Recommendations Summary  (September 2004)

Based on two years of community input and engineering analysis, the Ohio Department of Transportation is presenting a Strategic Plan that identifies the field of potential solutions for fixing the Interstate 70/71 downtown “split.” During 2004 and 2005, ODOT will focus its engineering and environmental analysis on three alternatives:

- One-way Pair Collector/Distributor Road
- Two-way Collector/Distributor Road using local streets
- Urbanized Freeway

These elements may also be combined to create a final plan for the corridor.

The alternatives were identified during a series of public/community meetings held over the past two years. In all, ODOT has participated in more than 90 small group meetings; six meetings of the public Advisory Committee; five general public meetings; two workshops; and individual meetings with key downtown stakeholders. In addition, the department has received thousands of comments and suggestions, including several hundred comments received via the website.

Of the alternatives reviewed, ODOT analyzed and compared them based on operational efficiency, safety, accessibility and mobility, cost, environmental and community factors.

“We’re advancing these alternatives for further study because they have the greatest potential to address all of these goals,” said Jack Marchbanks, ODOT District 6 deputy director. “We’re seeking a solution that not only solves the congestion and accident problem, but one that can capture the broadest level of community support.”

Background

ODOT considers the downtown split the most congested, high-crash freeway location in the state. Designed in the ’50s and built in the ’60s to serve 1980s traffic, today it carries about 175,000 vehicles a day or about 50,000 more than it was designed to handle.

While the highway design was considered state of the art more than 40 years ago, the outdated design, close proximity of ramps, overlapping of two major highways and high traffic volumes contribute to two crashes daily or an accident rate 10 times the state average for similar highways.

The need to fix this congested, high-crash corridor has never been more critical. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission estimates that by 2030 central Ohio can anticipate:

- 36% population growth
- 43% job growth
- 43% increase in regional trips

Recommendations

Over the past two years, ODOT has analyzed a number of concepts including rerouting portions of I-70/71 traffic to SR 315/I-670 and SR 104, truck only lanes, tunneling and decking over the freeway. However, these options were eliminated from further study based on analysis and public input. Over the past year, ODOT has concentrated its analysis on improving the operation and safety of the I-70/71 South Innerbelt. Transit and traffic demand management options such as carpooling and flextime will also be carried forward for further analysis and possible inclusion in the final plan.

Based on the goals and objectives for the study, ODOT is recommending the following alternatives for more detailed analysis. Each alternative was evaluated based on:
• **Operational efficiency** (ability to meet or exceed highway geometric design standards)
• **Local accessibility and mobility** (ability to improve traffic flow and access)
• **Safety** (ability to reduce crashes or severity)
• **Environmental and community issues** (avoids or minimizes environmental impacts, minimizes right of way and building acquisition, and addresses cap and pedestrian concerns)
• **Cost effectiveness**

The alternatives being advanced for further study are:

**One-way Pair, Collector/Distributor (CD)** – Build one-way CD roads parallel to both sides of the freeway. CD roads collect traffic from existing downtown areas to distribute onto the highway. Likewise, they collect and distribute highway traffic onto downtown city streets. This alternative would also involve rebuilding freeway ramps and interchanges to eliminate excessive weaving and add through lanes to accommodate growth. Estimated cost: $680 million

**Two-way, Collector/Distributor Road Using Local Street System** – Same alternative as above, however the roads would carry two-way traffic and run north of I-70/71 along Fulton and west of I-71 along Lester. Estimated cost: $720 million

These alternatives are being advanced for further study because they:
- Performed well in four of five criteria
- Provide flexibility in the location of CD roads and integration with the city’s downtown street conversion plans
- Potentially balance transportation (improve safety and efficiency) and community goals (minimize environmental impacts and improve neighborhood connectivity with downtown)

**Urbanized Freeway System** – Improve the interchanges at I-70/I-71/State Route 315 (west split) and I-70/I-71 (east split), untangle and add lanes to the freeway, improve the existing ramps, but leave the current highway and ramp system intact. However, any ramps deemed unsafe could be consolidated or closed. Estimated cost: $590 million

This alternative is being advanced for further study because it:
- Performed well in two of five criteria, but has the potential for improvement with more detailed design
- Fewer environmental impacts and more cost effective than other alternatives studied
- May be paired with other alternatives to create final plan for the corridor

**Next Steps**

These concepts will be analyzed in greater detail and shared with the public before ODOT makes final recommendations for the corridor in 2005.

ODOT will continue through its project development process, which is displayed below. ODOT will also continue to work with the public throughout this process to determine how the project should be funded, constructed, how traffic will be maintained during construction and what design enhancements should be included to the project to improve the attractiveness of the highway and pedestrian facilities.