

# TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

## Developing a Plan

In 2005, as a result of a study conducted for a Loop Road around the City of Tiffin already discussed in Section 8.15, and a public outcry for safer conditions on specifically US 224 East and State Route 53 South, preliminary engineering, funded by the City of Tiffin, the Seneca County Commissioners and SIEDC, was performed on upgrading these two routes from county line to county line. Before this study went out for public comment, the Seneca Regional Planning Commission's Transportation Committee was asked to review and comment on the study.

The study called for a "Super Two" status, necessitating an increased right of way that would provide for a buffer strip between lanes and the addition of turn lanes at all road intersections. Since passing lanes would only be allowed at certain intervals, this scenario would prevent head on collisions. But the committee questioned the repercussions of the citizenry in regards to restricted access to private drives for homes and farm fields.

After much discussion, the committee decided that, in order for this proposal to be successful, it must be accepted by the citizens of Seneca County while addressing first and foremost the safety concerns that currently exist.

Widening of the right of ways in key areas would allow for the addition of turn lanes at major intersections, wider berms, and the relocation of ditches away from the road edge. These improvements would facilitate better traffic flow without the use of the buffer area.

As a result, three options were suggested by the committee to be investigated in more detail:

- 1) The already studied Super 2
- 2) Modifying existing roadways to allow for turn lanes, berms and ditch relocation
- 3) Addressing spot safety issues along the two corridors

Costs were broken down into four segments, with each segment beginning at the county line and ending at Tiffin on each of the corridors. The following estimates were compiled:

<u>US 224</u>	<u>Option 1</u>	<u>Option 2</u>	<u>Option 3</u>
Hancock County Line to SR 18	\$13,087,276	\$9,676,681	\$9,801,681
Huron County Line to SR 18	24,859,047	18,283,323	18,693,323
<u>SR 53</u>			
Wyandot County Line to US 224	\$6,403,406	\$4,885,617	\$ 4,980,617
Sandusky County Line to Tiffin	9,910,671	7,266,700	7,461,700

**None of the above estimates includes right of way purchase. Acreage requirements to increase the right of ways to 100 feet are estimated to be 58 acres for SR 53 and 107 acres for US 224.**

In consideration of these estimates and the inconvenience that would result, Option 1 was eliminated as not serving the purposes of the county. The committee further concluded that the proposal best suited for Seneca County would address the following goals:

- 1) Meet the transportation needs of Seneca County well into the future (50-100 years)
- 2) Spur economic growth within Seneca County.
- 3) Address the health and safety concerns that exist with the present corridors.
- 4) Be a natural extension to upcoming projects in neighboring counties that provide better access to major thoroughfares (Turnpike to the North, US 30 to the South and I-75 to the West).

As a result, the committee recommended securing 100 foot right of ways the full length of both corridors and four undivided lanes across the county on both highways. This would allow for growth and address the safety issues on the existing routes. Using the above segment approach, coupled with the goals, the following phases were established:

**Phase I**-SR 53, Sandusky County Line to Tiffin's North Border, the beginning of the Loop Road around Tiffin.

**Phase II**-SR 53, Wyandot County Line to US 224

**Phase III**-US 224, Hancock County Line to SR 18

**Phase IV**-US 224, Huron County Line to SR 18

### **Surveying Elected Officials**

The next step in the process was to build a consensus of elected officials before presenting to the Seneca Regional Planning Commission for their action. Public comment would then follow.

