

Delaware County mulls transportation improvement district

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Delaware County commissioners have begun examining whether the county should form a transportation improvement district, an umbrella organization that would handle transportation projects across jurisdictional lines.

Commissioners at their May 9 work session heard a presentation from attorneys Steve Tugend and Rusty Schuermann, members of the law firm Kegler, Brown, Hill and Ritter, which provides counsel to TIDs in Clermont, Butler, Warren, Hamilton and Belmont counties.

Commissioner Dennis Stapleton initiated the meeting. He told *ThisWeek* that he knows Tugend and had spoken with a Clermont County commissioner at a County Commissioners Association of Ohio board meeting.

"My purpose for the whole discussion was to learn more from my end along with the other commissioners about the viability of a TID being an economic tool," he said.

At the meeting, commissioner Tommy Thompson said cooperation among the different county jurisdictions is better now than it was five or 10 years ago. "I think it's going to happen," he said of the prospect of TID implementation.

Stapleton told *ThisWeek* he's made no judgments about whether it would be a good idea for the county.

"This is just an introduction and nothing more. I am sure many more discussions would need to take place before we would proceed," Stapleton said.

Commissioners would have to pass a resolution to begin a TID and then appoint board members to oversee it. Though membership varies, Tugend told *ThisWeek* that members can be county commissioners, engineers and administrators; township administrators and trustees; and city representatives.

"This allows for a county to bring in various contributors and to leverage their combined contributions to bring in as many resources as possible to fund transportation projects," Tugend said.

A TID would group transportation projects together in the same area, across jurisdictional boundaries.

The TID board cannot act independently and finance road improvements alone, however. It must have approval from federal, state, county and local entities, said Nancy Burton, communications manager for the Ohio Department of Transportation District 6.

Tugend said that a TID's unified approach would prevent ODOT from having to choose between competing projects in the same county or jurisdiction. Because of the group approach, the TID would also have a larger funding base and be able to provide a bigger local match for projects to get a larger amount of ODOT funding.

While Butler County, the first county to implement a TID, chose a larger board, most TIDs opt to use a smaller system, Schuermann said.

The bigger board includes two members appointed by county commissioners; three members appointed by the most populous municipal corporation in the TID area; two members appointed by the second-most populous municipal corporation; two members appointed by the most populous township; and the county engineer. There is also an option to appoint a member from a township or municipality in the district who isn't a member of one of the other groups. One nonvoting member is appointed by the regional planning commission. All state senators and representatives could be non-voting members.

The smaller board includes five members appointed by the county commissioners. One non-voting member is appointed by the speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives, and another non-voting member is appointed by the president of the Ohio Senate.

Counties normally provide more funding because they have larger budgets, Schuermann said. No one is required to contribute, and entities don't have to fund all projects at the same level. Funding strategies vary according to each TID. Individual projects could be funded one at a time, or a revenue pool could fund a program of projects.

Commissioner Ken O'Brien said he chose not to attend the presentation. He said he's interested in whether the TID could be a solution for the county but wants to make sure that the area could financially sustain a TID.

He said the county's attorneys should take the lead on the project and recommend attorneys to speak with. He questioned why attorneys with Kegler, Brown, Hill and Ritter were chosen for the presentation.

"If we are not paying for the attorney, why is it that they're coming?" he questioned.
"What is it that's in it for them?"

Stapleton told *ThisWeek* that he chose the law firm because it had worked with Butler and Clermont counties. The state authorized transportation improvement districts in 1993.

County engineer Chris Bauserman said the county needs to determine if other public entities would be interested in collaborating and if enough multi-jurisdictional projects exist to justify a TID.

"I like the idea of agencies being able to pool their funds and hopefully being able to attract more federal and state funds to Delaware County," Bauserman said. He said he would be concerned about creating another level of government if potential benefits don't justify it.

Commissioners also:

- Approved five right-of-way acquisitions totaling \$28,552 for the Sawmill Parkway extension project. The county has acquired about half of the needed right of way. The total estimated right of way cost is \$4.6 million, and the total estimated construction cost is \$36 million. The project will extend Sawmill Parkway north from Hyatts Road to U.S. Route 42. Construction could begin as early as 2013 and is funded through county road and bridge revenues.
- Approved a \$232,221 preliminary engineering contract for the Lewis Center and Africa roads intersection project. The project will add a traffic signal to the intersection and left turn lanes from every approach and right turn lanes on two of the approaches. Preliminary cost for construction is \$1.6-million. Work would start between 2014 and 2015. The county could seek funding through the Ohio Public Works Commission.
- Approved a \$92,150 contract for the replacement of two bridges on David Road, east of River Road. Construction will be in 2014 and will take about three months to complete. County road and bridge funds will pay for the project.
- Approved a \$36,874 contract with Quickmow for roadside mowing to supplement mowing performed by county crews.