

State approves \$16.4M for Western Row interchange



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MASON – A state panel has approved \$16.4 million in funding for a major transportation project to transform the Western Row exit at Interstate 71 from a partial interchange to a full one.

The award provides the final funds needed to begin construction on the project in 2017, county transportation officials said Tuesday. It was approved last week by the Transportation Review Advisory Council, a group that works with the Ohio Department of Transportation in prioritizing big-ticket projects for funding.

"This is a huge win for our region," said Warren County Engineer Neil Tunison. "Western Row Road is a key access point along the I-71 corridor, attracting a growing number of businesses and residents. This work will improve safety, reduce congestion and expand access to the many business and recreational destinations in the area."

The Western Row area is home to some of Warren County's top attractions – Kings Island, Great Wolf Lodge and the Lindner Family Tennis Center – along with some of the county's major employers like Luxottica and the Cintas Corp.

The \$36.8 million project will be completed in two phases:

- Phase 1 of the project involves the relocation of Columbia Road, which would extend the roadway about 800 feet east and loop around an existing restaurant and gas station to connect with the employee entrance to Kings Island off Western Row Road.

The \$12.5 million project, which is expected to alleviate bottlenecks at the intersection, is set to break ground in late 2015.

- Phase 2 will add a new exit and on-ramps connecting southbound I-71 to Innovation Way. It will also add new entrance ramps from Western Row Road and Kings Island Drive to northbound I-71. Improvements will also be made to Innovation Way and Cintas Boulevard.

Today, only southbound drivers can enter I-71 at Western Row and northbound drivers can exit the highway. The partial interchange forces motorists to use S.R. 741 or the Fields-Ertel/Mason Montgomery interchanges and wind through local roadways to reach Western Row destinations, officials say.

The project is expected to reduce congestion at the traffic-clogged interchange at Fields Ertel and Mason-Montgomery roads by as much as 24 percent for northbound traffic and 17 percent for southbound traffic, officials say.

A third project, managed by the city of Mason, calls for the widening of Kings Island Drive to better support incoming traffic from I-71. The \$5 million project, expected to begin this spring, will add a left turn lane into Kings Island for southbound traffic, new traffic signals and a bike path from Western Row Road to Great Wolf Drive.

Mason officials say the improvements will boost growth in a rapidly-growing economic development hub along Innovation Way and I-71.

Start-up medical device maker Atricure [broke ground last summer](#) on its new 85,000-square-foot global headquarters on just over 10 acres at Western Row and Innovation Way.

Nearby, the Festo Corp., a German-based manufacturer of automation technology, is building its new \$50 million, 175,000-square-foot production and distribution facility on 45 acres in the Mason Business Park off I-71 north of Socialville-Foster Road.

"This is an historic day," said Mason Mayor David Nichols. "This project underscores our commitment to providing the infrastructure that supports a thriving business environment."

For more information on the Western Row Road projects, go to imaginewesternrow.com.