A survey was designed to surface input from various elected officials across the county. These surveys were distributed and discussed at City Council Meetings, the Township Association and the Village Association meetings. A total of 96 surveys were submitted with the following results:

## **ELECTED OFFICIALS SURVEY RESULTS**

### **SR 53/US 224**

**(96 Surveyed)**

### **GOALS**

	VERY <u>IMPORTANT</u>	<u>IMPORTANT</u>	NOT <u>IMPORTANT</u>	NO <u>RESPONSE</u>
1) Address the health and safety issues that exist with the current corridors.....	48	40	7	1
2) Meet the needs of Seneca County well into the future – 50 to 100 years.....	30	55	9	2
3) Spur economic growth in Seneca County..	47	41	7	1
4) Be a natural extension to upcoming projects in neighboring counties that provide better access to major thoroughfares (Turnpike to the North, US 30 to the South, and I-75 to the West).....	34	51	8	3

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the above goals, the Transportation Committee recommends **expanding the Right-of-ways to 100 feet for both SR 53 and US 224**, which would provide for a minimum of moving ditches, widening berms and adding turn lanes at major intersections. The ultimate goal would be expanding the existing routes to four lanes, undivided, that still allow for full access. How important is this recommendation to:

	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	NO RESPONSE
Goal #1 above.....	41	40	5	10
Goal #2 above.....	28	50	6	12
Goal #3 above.....	38	37	10	11
Goal #4 above.....	36	36	11	13

### **REACTIONS TO RECOMMENDATION:**

- “Should be 120’ right-of-way. Will never be easier than right now.”
- “Good. The country needs something.”
- “Don’t like a cold survey. Order of work being done don’t address needed safety issues.”
- “Sounds like a huge undertaking.”
- “Long overdue.”
- “Good.”
- “A very good program that is needed.”
- “Sounds good, but I see it to be quite at task.”
- “Unless you get the adjoining counties to expand the roads when it hits them (i.e. Huron/Hancock), it isn’t going to achieve goals #2, 3.”
- “It is a good first step.”
- “Make the ditches safer.”
- “I approve and would support it happening.”
- “Need to continue with plans and move forward.”
- “Time something starts to happen.”
- “Excellent.”
- “Pleased.”
- “Very good.”
- “Very aggressive, but I feel it is needed.”
- “Go for it!”
- “May cause quite a bit of hardship to small towns like Fort Seneca.”
- “I would like to expand 53 because of the Turnpike and Route 53 to Route 23.”

### **REACTIONS TO RECOMMENDATION (CONT.)**

- “SR 53 expansion is more important than US 224 because the Turnpike, Routes 6, 20 and US 30 take care of the east-west issues. SR 53 connects them. US 224 is less of a priority, if at all.”
- “I totally agree that we need to expand the roadways.”
- “Only have concerns on homeowners that would be close to right-of-way.”
- “It doesn’t help the Village of Republic much.”

- “Ask the homeowners.”
- “Not good! What will this do for Republic?”
- “No importance.”
- “I think it is a good idea, #1 because of safety. There have been too many accidents on these roads. This obviously will help with the economic concerns.”
- “Great!”
- “Money.”
- “I think you are on the right track. Keep up the good work.”
- “A very ambitious undertaking with no foreseeable benefit for our Community (with the exception of Route 224 East).”
- “OK, sounds good for Seneca County improvement.”
- “If we are going to grow, these recommendations are not only important, but essential. These recommendations will in turn make the County prosper. Great job!”
- “Why have we waited this long?”
- “All good goals.”
- “I think this is great. I only wish they could work on 224 East first.”
- “It is time to take care of 224.”
- “Should take place as soon as possible!”
- “Route 224 East is a terrible road. This needs addressed.”
- “Safety of all using the highways and County roads.”
- “What is the reaction of the property owners?”
- “This is a good recommendation.”
- “I feel this is needed to spur more work to County to bring in more revenue and jobs to County. Seneca County is centrally located between Cleveland, Toledo, and Columbus.”
- “It is overdue. Both SR 53 and US 224 are dangerous and have needed major improvement (widening) for a number of years.”
- “Being in eastern Seneca County, Rt. 4 North and South needs to be looked at.”
- “Is the economic growth being looked at in Tiffin and Fostoria only? As heavy as SR 4 is traveled, is there a project being looked at for this route? This route also goes from the Turnpike and Route 30. Are you thinking of bypassing Attica with US 224?”

**OTHER GOALS THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED BUT NOT CURRENTLY ADDRESSED BY COMMITTEE:**

- “Turn lanes for new school on 224 near Attica.”
- “Number of stops for trucks inside Tiffin.”
- “Railroads, airport expansion, public transportation.”

