



*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

August 28, 2026

Dear 71/23 Connector Feasibility Study Project Committee:

Ohio Farm Bureau again appreciates the opportunity to provide updated comments regarding the 71/23 Connector feasibility study and its recent August update. The previous comments we provided on March 6, 2026 remain applicable to the current updated feasibility study. However, as the Department has now selected a preferred alternative route for the study, we wish to provide additional comments.

Costs v. Benefits

As previously noted, the cost/benefit analysis ignores important context and fails to provide a full picture of costs that will be incurred. Per the Department's presentation, costs considered only include the construction, engineering, right of way acquisition, and operations/maintenance for the connector segment. It does not include the further costs that will be incurred by the communities which will be burdened by the construction and eventual roadway. These will include, but are not limited to, increased road maintenance costs/duties related to approaches and access roads, costs for law enforcement and emergency services to attend to additional service calls, and the economic loss of farmland and farm businesses. Add to this that the benefits that will be accrued are largely to be felt by those outside of the project area. The Department should provide a cost/benefit analysis that includes all costs aside from just road construction, and compare it to the actual benefits that will be felt by the communities that will endure costs directly. As we stated in our previous comments, the costs of this project cannot be calculated in a vacuum of cost to the state only, but must consider all costs likely to arise due to the construction of this roadway. Frankly, if only one area and one set of constituents will largely bear the cost but feel little to no benefit, the project's cost/benefit is fatally skewed.

Additionally, the acquisition costs are likely extremely conservative as they are based on auditor tax information only, and not on appraisals or market research, according to the Department. Morrow County, where a significant portion of this land is located, is in the third year of its 6-year reappraisal schedule, and will have updated property values for the 2026 tax year (payable

2027). Therefore, any cost of acquisition estimates based on those tax numbers is out of date and the estimated costs will be extremely conservative.

Finally, the study mentions eventually widening I-71, which it is assumed will be due to increased traffic from a hypothetical connector. However, the presentations as yet have not described any of the impacts to existing I-71 (nor have the costs been transparently included). Having a connector will almost certainly increase traffic on an already highly-congested I-71 as it enters the Columbus metropolitan area. What will be the increase in traffic delays to those already traveling I-71, or attempting to move between the Polaris area and downtown? Will the increased traffic result in additional potential accidents or safety-related issues? Again, the cost/benefit cannot be done in a vacuum of only the footprint of a proposed connector but must consider the resulting impacts of the connector as well on the existing transportation system and the communities that will bear it.

Farmland preservation

We appreciate the Department's effort to consider impacts to agricultural parcels, including reducing field splits and landlocked parcels as they considered the various alternatives. However, it cannot be reiterated enough that this state has already lost more than a million acres of farmland in the last 20 years to development and urban sprawl. This connector will further speed the conversion of farmland, not just from the land that will be taken to build the road itself, but the development that will surely follow along the way. Farmers have to make difficult decisions regarding their land, particularly when development encroaches to the point of making a farming business unprofitable or unfeasible due to neighborhood and development pressure. This connector may only impact 800 some acres within its footprint, but it will hasten the loss of many more acres as it encourages further urban sprawl.

Efficiency of government resources

Finally, Farm Bureau would be remiss if it did not once again highlight concerns related to the use of government resources for an unnecessary roadway when millions of dollars of existing road projects sit waiting. Economic development in this state for the benefit of all would be best helped by updating and fixing our current roadway infrastructure to reduce delays and closures. This includes the more than 1,000 bridges that are currently rated as structurally deficient across the state of Ohio. *See* National Bridge Inventory: Ohio, <https://artbbridgereport.org/state/profile/OH>.

It is also concerning that this roadway is being proposed solely to benefit an area of the state which already has access to multiple interstate highways, ports, and an international border. It is simply not true that there is "no route" between Toledo and Columbus. There is an existing route through US-23, a route to which the Department and the state have already committed significant resources for improvements which will reduce traffic times and improve safety. There simply must be time for those improvements to be implemented before the state throws millions of dollars at a new roadway which will irreversibly destroy farmland and disrupt communities.

Conclusion

We greatly appreciate the work ODOT has done throughout this process to ensure stakeholders like OFBF remain informed, along with willingly answering additional questions throughout the process. Ohio Farm Bureau opposes the construction of this connector project, and asks the state to instead focus on the many road projects already needed to ensure our transportation system is safe and efficient.

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

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Leah F. Curtis

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