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## Committee makes strides on 16/37/161 highway

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COSHOCTON -- It would cost about \$1 million to replace signs to identify just 85 miles of the Columbus-to-Pittsburgh corridor if it were changed from Ohio 16/37/161 to a single number, Ohio Department of Transportation representatives said Friday.

The change also would require changing postal addresses, the ODOT representatives told the Columbus/Pittsburgh Corridor Committee, which met Friday morning at the Dennison Depot in Dennison.

Although the information presented by ODOT put a negative spin on the idea of renumbering the 85-mile stretch from Columbus east to Interstate 77, the group hasn't given up on making the route more identifiable to the general public, said T.J. Justice, co-chairman of the committee and Coshocton Port Authority executive director.

"These are obstacles that can be overcome, but I think our next step will be approaching the General Assembly," Justice said.

Legislators have the ability to name highways, and the group may request a name be attributed to the entire area of its focus -- the Columbus/Pittsburgh Highway.

At the committee's next meeting ODOT will present information identifying any stretches involved that may already have been designated a name.

"At the end of the day what we're trying to do is simplify its identity for the general public," Justice said.

The focus of the group since it formed late in 2007, is to push forward the completion of a 160-mile stretch of highway that would directly connect Columbus and Pittsburgh.

The Ohio 16-Cherry Valley Road intersection is one focus, as well as a 10-mile stretch of Ohio 16 from Ohio 60 to Coshocton; a 28-mile stretch from Newcomerstown to Cadiz; and Ohio 22 near Cadiz needs part of it completed to four-lane.

Since the group was formed both the Cherry Valley Road interchange and the Cadiz/Newcomerstown connection have received some focus from the ODOT. The four-lane to Coshocton has received a \$400,000 federal appropriation through Congressman Zack Space, who has recognized the economic importance of completing the expansion, Justice said.

The feasibility study for U.S. 22 was held up because of economic modeling data information put behind by consulting teams working on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects, said Katie Stickle, public information officer with ODOT's District 5.

Completion date for the study is now September, Justice said.

ODOT also told the group the announcement of which projects are classified as Tier I or Tier II would be released this spring.

Justice said ODOT's District 5 made applications to the Transportation Review Advisory Council for both the Cherry Valley interchange and the Muskingum County to Coshocton four-lane completion be

moved up to Tier I.

ODOT representatives also explained the agency's business plan, and said TRAC is supposed to vote on the new Fast TRAC process, which is an effort to move projects that are crucial economic drivers or have statewide or regional significance through the red tape more quickly.

The Columbus/Pittsburgh Corridor Committee's next meeting will be April 16, at Fort Steuben in Steubenville.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us, but two studies are started and some money has been set aside for the Coshocton area as a result of the committee," Justice said.

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