

**Mall Road preps for work**

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By ROBERT A. DEFRANK - Staff Writer , Times Leader

ST. CLAIRSVILLE - The final plans for the Mall Road connection project was announced at a public meeting held by the Ohio Department of Transportation at the city garage complex.

ODOT District Deputy Director Lloyd MacAdam said the road project addresses issues of congestion, safety, connectivity and accessibility issues within the Interstate 70 and Mall Road interchange area. The project is expected to result in improving the traffic flow and reducing delays, as well as reducing accidents. The road is also expected to support economic development.

Steven R. Bergman, engineer and vice president of HDR, said the preferred alternative is a two-lane roadway extending to the west from Mall Road near the Banfield Road intersection, traveling south and behind the Ohio Valley Mall, then turning towards the west, then north and meeting at a new intersection with U.S. 40. The road replaces a portion of the existing Mall Perimeter Road and includes a 540-foot-long bridge crossing over I-70.

**Article Photos**



T-L Photos/ROBERT A.?DEFRANK
ODOT District Deputy Director Lloyd MacAdam points out a planned road construction around the Ohio Valley Mall.

The proposed two-lane road will be 36 feet wide, curbed, and with dedicated left turn lanes at the intersections. The road will narrow to 24 feet at the bridge. The bridge will include at 8-foot-wide sidewalk on the east side.

The total length of the roadway is about 2 miles with the northern 0.4 miles being built by the Transportation Improvement District and a 500-foot section located behind the mall being partially built by the Cafaro Company.

The plan's environmental impacts will be minimal, with a total of 0.03 acres of category 1 wetlands filled to facilitate construction. No impact to streams, threatened or endangered species, cultural resources, or recreational properties is anticipated.

MacAdam noted that detailed design is beginning and will be completed next September. Right-of-way acquisition will continue through 2016. Construction work is expected to begin in 2017 and be completed in a year-and-a-half.

TID Chair Dennis Bigler said the segment to be constructed by the TID should be out to bid in early winter, with construction in March.

Project Manager Roxanne Kane noted that currently the rate of crashes on the roads in the area in a three-year period is well above state averages. In addition, studies have determined the current road congestion to be about average, but congestion is expected to be progressively worse in 2017-2037 without construction. The roadwork should keep congestion in acceptable levels.

Mall Road is expected to see daily traffic of 19,700 vehicles in 2017 if nothing is built. The Mall Road connector is expected to reduce daily traffic by 3,000 to 16,700. Traffic on U.S. 40 is also expected to be reduced from more than 14,000 to 11,200.

"We're going to relieve some of the congestion on Mall Road and 40," she said.

She added that the alternate possible project would have had further impact on wetlands. However, impact will be reduced by paralleling I-70.

Kane added that they have been open with the public during the stages of the project. She noted they looked at expected impact on the I-70 ramps, U.S. 40 east and west of Mall Road, and Banfield Road.

"We have been working with landowners and the officials for years," she said. "I think everybody understands where we are in the process."

Environmental Coordinator Tom Stratton noted that they were coordinating with the Departments of Fish and Wildlife and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

"We're happy it's coming through. It's a good thing," said Dwarka Vemuri, noting that the road will go through his property. "It will increase jobs here. It improves the economy. It includes a lot of opportunities, especially for the younger, present generation in the Ohio Valley. It gives an opportunity for up-and-coming investors to invest in this valley."

"Hopefully, this is moving in the right direction," said Robert Stewart, another landowner.

"The TID's been in this since the beginning," said Commissioner Matt Coffland. "That's one of the reasons the TID was created. It has been a long, long process, but we've made major strides over the last three years towards this becoming reality. ODOT has really stepped up to the plate over the last couple of years. We've got major industry, a major influx of people coming in Belmont County now, and these upgrades are needed."

"This is an important next step in the development in this project," said Commissioner Mark Thomas. "We will hear sometime in early January about a confirmation of Round 1 funding for confirmation of this project, which will be predominantly money to buy right-of-way, then we'll take it to the next step, which will be TRAC 2 funding for the main part of the project."

Mayor Robert Vincenzo noted the hopes for the future, including development around the city and county and future job creation. "We've been waiting several years for this development to come to fruition, and today it's quite evident progress is being made, not only for the city of St. Clairsville, but it's going to be a great improvement to take care of the Mall Road traffic and open the area up for future development."

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