

US 23 bypass plan added to transportation budget aims to ease Delaware County congestion



Dean Narciso

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- Ohio has allocated \$500,000 to study a proposed bypass for U.S. Route 23 in Delaware County.
- The bypass would connect Route 23 to Interstate 71, diverting traffic around a heavily congested 23-mile stretch.
- The study will examine five potential routes and determine whether ODOT or the turnpike commission is best suited for construction.
- While the bypass is seen as a potential solution to traffic woes, officials emphasize the importance of continuing with the planned \$1.6 billion reconstruction of Route 23.

Clarification: This story has been updated to clarify ODOT spokesperson Matt Bruning's statements about the project. He said both a reconstruction of U.S. 23 and a bypass could be viable and that he could envision overhead signs similar to those near Frank Road.

[Plans to reconstruct much of U.S. 23](#) to improve safety and efficiency through Delaware County would cost an estimated \$1.6 billion and likely take more than a decade to complete.



And when details were announced earlier this year, including a series of new interchanges, collector roads and overpasses, there was little discussion about bypassing Delaware County altogether.

But Ohio House Bill 54, which Gov. Mike DeWine signed in March, mandates funding to study a long-discussed bypass to divert traffic around this 23-mile stretch of crowded roadway between Worthington and Waldo in southern Marion County.

The \$11.5-billion, two-year transportation budget allocates \$500,000 for the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission to work with the Ohio Department of Transportation to begin plans for a bypass that would connect U.S. 23 to Interstate 71, in northern Delaware County. The bill does not require construction, only study, including preliminary engineering plans.

ODOT spokesman Matt Bruning told The Dispatch that both projects could be viable, considering Delaware County's continuing growth.

"The bulk of this traffic is in the city of Delaware and south, where it's already 30% over capacity. There's no way that you can just ignore (U.S.) 23. That's really where the pinch point is," Bruning said of the route that connects Columbus to Toledo and northwestern Ohio.

According to the Legislative Budget Office, the connection between U.S. 23 and I-71 could happen either by:

- Expanding Route 229 or a similar state route in northern Delaware County
- Creating a new freeway in northern Delaware County
- Creating a toll road or new freeway in the region between Route 529 and Waldo, which would head east toward I-71 north of Marengo in Marion and Morrow counties

As part of the plan, the agencies are charged with preparing a preliminary engineering report to determine the most feasible routes for any new freeway or toll road and determine preferred alignments from five possibilities. In addition, planners would determine whether ODOT or the Ohio Turnpike Commission would best be suited for construction.

The plan must be completed by Oct. 1 and submitted to legislative leaders, including transportation committee chairs, according to the budget office.



Bruning could envision overhead signs similar to those near Frank Road that would give motorists along Interstate 270 options, either toward I-71 to a potential bypass or a conventional path north through Orange and Liberty townships and into Delaware.

Orange Township Trustee Mike Ringle knows well the traffic snarls that commuters face daily. He also knows the U.S. 23 corridor's value.

"The 23 corridor is very important for commerce," he said. "We have a lot of our commercial base along there that helps to supplement real property tax rates."

Ringle said that both projects — a bypass and U.S. 23 reconstruction — are compatible, but he cautions state officials against losing focus on either.

"If you divide the resources too much, it might make either solution ineffective," he said. "While a bypass might be an option to address some of the congestion, I don't think it is a solution (on its own)."

The Dispatch [reported in February that](#) ODOT's priorities are to reduce crashes by installing wider roads, new interchanges and other upgrades north from I-270 along U.S. 23 through Delaware. ODOT had previously announced plans to reduce the 39 traffic lights along the 23-mile stretch of roadway to seven or fewer.

Dispatch northern suburbs reporter Dean Narciso can be reached at dnarciso@dispatch.com.