.

The I-71/Sunbury Parkway and Interchange project is described thusly by MORPC:

"This request seeks to address the safety and congestion 'bottleneck' currently experienced at the existing I-71/U.S. 36/S.R. 37 interchange due to inadequate ramp and arterial capacity. The project will construct new interchange ramps at I-71, south of the existing U.S. 36/S.R. 37 interchange. The project will enhance capacity and increase mobility on the national highway system in partnership with private economic development. ODOT District 6 and the Delaware County Transportation Improvement District are requesting \$15 million for construction in fiscal year 2026."

The other projects are Central Ohio Transit Authority's LinkUS West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit (requesting \$39.05 million); I-70/I-71 Downtown Ramp Up Phase 2D (\$125 million); I-70/I-71 Downtown Ramp Up Phase 3 (\$75 million); I-270 eastbound to I-71 northbound ramp widening (\$22.5 million); I-71 Hard Shoulder Running/Smart Lane between Fifth Avenue and State Route 161 in Columbus (\$50 million); Alum Creek Drive adding a lane from S.R. 317 to Groveport Road and replacing bridges over Big Walnut Creek (\$3.59 million); I-71 and Taylor Road/S.R. 256 Interchanges (\$7 million total); I-70 Widening in Licking County (\$5 million); S.R. 161/S.R. 37 widening in Franklin and Licking counties including Mink Street near Intel (\$7 million total).

MORPC has said that central Ohio is expected to exceed a population of 3 million by 2050, one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the United States.

"Franklin County is expected to absorb half of the regional growth and will welcome more than twice as many newcomers as the next highest county (Delaware)," a MORPC news release said in February. "That said, the six surrounding counties will experience greater growth relative to their current populations ranging from a 30 percent increase in Madison and Licking counties, to 80 percent in Delaware, compared to 26 percent for Franklin County."

Transportation needs will also grow, and MORPC is looking into expanded passenger rail service in central Ohio, looking at the following corridors: Columbus–Toledo–Detroit; Columbus–Lancaster–Logan–Athens; Columbus–Chillicothe–Portsmouth (South Shore, Kentucky); Zanesville and Western Scenic Railroad–Mt. Perry Railroad. MORPC has praised the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law under President Biden as an opportunity to expand existing programs and create new programs for rail transportation.

"We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect Columbus and rural Ohio to the nation's passenger rail network, starting with quick service to Cleveland, Dayton, Cincinnati, and possibly Chicago, Detroit, or Pittsburgh," wrote MORPC Executive Director William Murdock in an opinion piece in January.

"Existing roads and highways around the region need upgrades," Murdock also said in the op-ed, which appears on MORPC's website. "Plans envision major improvements to existing routes, smart technology projects, and new connections in growing Delaware and Fairfield Counties. ... We could build out the regional trails system with plans for 500 new miles, create dedicated bike lanes... These would elevate access to nature, drive economic development, and connect neighborhoods left behind."

However, a long-rumored second outerbelt around I-270 was dismissed by Murdock.

"By MORPC's preliminary estimates, a second outerbelt would involve building more than 150 miles of new highway at a potential cost of \$10 to \$15 billion," Murdock wrote. "That's about five times what (ODOT) spent last year on highways for all of Ohio. It could disrupt over 10,000 acres of prime farmland and beautiful natural areas. A project of such size and impact could make some hometowns unrecognizable, involve extensive use of eminent domain, and divert resources away from other necessary projects. A second outerbelt is an idea that neither fixes today's problems nor readies us for the future. 1950s thinking is not the way to prepare for 2050."