

**ODOT talks possible US 23 / I-71 connector**

By Joshua Keeran – March 7, 2026



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On Thursday, ODOT officials hosted two open houses at the Delaware County Fairgrounds to give residents a chance to learn more about the study, ask questions, and view maps showing the five alternatives for the connector.

“The effort we are doing right now is simply to fulfill the legislature’s ask of us as to where would be the most feasible place to put this line on the map,” ODOT Press Secretary Matt Bruning said Thursday. “Where would be the most feasible place to build it? The question about should we build it, that will come in the next step.”

While working to complete the study, ODOT recently released the findings of a Draft Conceptual Alternatives Study, which resulted in the development of 16 different alignments for the potential freeway connection between U.S. 23 and I-71.

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Morrow counties, a portion will impact Delaware County.

“With this process it’s kind of like a refining process,” Bruning said. “We started with this big map and big section of central Ohio that the (Ohio) General Assembly said are the corridors we want you to study. We have refined that down, and the next refining was to get it north and south of Ashley, and now we’ve taken it down even further. The sandpaper is getting finer, if you will. Now we are at these alignments that are north of Ashley.”

The study indicates the alignments south of Ashley weren’t selected because of environmental, community and permitting constraints.

“All three southern alignments would cross federal and state-owned or -managed wildlife and natural resource areas,” the study states. “In addition, the southern alignments affected a larger area of FEMA mapped floodplain. Construction and long-term operation within these areas would likely require extensive coordination with the USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), additional permitting, and increased mitigation efforts.”

Bruning added, “Any of these routes will have some impact, so that’s what we’re looking at as part of this effort – the environmental factors, the community factors and the cultural factors. All of those things are going to be taken into consideration when we try to offer this report by Oct. 1 to the legislature.”

All five of the conceptual alternatives being considered will connect via an interchange at I-71 in Delaware County.

The options involve an interchange at U.S. 23, north of Waldo in Marion County, and another interchange at U.S. 42, north of Ashley in Morrow County. How the connector gets to those interchanges differs a bit between the options, which is the same in Delaware County.

Four of the five options have the I-71 interchange located just south of the Morrow County/Delaware County line. The interchange would be in Kingston Township (Delaware County) near the intersection of Blue Church Road and Kilbourne Road.

The largest impact to Delaware County would be the one option that connects to an interchange located southwest of the other proposed interchange. This interchange would be located near the end of Clark Road and the intersection of Kilbourne and Carters Corner roads in Kingston Township. Since the interchange is further south on I-71, more of the freeway would run through the township.

While many factors are being taken into consideration like travel time, cost, impact on the environment, etc., Bruning said open houses like the ones Thursday are “vital” to the study as ODOT seeks out community input.

“We want to hear not just from the people who say they are for it or against it, but we want to hear some specifics,” he said. “What will the impacts be to you, your family, your property, or what would be the benefits if maybe you own a trucking company or you are someone who drives a lot between northwest Ohio and central Ohio? We want to hear all of that information. All of that gets taken into consideration and put into this report.”

## **Still time to weigh in**

For those who were unable to attend the open houses at the fairgrounds on Thursday, Bruning said residents are able to visit the study's website, where they will be able to submit input and see the exhibits that were presented at the open house.

The study can be viewed at [publicinput.com/23-71study](http://publicinput.com/23-71study).

Open houses will also be held in Morrow and Marion counties on the following dates:

- March 10 from 12-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. at the Heartland Retreat Center, 3201 County Road 225 in Marengo.
- March 12 from 12-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. at the Marion County Fairgrounds, 220 E. Fairground St., Marion.

When asked if the US 23/I-71 connector is a sure thing at this point, Bruning responded by saying, "It's a question of maybe at this point."

He added after ODOT presents its report to the General Assembly, the next questions will be "Should we build it, and how do we pay for it? ... We are going to give all of these options to the General Assembly in a report by Oct. 1, and then future leaders in Ohio will make an informed decision because of the effort we are doing today."

## **U.S. 23 remains priority**

While Bruning said the US 23/I-71 connector is "still too early in the process to start talking about parcels and acres" in terms of how much of Delaware County will be impacted, he did make it clear the Route 23 Connect Study is very much still in play in Delaware County.

"I want to be very clear, we still remain very much committed to 23 Connect and improving the 23 corridor," he said. "That is a separate effort and a separate issue. This is not an either or. They are very much separate things."

Route 23 Connect aims to make improvements to the existing U.S. 23 corridor between I-270 and Waldo. Bruning noted this study and the US 23/I-71 Connector Feasibility Study are independent of each other, and one won't fix the other's issues or vice versa.

"We've gotten a lot of comments saying, 'Don't do this' or 'You should focus on 23.'" I get that, and I want to be clear for those folks that this is not an either/ or. We still remain very committed to addressing 23, regardless of what happens with this effort. What will 23 look like? That is a separate effort. There is a lot of funding that needs to happen and bridges that need to be crossed when we get to them, but that is not something we are going to abandon."



**This section of map shows where the freeway connections being considered would cross into Delaware County from Morrow County with the interchange with I-71 (two options) being in Delaware County.**



**This map shows the two possible interchanges at U.S. Route 23 for the U.S. 23/I-71 connector would be located just north of Waldo in Marion County.**



**This map shows where the possible interchange (two choices) at U.S. Route 42 would be located just above Ashley in Morrow County as part of the U.S. 23/I-71 connector.**