

70/71 Study Newsletter

March 2003



Fixing the I-70/I-71 "Split"

ODOT seeks public input to reduce accidents and congestion

Most motorists will take the shortest distance between two points. But for commuters like Chris Hayman of Columbus, the shortest distance is not always the fastest or safest.

"Currently, I work downtown and use Broad Street or I-670 to get to and from work," he said. "I would love to be able to use I-70 downtown, but it is way too crowded and dangerous at this time."

Hayman's concerns are common. In the past nine months since the Ohio Department of Transportation began studying ways to fix the congested I-70/I-71 corridor, several hundred residents and commuters – some from as far away as New Jersey – have agreed: something comprehensive has to be done.

How Bad is It?

The I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt corridor in downtown Columbus – commonly called "the downtown split" – is one of the busiest and most vital sections of highway in the region. Today, it serves approximately 150,000 cars and 17,000 trucks per day.

But like many highways built during the 1960s, traffic has surpassed the original design. The highway now carries about 50,000 more vehicles than it was designed

to handle, making it the most congested stretch of freeway statewide.

It's also one of the most hazardous. Although it makes up only six percent of the Columbus-area freeway system, it is the site of 27 percent of all I-70/I-71 freeway accidents, resulting in two to three accidents a day.

Fixing the Problem

Over the next nine months, ODOT is seeking the support and input of area commuters, organizations and communities in finding ways to reduce congestion and accidents.

"Today we have 21st century traffic traveling on 1960s roads," said ODOT Director Gordon Proctor. "We know something must be done, we know it will be expensive, but we need the community's support to find the best solution."

Now is a critical time for the public to get involved.

Over the next several months, ODOT will begin evaluating potential solutions or alternatives for the corridor. These alternatives will be selected based on community input and engineering data. Final recommendations will be made in the fall.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

American Electric Power
Baptist Ministerial Alliance
Baptist Pastors' Conference
Brewery District Commission
Capital South Development Corporation
Children's Hospital
Columbus City Center
Columbus Clippers
City of Columbus
Columbus City Council
Columbus Compact Corporation
Columbus Post
Columbus Urban League
COTA
Council of Southside Organizations
Federal Highway Administration
Franklin County Board of Commissioners
Franklinton Area Commission
The Gafford Company
German Village Society
Grant Medical Center – OhioHealth
Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce
Greater Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau
Main Street Business Association
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Miranova
Mount Carmel West
Nature Conservancy – Ohio Chapter
Near East Area Commission
Ohio Department of Transportation
Ohio Hispanic Coalition
Ohio Rail Development Commission
Ohio Trucking Association
Salvation Army - Columbus
Sierra Club - Ohio Chapter
Southside United Neighbors
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
United Way

PUBLIC MEETING

Learn more about the preliminary concepts ODOT plans to study. The next Public Meeting will be held:
Wednesday, March 12, 4 - 8 p.m.
Columbus Health Department Auditorium
240 Parsons Ave. (at the corner of Parsons and Main downtown) Free parking in rear.

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Advisory Committee Chairman Has Strong Community Ties

A veteran business leader with considerable experience involving major projects affecting downtown Columbus and its historic neighborhoods has agreed to chair the Ohio Department of Transportation's I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt Study. Jerome C. "Jerry" Gafford said he is excited about helping citizens work with ODOT to evaluate and select fixes for the busy urban corridor.

"I see my role as lending a guiding hand to the discussion of this group," Gafford said. "My job is to ensure that there is a proper exchange between ODOT and the community. We need to make sure everyone has the opportunity to discuss their issues so the committee can reach an appropriate consensus for what should be done."

Gafford is not new to transportation issues. He has served on the board for the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) and participated in the original discussions for building SR 315 and I-670.

He is also sensitive to preserving and improving downtown communities. In 1978, Gafford's first assignment as chief of staff for Mayor Tom Moody was to help restore the viability of Mt. Vernon Avenue businesses.

"I was involved with the people and communities that were impacted by the construction of the original I-70/I-71 highway. Being sensitive to all community voices during the progression of this study is a good first step for ODOT," Gafford said.



Jerry Gafford

Gafford said he's impressed by the work done so far and proud to be part of such a notable group. "It is clear to me that ODOT and the members of the advisory committee are committed to finding a solution that will be sensitive to nearby neighborhoods and maximize the benefits for all involved," he said.

"Knowing the members of this committee, and how busy their lives are, the fact that they are setting aside time for this study says a lot about their commitment to finding the right solution for this area," Gafford said.

Gafford has lent his knowledge and time to many organizations over the years.

His background includes serving as chief of staff for former Mayor Tom Moody and senior vice president of Corporate Affairs for Lazarus Department Stores. He's also been active in the community, serving as co-chair of the Columbus Capital Improvement Campaign in 1999 and working on the Leadership Campaign for the Columbus Center of Science and Industry (COSI) on the Riverfront.

