Grant aims to ease traffic crashes

$2.4M to finance changes at Fairfield intersection

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FAIRFIELD – One of Fairfield's most congested and accident-prone areas will be improved using a $2.4 million Ohio Department of Transportation grant.

Changes will be made at the intersection of Ohio 4, South Gilmore Road and Holden Boulevard. They also are expected to relieve backups and accidents on Holden at its intersection with Port Union/North Gilmore, near Fairfield Senior High School.

"We took a long shot and applied for the grant," said Dave Butsch, public works director.

Northbound South Gilmore Road will be widened by adding one through lane and a second left-turn lane onto Ohio 4. A left-turn lane from South Gilmore onto Parkland Hills is also being added. Southbound Holden Boulevard will be widened by adding a through lane.

"Fixing Holden and Ohio 4 will greatly help the Port Union and Holden intersection," said Ben Mann, city engineer.

Traffic at that intersection has increased this year after busing was eliminated at Fairfield Senior High School, just a block away. About 1,100 students in grades 10-12 rode the buses during the 2010-11 school year, said Bill Westerbeck, transportation director.

Those students are now being dropped off behind the school where buses used to park, driving themselves, walking or finding rides with classmates.

Student parking passes increased from 550 for all of the 2010-11 school year to just over 600 so far, said Jason Krause, dean of students. He expects that number to increase as additional students get their licenses.

"Between 7:30 a.m. and 8 a.m., we have two lanes of traffic the entire length of the building where the buses used to be," Krause said. "Those lanes are full the entire time."

The Ohio 4/South Gilmore/Holden intersection has the highest intersection crash rate in the city, Mann said. There were 131 accidents there between 2007 and 2009. At the Holden/Port Union/North Gilmore intersection there were 39 crashes – the fifth highest in the city.

Eighteen crashes were recorded during that period at the South Gilmore/Parkland Hills intersection. About 28 percent of the accidents at all three intersections involved injuries, Mann said.

"By reducing congestion at Ohio 4/South Gilmore/Holden, we're going to improve safety at all three intersections," Mann said.

The safety grant the city received is a 90-10 split with ODOT paying about $2.4 million and Fairfield $268,000.

An environmental study is expected to begin in late spring and should take 12-18 months to complete. Construction isn't likely to begin until 2016, Butsch said.

"We're thankful ODOT gave us this grant," Mann said. "They recognized we have a problem and wanted to help us with it."