**OTHER GOALS (CONT.)**

- “Good roads are a must.”
- “I feel that the Committee should have more activities/etc. for kids (skate park).”
- “County Road/State Route paving in our town.”
- “Yes, help for Republic business.”
- “Work on safety of intersections and minimize impact of train traffic.”
- “Safety issues on Rt. 224 at Rt. 67 and Rt. 19 South.”
- “Help for Republic income.”
- “I feel that there should be guardrails along 53. Needless to say, I think they’ve had enough accidents, they don’t need any more!!!”
- “Rt. 4.”

- “None more than jobs.”
- “Route 4 needs to also be looked at due to heavy traffic which is a major route and heavily traveled.”
- “New development and US 224 and SR 18 and the effect on traffic at that intersection. SR 4 needs widened as well.”
- “Rte. 4 North South needs to be looked at.”

**DO YOU BELIEVE A DIFFERENT  
RECOMMENDATION WOULD BETTER  
ADDRESS COMMITTEE’S AND/OR YOUR  
GOALS?**

<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>UNSURE</u>	<u>NO RESPONSE</u>
6	59	2	29

**IF YES ABOVE, PLEASE INDICATE YOUR RECOMMENDATION:**

- “Safety issues on Rt. 224 at Rt. 67 & Rt. 19 South, bad intersections.”
- “I think 224 needs to be looked at a bit more than 53.”
- “Rte. 4 is very heavy traffic rd.”
- “Rt. 4.”
- “Look at State Route 4.”

After compiling the results of the above survey, it was agreed that the comments were generally positive. This proposal would be safer for farmers moving equipment and would require less land as the right of ways would only be expanded 20-30 feet on each side. Spot problems would exist in Fort Seneca, Attica, and Tiffin, although Tiffin would be addressed through the Loop Road Plan. The survey further reinforced the notion that safety must be the first consideration.

The Transportation Committee then acted to recommend the following to the Seneca Regional Planning Commission:

*The Transportation Committee recommends expanding the right of way to a total of 100 feet for both US 224 and SR 53, which would provide for a minimum of moving ditches, widening berms and adding turn lanes at major intersections. The ultimate goal would be expanding the existing routes to four lanes, undivided, that still allow for full access. The following segments shall be prioritized as follows:*

- 1) ~~SR 53 North of Tiffin to the Sandusky County line~~ (Revised 11/21/11)*
- 2) ~~SR 53 South of Tiffin to the Wyandot County line~~ (Revised 11/21/11)*
- 3) US 224 West of Tiffin to the Hancock County line*
- 4) US 224 East of Tiffin to the Huron County Line*

*The Transportation Committee further recommends that SRPC assign the responsibility of promoting this concept to either the Transportation Committee or an Ad Hoc Committee of the Seneca Regional Planning Commission.*

***The Committee finally recommends the incorporation of the Loop Road Study around Tiffin into this plan.***

On September 7, 2005 the Seneca Regional Planning Commission, at its regular meeting, held a public hearing to hear comment on this plan. Once again, comments generally were in support of this plan and commission members were encouraged to vote in favor of the Transportation Committee's recommendation. A roll call vote indicated that all members present voted in favor. Responsibility for carrying this plan to our Legislators and the general public was assigned to the Transportation Committee. The Transportation Committee agreed to pursue the plan after SIEDC held their final hearing.

### **Final Public Hearing Held**

Once the review and recommendation was completed by the Seneca Regional Planning Commission, as requested by SIEDC, a final hearing was scheduled to surface comments on the plan. A joint Legislative Committee comprised of the Fostoria and Tiffin Chamber of Commerce representatives had since been organized and assumed the task from SIEDC of holding the final hearing. In order to better represent the Fostoria area, two additional routes were added to the plan—US 23 North from the intersection of US 224 to Fostoria's proposed Loop Road (See 8.16 of the County's Comprehensive Plan) and SR 12 from Fostoria's proposed Loop Road Northeast to the County Line near Bettsville.