"We are very excited and proud to have a community member of Mr. Gafford's stature and expertise serve as our chairman," said Jack Marchbanks, ODOT District 6 Deputy Director. "He will be a great advocate for the community as we search for solutions to reduce congestion and accidents in the corridor."

Get Involved With the I-70/I-71 Study Today!
Contact us by mail, phone or e-mail at:
 Ohio Department of Transportation
 Attention: Michelle May
 1980 W. Broad Street
 Columbus, Ohio 43223
 (614) 644-8309
 michelle.may@dot.state.oh.us

Visit our website at: www.7071study.org
 or
Attend the Next Public Meeting :
 March 12 (4-8 p.m.)
 Columbus Health Department (Auditorium)
 240 Parsons Avenue

2002									
Apr.	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
STEP ONE	Confirm and Clarify Problems, Goals and Needs								
		Advisory Committee							
		Project Kick Off Meeting							
STEP TWO			Collect and Analyze Information						
								Submit Existing Condition Report to ODOT	Draft Purpose & Need
								Advisory Committee Meeting	
Community Outreach Meetings									

Project Schedule
 I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt Study

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Study Quantifies Challenges in Fixing the Downtown "Split"

In order to make the best transportation decisions regarding the I-70/I-71 South Innerbelt, it is necessary to first know the existing conditions of the highway. Those existing conditions include such physical things as the condition of the pavement and bridges, but also include the number of vehicles that use the highway and the presence of nearby parks and historic neighborhoods.

This information will help ODOT and the community better understand the extent of problems in the current design and structure, and will allow for more informed comments and suggestions as planners develop solutions to problems.

The following are some key conclusions based upon the data collected for the corridor so far:

- Current traffic volume exceeds the design capacity of the highway, contributing to congestion and delay.

The traffic count for 2002 indicates about 175,000 vehicles per day will travel on a section of highway built to handle 120,000 vehicles per day. ODOT has declared this section of highway *the most congested in the state.*

- Traffic peaks at around 7 a.m. and continues at near peak until 7 p.m.

Unlike many urban corridors, where traffic peaks during morning and evening rush hour

but declines during the day, the South Innerbelt experiences high levels of traffic throughout the day. Although the interstate system was originally developed primarily for long-distance travel and for national defense reasons, about 75 percent of those using this section of highway today are commuters or nearby residents.

- Crash data for the period 1999-2001 shows 1,225 accidents in the study area each year – more than three accidents every day.

The most common accidents are rear-end crashes (63 %) and sideswipe crashes (21%). Also, most accidents appear to be in the inbound direction – which is consistent with the high number of rear-end accidents since motorists entering the highly congested area are unaware of, or inattentive to, stopped or slowing traffic ahead and are unable to stop in time.

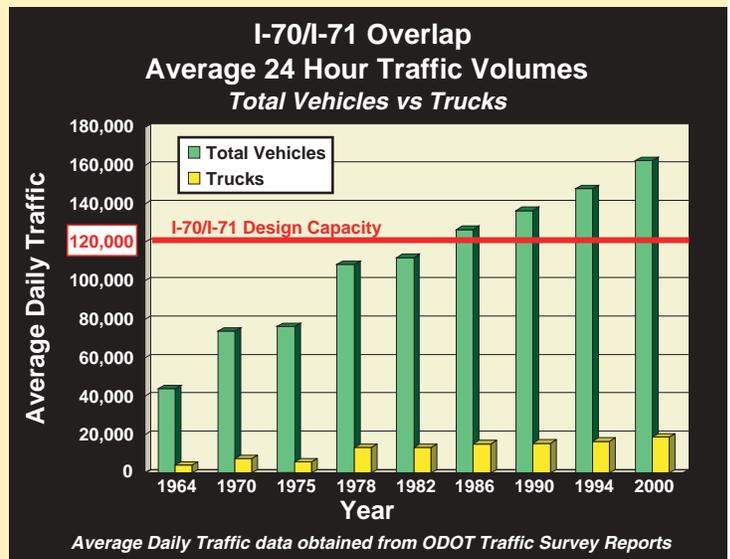
- The overlapping of the two interstates forces drivers to “weave” through lanes, causing demanding decisions for drivers and increasing the num-

ber of conflict points.

Eleven of the horizontal curves do not meet ODOT standards and all of the interchange ramps lack sufficient length for proper acceleration and merging into mainline traffic. The spacing between interchange and ramp terminals does not meet design standards; does not provide adequate distances to merge from the mainline freeway traffic; and does not give drivers enough time to read directional signs.

- The South Innerbelt is a vital transportation link for freight traffic – about 30 percent of all freight moving in Ohio goes through this area.

