

US Rt. 23 – ODOT -Orange comparison

By Gary Budzak - November 29, 2024



LEWIS CENTER — The Ohio Department of Transportation released the Draft Preliminary Feasibility Study for its Route 23 Connect project this week.

This study, a 95-page report prepared for ODOT District 6 by MS Consultants, looks at multiple concepts (including no-build) for improvements to seven segments of U.S. Route 23, from Waldo to Columbus at Interstate 270, averaging 12,200 through trips per day along the 23.5-mile stretch. The Concept A for each segment is most freeway-like, while Concept D is most like the existing route.

ODOT wants to improve travel times and safety along the route as the primary need; however, “consistency with local plans” is considered as the secondary need.

This article examines how ODOT's study findings compared to comments issued by Orange Township Administrator Michele Boni on behalf of the trustees (Chair Lisa Knapp, Vice Chair Michael Ringle, and Erica Fouss) in a letter dated Sept. 18.

ODOT

- The first segment starts at I-270 and is split into north (Northwoods Boulevard to Gold Meadow Drive) and south (I-270 to Flint Road).

For the south, Concept 1S-A “would remove all signals for through traffic in both directions of U.S. 23,” the study said. Then, Concept 1S-B “would allow for southbound vehicles on U.S. 23 bound for I-270 to avoid all signals.” Despite this, the ODOT recommendation is no-build, which would have the least impact on current properties.

For the north, four different concepts have been developed. ODOT said “the baseline and starting point for further study,” Concept 1N-C, would have U.S. 23 “widened to three lanes in each direction throughout the corridor.” While it was noted that Concept 1N-A was most

harmonious with Orange Township's 2018 Comprehensive Land Use Plan and "would provide the greatest overall benefit for the traveling public, however, it is expected to cost nearly double other costs with similar benefits," ODOT said. "Concept 1N-A is expected to have much greater right-of-way impacts and potential for displacements."

- Segment two (Gold Meadow Drive to Parkway Drive) has four concepts. Of those, Concept 2B "is more consistent with local planning documents (the Orange CLUP) ... as it would create fewer cul-de-sac roadways." This would remove all signals on U.S. 23, and "have a traditional interchange where each direction of U.S. 23 would have ramp connections to S.R. 750, Green Meadows Drive, or both." A connector road interchange would provide access to Orange Road, have a grade separation at Meadow Park Avenue and right-in/right-out access at Hidden Ravines Drive and Windbrush Avenue.
- The third segment (Orangepoint Drive to Orangewick Drive) has four concepts. Concept 3A, a traditional freeway interchange, was considered the baseline at Home Road; while 3B "would remove all signals in the corridor, replacing them with two overpasses and many right-in/right-out locations, which would function similarly to connector road interchanges."
- Segment four (Hyatts Road/Shanahan Road to Pollock Road) also has four concepts. Baselines varied by road, with Concept 4B at Hyatts/Shanahan, 4B/4C at Glenn and Greif parkways, and 4A/4B at a relocated Cheshire Road.
- The fifth segment (S.R. 315 to U.S. 42) has five concepts developed, with a combination used as baselines. At 315, a connector road interchange (Concept 5C) is suggested; an overpass/underpass (5A) at Hawthorn Boulevard; a combination of right-in/right-out driveways and overpasses/underpasses (5C) at Delaware Plaza and Hull Drive; and connector road interchange (5C/5D) for U.S. 42.
- Segment six (Pennsylvania Avenue to Coover Road) has four concepts, with a combination used as baselines. At Pennsylvania, traditional freeway interchange ramps (Concepts 6C/6D) are considered; a southbound U.S. 23 connector road interchange (6B) for Merrick Parkway/Panhandle Road; a raised median with no signals with a connector road interchange (6C) for the segment between Merrick/Panhandle to Hills-Miller Road; raised median with right-in/right-out only driveways (6B) between Hills-Miller and Coover roads; and a connector road interchange (6A/6B) at Coover Road.
- The final segment (Main Road to State Route 229) has four proposed concepts. Concept 7B emerged as the baseline, removing two signals and making U.S. 23 freeway-like north of Delaware State Park.

Orange Township

- For segment two, the township writes, "An interchange at Orange Road with signal removal seems practical... Concept B offers several advantages, but pedestrian connections need attention..."

There were also concerns about significant backups at Powell Road/S.R. 750. "Concept A could work with improvements to Green Meadows Drive South for Metro Parks (Highbanks)

traffic,” the township wrote. “Concept B might also be feasible if the on/off ramps can be effectively integrated.”

- At the third segment, Orange proposes the addition of pedestrian access along U.S. 23 from Home Road north to Pointe Bluff. There were also concerns for Olentangy Local School traffic, the Home Road interchange, Orangewick and Lewis Center Road.

Most important, was connectivity on Gooding Boulevard for emergency and hospital services. “Specifically, the Orange Township Fire Department needs to retain the ability to turn west onto Gooding Boulevard from northbound U.S. 23,” the township writes. “Alternatives that add ‘a couple of minutes’ could be life-threatening in emergencies. We propose maintaining the current light operation or implementing a system where emergency vehicle can override signals with pre-emption devices and mountable medians. Lastly, we also see the opportunity to extend Pacer Drive as an additional north/south connection.”

- Segment four noted that there would future residential growth in the Evans Farm subdivision and connecting Shanahan to South Old State Road. “Concepts A and B appear logical for maintaining east/west pedestrian access in this area,” the letter said.

It should be noted that Orange’s letter only addressed segments two-four (two and three are entirely within the township), along with other considerations (landscaping/hardscaping, pedestrian and connector streets, and signal removal).

“As Trustees of Orange Township, we have to balance the need for easy and safe access for our 36,000-plus residents and our business community,” the letter concludes. They stress the project should have a minimal impact on township roads, as maintenance/improvements for them are funded by their taxpayers.

“We urge ODOT to keep us engaged and informed throughout this project,” the township said.

Upcoming

The study said that the improvements would cost \$1.6 billion in 2030 dollars. However, it would reduce more than 300 crashes per year; reduce more than 150 fatal/serious crashes over 20 years; address 25 high-incident areas; reduce travel times by nearly 35 minutes; and eliminate more than 32-34 traffic signals along the route.

ODOT has said it will come up with an Action Plan “in early 2025,” with further study needed as well as additional public meetings. For more information, visit publicinput.com/23connect.