



*Working together for Ohio farmers to advance
agriculture and strengthen our communities.*

Ohio Department of Transportation
c/o Jeff Hipp, ODOT Project Manager
Submitted via email to 23-71study@dot.ohio.gov
Re: US-23/I-71 Connector Feasibility Study Project

March 6, 2026

Dear US-23/I-71 Connector Feasibility Study Project Committee:

Ohio Farm Bureau appreciates the opportunity to provide general comments regarding the US-23/I-71 Connector Feasibility Study. We understand that this project is in the initial study phase and hope we can provide insight to assist you as you move forward in this process. The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation is the state's largest general farm organization, representing more than 60,000 farm families across the state of Ohio. Our members produce a variety of farm products- from corn and soybeans to tomatoes and lettuce, to livestock and everything in between. In turn, Ohio Farm Bureau membership represents one of the largest groups of Ohio landowners in the state. Efficient and effective transportation is important to our members, in getting supplies to their farms and products off to market.

We want to thank you for your willingness to engage with our members at the local county level where this project is being discussed. However, we also wished to provide general comments and issues that we have seen arise in highway improvement projects and in particular to this issue, so that these can be addressed at the appropriate time. We are concerned that to this point, the updates on this study have seemed to be presented as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is imperative that the leading question of this study is: whether it is practical to build a connector between I-71 and US-23? Instead, the updates have largely been presented as "these are routes that could be used for a connector." It is imperative that this study be truly about feasibility- that is, practicality- and not simply a veiled justification for building a new roadway at the expense of rural Ohioans.

Cost vs. Benefit

It is extremely concerning to Farm Bureau members that this project seems to largely focus on the benefits that will be felt by those in the Northwest Ohio I-75 Corridor without commensurate consideration for the extreme costs that will be squarely pushed on rural Ohio alone. It is rural Marion and Morrow County which will feel the disruption to their landowners, businesses and communities for this project. Yet, these same communities will receive little to no benefit from these improvements, since the improvements will likely be minuscule for those citizens. We ask that these final stages of the study fully consider and quantify the extreme costs which rural Ohio must bear for the limited benefits. Within these costs, the economic loss to businesses and farms must be included. Additionally, ODOT must consider the increased costs that will be borne by

local jurisdictions due to the presence of a new highway. These should at minimum include new road maintenance duties placed upon local governments for access and approaches, law enforcement and emergency services costs for patrol and response, and other related costs that will be placed upon local governments only as a result of a new highway. The costs of this project cannot be calculated in a vacuum of the construction cost to the state only, a holistic review of all costs must be done to determine the true feasibility of any possible project.

Eminent Domain

Ohio Farm Bureau understands that road improvements often require the use of eminent domain. Ohio Farm Bureau policy unequivocally supports that existing roads and road rights of way be used wherever possible for the construction of any new or upgraded highway infrastructure. We have deep concerns about the impacts of new infrastructure on healthy, fertile farmland in the region. Farmland is not “vacant” or “undeveloped” land. It is a carefully tended ecosystem that feeds and fuels our state and country.

Farmland preservation should be of utmost importance to the state of Ohio, a state that has lost over a million acres of prime farmland in the last 20 years to development and urban sprawl. Any project must consider this impact and take the steps necessary to limit to all extent possible the taking of valuable farmland from private property owners. Where land must be taken, government should act transparently in good faith to compensate landowners appropriately for the value of the land and the full impact to their business. Farmers cannot farm without land, and they cannot simply pick up some more at the local store. While any property owner would feel the impact of a taking, farm businesses are unique in that there is no such thing as just another building to buy or moving to a new site. Farmland is often passed down for generations and is a part of the heritage and lifeblood of that farm family. Any project must respect this unique situation and preserve Ohio farmland for future generations.

Furthermore, highway projects can often bisect or divide farmland to the point of inefficiency and nonviability. Farms operate on thin margins, and their business strategies are typically crafted to specifically match the acreage available to them. Taking any farmland disrupts that strategy and can domino quickly into significant negative financial and business impacts. Such takings can also significantly hinder access to farmland by farm equipment, particularly where limited-access highways are implemented. New limited-access highways not only prevent normal routing of agricultural equipment and loads, they often close or dead-end existing routes for local traffic. While ODOT are the highway design experts, farmers are the experts on how their access and business will be impacted. Feasibility must also consider the impacts, inefficiencies and losses to local residents and businesses due to rerouting.

Drainage impacts

Additional infrastructure can also cause devastating impacts on complex and systematic subsurface drainage systems. It is imperative that this study also consider the larger impacts of any route to the public and private subsurface drainage systems that will be disrupted and require remediation and repair throughout construction. Disruption to drainage systems can not only impact the landowner where the road is being built, but neighboring landowners not directly connected to the infrastructure project. All impacts, including up and downstream impacts, on drainage systems must be considered within the feasibility study.

Local Land Use

ODOT must also consider reconciling these possible projects with the comprehensive land use plans developed by the local officials in the area. Land use planning is an extremely thoughtful and important exercise that takes into account all aspects of a community and its needs. It is an extreme disruption to the state-local balance for a state entity to decide to disrupt the carefully made land use plans of local officials and communities best suited to determine their needs.

Existing projects

In February 2025, ODOT announced the results of a comprehensive study of Route 23 with planned improvements between I-270 and Waldo to address traffic congestion, safety, and delays. That study resulted in 33 identified locations for improvements to address similar issues as this feasibility study. Yet, this study update has yet to discuss reconciling those projects with this idea of a new connector. Again, “feasibility” is not simply “is it possible?” but is instead the questions of both possibility and practicality. Is it practical to propose an entirely new highway when we have already determined to accomplish 33 identified improvements to address the same issues? Once improvements are made to the existing US-23 corridor, what will be the benefits of a connector?

Furthermore, the expense that could be incurred to build a new road where residents do not want it could be better deployed to improve and update the existing road infrastructure across the state. This includes the hundreds of bridges across Ohio that have downgraded weight limits or been closed entirely due to safety concerns, as well as congestion improvements on existing roadways. As a state, how is it feasible to move forward with a major highway expansion when we cannot afford, nor properly maintain the highway system we have currently?

Conclusion

Ohio Farm Bureau understands that this study was directed by law to be accomplished. However, any study being done is worth doing right. We implore ODOT to expand the considerations within this study to truly explore the additional costs to rural Ohio from a proposed connector, and the best use of Ohio’s tax dollars for efficient and effective transportation.

Again, we greatly appreciate your willingness to involve the farm community as this study proceeds. We hope these comments can help continue and facilitate productive dialogue. If you have any questions, please contact at lcurtis@ofbf.org.

Respectfully submitted,
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