The hearing, held on April 12, 2006 was attended by approximately 36 citizens, according to a news article in the Advertiser-Tribune. It was revealed that Seneca County has the sixth highest accident rate in the state, with the first five being urban counties. The Chamber's expanded plan stressed an "Enterprise Zone" for development stretching from US 23 on the West, SR 12 on the North, SR 53 to the East and US 224 to the South. Some attending questioned if safety was still the driving force behind the plan or if we had emphasized development ahead of safety. It was discovered during the hearing that SRPC's priorities were mistakenly switched and that SR 53 was still the first and second priority with US 224 West being third.

### **Subsequent Meetings of the SRPC**

After the final hearing, the Transportation Committee of the Seneca Regional Planning Commission held a meeting with representatives of the joint Legislative Committee to discuss how to proceed with the promotion of the Transportation Improvement Plan. Some members were concerned about the revised plan and how it had changed to add US 23 and SR 12 to the list of improvements. A great deal of time had been spent by SRPC to build a consensus for the original plan and it was important to not lose that focus. It was also agreed that, while the priority ranking is important, all of the projects serve an important need.

The joint Legislative Committee of the Chambers then offered to be the promoters of the plan, with the assistance and assignment of representatives from SRPC's Transportation Committee. This would build unity between the two groups and assure that the plan's focus would be constant.

The Legislative Committee believed, however, that the Transportation Improvement Plan should be made a part of the County's Comprehensive Plan, so that a written document existed to verify how we arrived at our consensus. The Legislative Committee also wanted the expanded plan, including US 23 and SR 12 and the elimination of the priorities, to be a part of the Transportation Improvement Plan. Since this revised plan entailed significant changes to the original study already adopted by the Commission, the joint Legislative Committee agreed to approach SRPC with their revisions. If the Commission agreed to the changes, their action would constitute a buy-in for the entire county.

### **Another meeting of Transportation Committee of the Seneca Regional Planning Commission**

In September of 2007 the Transportation Committee met with representatives of the Fostoria/Tiffin Legislative Affairs Committee to discuss the Transportation Improvement Plan and how to effectively get the Plan into the ODOT schedule.

The Transportation Committee agreed to deemphasize the earlier priority recommendations and agreed to the inclusion of US 23, SR 12 and SR 4 with the previously approved improvement recommendations for US 224 and SR 53. In consideration for these changes, the Legislative Committee agreed to take the revised plan to the Elected Officials of the County and ask, once again for resolutions of support.

Following this meeting, the Transportation Committee made the above recommendation to the Seneca Regional Planning Commission, as stated above, and SRPC accepted the revisions.

### **Additional meeting of Transportation Committee of the Seneca Regional Planning Commission**

In November, 2011, the Transportation Committee met with representatives of the Fostoria/Tiffin Legislative Affairs Committee to discuss the Transportation Improvement Plan. The outcome of the meeting was to meet further and consider revising the priorities written into the plan due to the number of dangerous intersections and accidents.

The Seneca Regional Planning Commission Transportation Committee met with Ohio Department of Transportation and other local officials/committee members. The outcome of the meetings held was to revise the SRPC Transportation Improvement Plan to change the priorities as follows:

*The following segments shall be prioritized as follows:*

- 1) SR 53 South of Tiffin to the Wyandot County line*
- 2) SR 53 North of Tiffin to the Sandusky County line*
- 3) US 224 West of Tiffin to the Hancock County line*
- 4) US 224 East of Tiffin to the Huron County Line*

Additional discussion took place about asking Ohio Department of Transportation (O.D.O.T.) to consider the route for a super two-lane highway if it were repaved. Representatives from O.D.O.T. were interested in seeing a proposal and that committee plans to meet again.

Another meeting was held with O.D.O.T. to discuss Seneca County's Transportation Plan and priorities, safer signage, and safer ditches. It was also noted that Senator Dave Burke is looking into applying for a Safety Fund.