

LOCAL

## ODOT: Some US Route 23 upgrades in Delaware County prioritized in \$1.6 billion plan



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With an estimated cost of \$1.6 billion, reconfiguring Route 23 north from Interstate 270 through Delaware isn't going to happen cheaply, or quickly. Especially when the goal is to remove almost all traffic lights.

But an action plan released last week by the Ohio Department of Transportation is prioritizing which improvements might happen first, based on their chances of improving safety, ending traffic snarls and eliminating unpopular stop lights.

The goal is to prioritize areas that would receive funding based on needs, available resources and other factors, ODOT District 6 spokesperson Matt McGuire said.

The corridor action plan states in part, "Even though some improvements may be shown as a lower priority than others, each improvement brings independent utility and should be developed as funding permits."

McGuire said: "It's not a hard order list. It ranks the different locations into a tier system ... what the priority locations will be. We feel that these represent the best return on investment."

ODOT's studies and action plan can be reviewed [here](#).

The Dispatch previously reported the total project cost could range from \$1.4 billion to \$1.9 billion. By combining improvement segments in nearby areas, the \$1.6 billion cost is more accurate, said McGuire, who cited stretches of Route 23 north of the city of Delaware as already partially funded.

The ODOT study concluded it is "unfeasible" to create an entirely "free-flow" Route 23, without any stoplights, but the recommendations would create some "free-flow" conditions from just north of 270 to just south of the village of Waldo, in southern Marion County. Officials had previously announced plans to reduce the 39 traffic lights along the 23-mile stretch of roadway to seven or fewer.

Top-tier improvements include \$43.6 million near Coover Road and \$50.4 million near Route 229, a combined area where public hearings will take place this year, McGuire said. Route 23 between Troutman and Weiser roads, near Delaware State Park, also is a priority, with an estimated cost of \$25.6 million.

The intersection of Routes 23 and 750 is among the most notorious — and dangerous. The plan ranks this as a mid-tier project to cost an estimated \$85.1 million. It would include a center median barrier along Route 23, prohibiting all left turns in both directions. The road would be widened for additional through lanes north and south and would include an overpass/underpass and interchange ramp connections at Route 750. This would replace all existing traffic lights.

A similar project, at Orange Road, which has significant school bus traffic and backups, is a third-tier project that would include a collector road interchange to eliminate the north-south traffic light. The area has frequent crashes including a fatality last year.

Similar bridges, ramps, collector roads and other upgrades would eliminate most left turns, a common cause of the most serious crashes.

For example, left turns into Highbanks Metro Park would be eliminated. Alternatives would include a new Lazelle Road interchange to support pedestrian access into the park and bridge or tunnel at Green Meadows Drive, across from the park.

Response to the plan on Reddit have been varied with some asking instead for a bypass, like the Route 33 bypass in Lancaster, others seeking a rail system. Most simply want relief.

One person suggested, "Construct one long bridge from 270 to Delaware with occasional on/off ramps."

Another wanted to "strangle the person that approved the first stop light," along the county's stretch of Route 23, saying that the county "single-handedly made decisions that have wasted countless hours" of motorists' time.

Yet another commented, "I might go insane if the traffic gets even louder."

The Delaware County Engineer's office said ODOT has kept local agencies informed and allowed them input in the study.

Rob Riley, deputy county engineer, said that changes will require "limiting access to Route 23 from some of our county and township roads," but that a network of parallel and adjacent roads will lessen unintended problems during and after construction.

"We share the opinion with ODOT that local trips are better off using local roads to get from place to place, rather than becoming part of the congestion and safety problem on U.S. 23," Riley said in an email to The Dispatch. "Our focus is to make sure US 23 remains a viable transportation route in Delaware County, but also one that continues to serve a major business corridor in our area that helps to balance out the tax base for our county residents."

McGuire said that more analysis and public involvement will be needed and could alter the estimated costs and construction dates.

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