

Economic Development and Transportation Projects

Transportation is a driving force in economic development. The Area Development Magazine has conducted surveys concerning site selection for 1986, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2006. The top criteria have consistently been labor and highway transportation related. In the 2006 survey the top criteria changed; state and local incentives topped both labor and transportation. Nonetheless, highway availability still scored 88.9% as a very important or important rating.

LCATS works and meets with economic development professionals at the city and county level in order to provide information to potential business sources. Locally, an effort to retain and expand current business has been developed. Through the use of a Retention and Expansion (R&E) Task Force, manufacturing/warehouse businesses have been interviewed by business leaders and government officials to investigate what their needs are, to match up resources, and to provide any needed assistance to keep the Licking County region strong. During the interview process, various types of questions or concerns may arise concerning transportation. LCATS reviews these needs and incorporates them, as appropriate, into projects. The Economic Development Manager for Licking County uses LCATS as a source for gathering data about transportation capacity of roadways, time travel for various routes, traffic volumes, and air quality analysis. These are frequent concerns and topics from current and prospective businesses looking to make Licking County their home.

While all projects to maintain or improve the transportation system are good for the economic base of a region, some projects are driven significantly by economic development forces.

One of the major projects selected to be funded with LCATS attributable funds is Thornwood Drive. One of the primary reasons for this project selection was the ability of it to help instigate economic development. Much of the adjoining property is currently vacant or in agricultural use, but it is slated to be used as industrial or manufacturing in the future in comprehensive land use plans in Newark, Heath and the county. In addition, the Port Authority has land that would also benefit from an improved roadway along the corridor.

Along the same corridor is the recently completed Thornwood Drive Connector. This connector opened in October 2007 and connects State Route 79 to Thornwood Drive at the south end of the commercial corridor. To the north of Thornwood Drive is a crossing of Raccoon Creek which is currently being served by a bridge crossing on Cherry Valley Road. LCATS has funds allocated to replace this bridge on a new alignment to make a better connection from Thornwood Drive to State Route 16 at Cherry Valley Drive. Another project in the corridor is replacing the Cherry Valley at-grade intersection with State Route 16 with an interchange. The completion of these projects will open up the Thornwood Drive Corridor and connect it to two 4-lane facilities; SR 16 to the north and SR 70 to the south.

Southwest Licking County has over 1500 acres that is being promoted as a premier site to developers and site selectors. Zoning is in place for manufacturing, industrial, and warehousing. This property is located between US 40 and SR 16 in Etna Township and the

City of Pataskala in the MORPC area. Currently, a roadway is under development using Ohio Department of Development Job Ready Site funds, private funds, and local funds to provide direct access to this property.