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ODOT Moves Closer to Plan for Downtown 'Split'

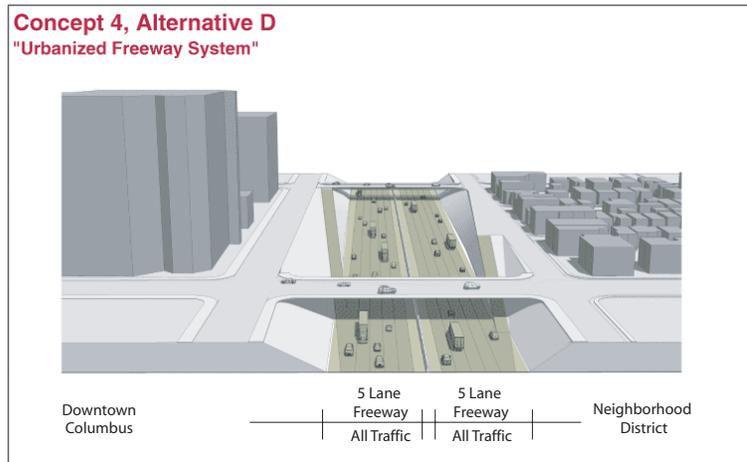
After two years of broad-based community input, the Ohio Department of Transportation has narrowed the options for fixing the Interstate 70/71 downtown "split." During 2005, ODOT will focus its analysis on three alternatives that either rebuild the entire corridor or untangle and upgrade portions of the existing freeway.

Officials say it's possible a final solution could mix elements from all three.

The alternatives were identified during a series of public and community meetings held across the community since 2002. Of the eight alternatives reviewed, ODOT analyzed and compared the alternatives based on safety, accessibility and mobility, cost, environmental and community factors.

"We're advancing these alternatives 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."

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. As a result, the highway experiences about two crashes daily.



PICTURED ABOVE IS ONE OF THREE ALTERNATIVES ODOT IS STUDYING FOR THE SPLIT.

Continued on back...

70/71 Study Newsletter

...Continued from page 1

To address these problems, ODOT is advancing the following alternatives for further study:

- 1) **Urbanized Freeway System** – Improve the interchanges at State Route 315 and I-71, untangle and add lanes to the freeway, improve the existing ramps, but leave the highway and ramp system unchanged (see drawing on front page). The most unsafe ramps could be consolidated or closed.
- 2) **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. (Pictured as Concept 4, Alternative A below) Likewise, they collect and distribute highway traffic onto downtown city streets. This alternative would also involve rebuilding freeway ramps, interchanges and lanes to untangle the freeway and add through lanes to accommodate growth. ODOT will also analyze a one-way CD system using Fulton and Mound streets.
- 3) **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 along Fulton and west of I-71 along Lester. (Pictured below as Concept 4, Alternative G)

These concepts will be analyzed in greater detail and shared with the public before ODOT makes final recommendations for the corridor in 2005. Construction could begin as early as 2008 and could cost more than \$600 million.

While the Urbanized Freeway concept did not rank as high as the CD road concepts during the analysis, Marchbanks said it was carried forward for further study because engineers thought it could potentially be improved during the next phase of analysis and design. The concept also costs less and had fewer environmental impacts than other alternatives.

ODOT is dropping from further consideration four concepts, which include tunneling and decking the highway corridor, as well as rerouting I-70 traffic to State Route 104 and turning portions of I-70 into a city street.

“Tunneling and decking were by far the most expensive alternatives costing about \$1 billion to build,” said Marchbanks. “It doesn’t make sense to study options taxpayers can’t afford when other options are just as good or better, and cost less.”

In addition, although the SR 104 concept was popular with some segments of the public, Marchbanks said it didn’t adequately address safety and congestion concerns in the split and had too many environmental impacts.

“From the beginning, ODOT said it would seek solutions that minimized or avoided environmental impacts,” he said. “This concept would disconnect hospitals from the freeway, cut through cemeteries and take far too much residential and industrial land. We do, however, recognize that SR 104 could play an important role in the future development of Columbus.”

For more information on the recommendations, or to share your comments log onto www.7071study.org or call (614) 644-8309

