

The Times Leader

Railroad bridge possibly replaced



T-L Photo/ADAM TYCHONSKI This rail bridge is being considered for replacement on U.S. 250 in Harrison County.

CADIZ — Business and government leaders are seeking \$12 million in federal funding to replace a train bridge on U.S. 250 in Harrison County, and they need letters of support from the public.

Local leaders say this rail bridge has been a *“pinch point”* because semi-truck drivers cannot drive under the overpass. This forces the truckers to take a detour of nearly 70 miles, costing energy companies money. The issue has caused officials to ask how they can solve the problem.

A stakeholder meeting in Cadiz laid out the plan to convince U.S. highway officials to grant \$12 million in funding. The plan would bring four lanes to the middle section of U.S. 250, and it focuses on the more important task of building a taller and wider railroad bridge. The Ohio Department of Transportation will be requesting the federal grant for the fourth time. ODOT will be providing about \$160,000 for the project and Harrison County will be providing \$100,000.

According to OMEGA Transportation Planner Kevin Buettner, the fund that they are requesting money from contains about \$1.5 billion; 30 percent of that total is set aside for rural areas. Buettner said this makes him hopeful that the agencies will be awarded the funding for this project.

“With the oil and gas truck traffic, the new power plant in Cadiz, Walmart trucks and JFW in Mingo, the road will be used heavily,” Buettner said. *“And the bridge doesn’t allow the traffic to come through, and we need to make sure that we’re accommodating not just what’s here now, but what will come in the future.”*

The 77-year-old train bridge was erected in 1941. It has a clearance of 13 feet 10 inches, but Ohio state standard is now 16.5 feet. ODOT will begin environmental testing in the area soon. The construction, if

funded, is projected to begin in October 2021. Buettner said the construction will not only be on the rail bridge, but it will involve a portion of the rail in either direction.

“Trains cannot make steep inclines, so we will need to make a gradual incline on both side of the bridge to accommodate the trains,” Buettner said.

There is also a plan in place to make the intersection of Ohio 151 and U.S. 250 safer as well. A short-term plan calls for adding a right turn lane onto Ohio 151 if heading westbound; the long-term plan would add lanes and widen the bridge.

“We’d expect to see around one crash per year, but we are already four and a half times over what we would expect to see, and one crash is too many,” Buettner said of the intersection.

Buettner added that this project wouldn’t benefit only Harrison County; instead, it would impact Tuscarawas and Jefferson counties and all of Ohio, he said.

The Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association and Harrison County business officials are now seeking additional letters of support for this bridge replacement project. Letters can be sent to OMEGA, 326 Highland Ave., Suite B, Cambridge, OH 43725.