(continued on page 4)



2003										
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	
STEP THREE		Identify and Evaluate Solutions								
Identify Preliminary Set of Alternatives					Submit Conceptual Package & Preliminary Evaluation Report to ODOT		STEP FOUR		Recommend a Strategic Plan	
Submit Future Condition Report to ODOT		Advisory Committee Meeting					Prepare and Submit a Strategic Plan to ODOT			
			Analyze & Evaluate Preliminary Set of Alternatives to Gain Final Alternative Set			Analyze & Evaluate Final Set of Alternatives to Obtain Preferred Solution			MORPC Approval	
				Advisory Committee Meeting				Advisory Committee Meeting		
Public / Community Meetings										
						Submit Final Alternative Report to ODOT				

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(continued from page 3)

Freight industry officials made clear their dependency on these two major interstate routes, adding they would be more likely to use the area if it is improved.

- The pavement for the majority of the freeway system is rated favorably, however the pavement in the I-70/I-71 overlap area is fair to poor, indicating a need for resurfacing in the near future.

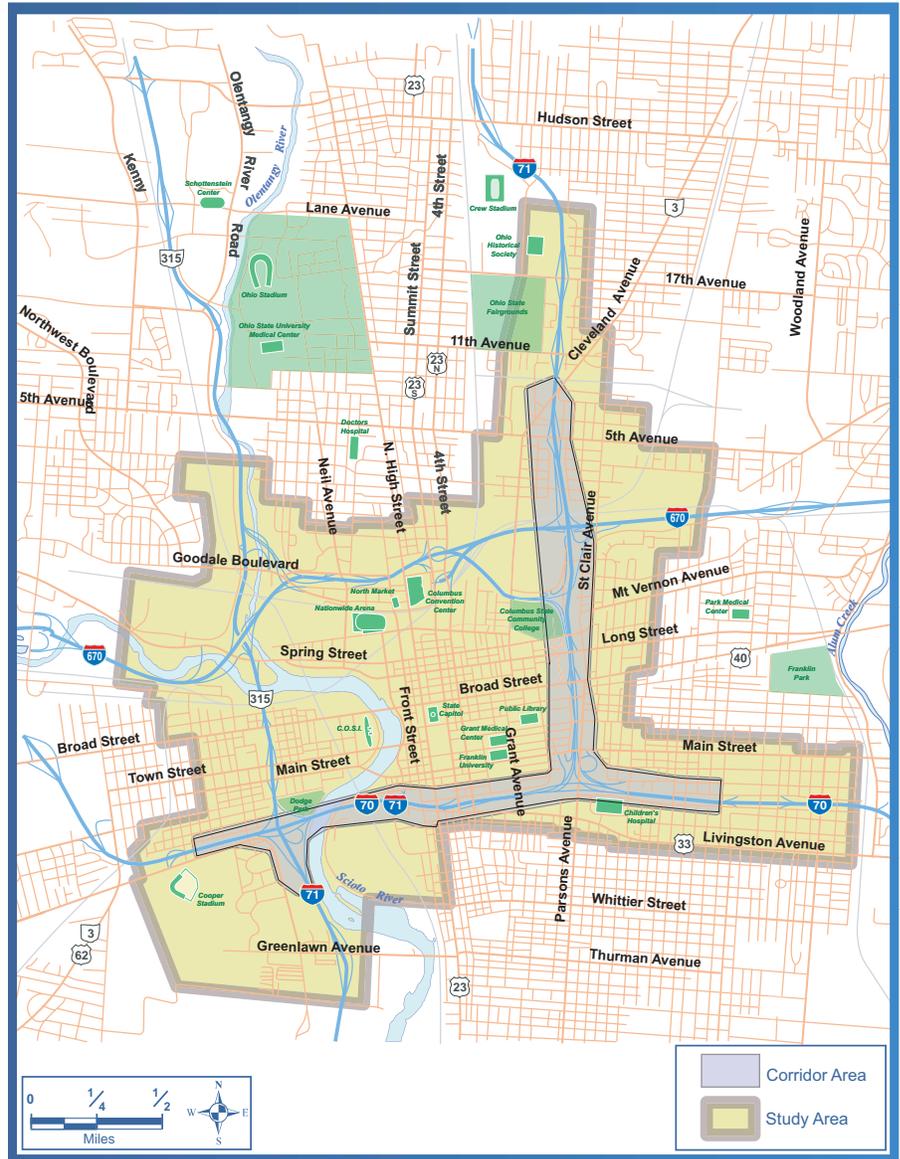
The bridges are rated from satisfactory to excellent condition and the retaining walls are rated from satisfactory to good condition.

- There are a number of existing social and physical environmental conditions in the study area that must be taken into consideration as various solutions are proposed.

The number - one goal of ODOT as this process moves forward is to “fix the highway and be a good neighbor.” This requires input from throughout the impacted area. Residents will be vital partners in developing alternatives.

For more information regarding the study or report, contact:

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Study and Corridor Area

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