

Print this Page

[<--back to story](#)

## Belmont County TID beginning to take shape

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POSTED: March 13, 2008

THE BELMONT County Transportation Improvement District is making progress in its initial stages, the commissioners announced Wednesday during their regular meeting.

Commissioner Mark Thomas said that the first meeting of the TID to select a chairman and vice chairman as well as to establish the bylaws and resolutions will be held sometime within the next 30 days.

The TID was established on Dec. 19, 2007 as a separate, legal county entity under Ohio law for the purpose of allowing the county the opportunity to facilitate and find funding for all county-wide transportation and construction projects.

Nine such entities existed in Ohio before Belmont County became the smallest county to create a TID.

The county, in conjunction with the City of St. Clairsville and the Richland Township Trustees, have created the TID for Belmont County to foster increased collaboration with local partner jurisdictions as other county, regional, state and federal agencies to implement a regional approach to transportation improvements in support of economic development throughout the county.

Although the TID was initially created to address the Interstate 70 strategic corridor in Richland Township, the short-term goals after finalizing the board at the initial meeting will be to improve traffic at the Mall Road interchange and eventually build a new interchange that will provide a more convenient route into the mall for the purpose of bringing in large retailers.

"The TID was created now so that we can help ourselves with the I-70 project," Thomas said.

A key element of the TID will be to pool funds and resources available to the county, its local jurisdictions and private sector investment partners to leverage non-federal, matching funds for federal funding purposes.

"What this means is, if we go get federal monies and we need matching monies, the TID can bring it all together," Thomas said.

The TID, under Ohio law, will be governed by five voting trustees and two non-voting trustees. The initial board members are Thomas, Belmont County Engineer Fred F. Bennett, Belmont County Port Authority Director Larry Merry, St. Clairsville Director of Public Services Dennis Bigler, and Richland Township Trustee Gregory R. Bizzarri.

The final two members will be appointed by the Ohio Legislature.

Thomas is scheduled to have a meeting in Columbus today to draw up the legal documents for this new county entity. After those are in order, the first meeting will be held and then "it's going to be full steam ahead" from there, Thomas said.

"We will be successful," Thomas said. "In the end, the TID will continue its own life and complete any transportation project in the future."

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