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 Updated: 9:49 am | August 13, 2010

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S. Airfield Road project moving forward

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BOONE COUNTY - It was a good week for the South Airfield Road project.



On Tuesday Boone County Fiscal Court members agreed to designate funds to secure the last parcel of land needed for the project. On Thursday the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments allocated \$3 million for the project, which will allow a Houston Road connector to be included in the project.

"These projects continue our efforts to address traffic problems and limit the negative effect of congestion," OKI Executive Director Mark Policinski, said in a release. "It is imperative that we continue to improve our transportation system to allow us to remain an

economically competitive region."

OKI also approved more than \$12 million for several other Northern Kentucky transportation projects, including \$4.9 million for reconstruction on a portion of Ky. 237 from Conner Drive to Medical Arts Drive.

The allocation of funds for the South Airfield Road project is significant because it ensures the Houston Road connector will be included in the initial development phase of the highway.

"This is going to be a tremendous reliever of traffic and will open up a lot of land for future development," Boone County Judge-executive Gary Moore said. "Of course, that could also bring additional jobs and we know how important that is right now."

The county was prepared to go forward with the project without the connector, because the road is needed to alleviate congestion on Ky. 18 between Florence and Burlington.

The request for funds was a joint application between the city of Florence and the county.

Florence had previously secured \$3 million from OKI for the Mall Road restoration project, but when the state agreed to fund that project, the city released the money, with the hope it would be used for the connector.

"They had the money to do the road, but not the connector," Florence Mayor Diane Whalen said. "We agreed to release the funds we had in SNK (Surface Transportation Program for Northern Kentucky) prior to our project being fully funded by the Kentucky Department of Transportation."

The connector will allow a convenient route for motorists who want to access the Houston Road retail corridor, which is in the city of Florence.

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The Fiscal Court's action Tuesday cleared the last roadblock for construction on the main road.

Despite the efforts of the county and the state transportation cabinet, which was brought in to assist in the negotiations, reaching an agreement with the last parcel owner has been a challenge.

The county, the state and the property owner agreed to formal mediation to settle the dispute and avoid a hearing scheduled for this month.

All parties accepted the terms of mediation and the Fiscal Court voted unanimously to approve an additional \$175,000 to pay all of the costs associated with the agreement.

The county had previously set aside \$1.495 million to secure the right of way for the parcel, which includes more than 20 acres of land.

"This is significant because we were able to secure all of the land without using eminent domain," Moore said. "That's almost unheard of in a project of this size."

The county had hoped to do some initial work on the project this summer, but the delay may ultimately benefit the development. Because the OKI funds have now been approved, the project can be bid in its entirety instead of separate bid processes for the main road and the connector.

The 2.5-mile South Airfield Road, a four-lane divided highway will extend from Ky. 18 at Oakbrook Drive to Ky. 1017 near Turfway Park.

Construction should begin next year and the road is expected to handle 49,000 cars per day by the year 2030.

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