

OHIO TURNPIKE COMMISSION

Resolution Relating to the Executive Director's Report Concerning the Partial Closure of S. R. 49 Interchange in Williams County

WHEREAS, pursuant to Resolution No. 15-2004 adopted April 19, 2004, the Executive Director was authorized to hold public hearings to encourage public comment on the Commission's intention to investigate the potential closure of the westbound entrance ramp from State Route 49 onto the Turnpike, and the eastbound exit ramp to State Route 49 from the Turnpike located in Williams County; and

WHEREAS, two (2) public hearings were held on August 5, 2004, at the Bryan/Montpelier Ramada Inn and Conference Center in the vicinity of Milepost 13.5 of the Ohio Turnpike, which gave the 248 residents and interested parties who attended, an opportunity to speak at the afternoon and/or evening hearings; and

WHEREAS, a transcript of the hearings was prepared and is attached, along with several other exhibits to the Report prepared by the Commission's Director of Government Affairs, concerning the potential closing; and

WHEREAS, it is the Commission's consensus that the "free" S. R. 49 interchange is an escape route for overweight commercial vehicles avoiding weigh scales at the Westgate toll barrier; and

WHEREAS, testimony elicited at the public hearings and letters received by the Commission indicate that the lack of speed and weight limit enforcement on the parallel routes close to the S. R. 49 interchange, coupled with strict enforcement of the speed limit on the Ohio Turnpike, is also a deterrent to commercial truck traffic; and

WHEREAS, although development in the immediate vicinity of the subject interchange over the last twelve years has not been meaningful, traffic counts do show that a significant number of vehicles use this interchange; and

WHEREAS, the overwhelming majority of residents and interested parties attending the public hearings opposed the closure citing that the closure would have a significant negative impact on economic development in the northwest Ohio corridor as well as easy access for personal travel, tourism and agriculture; and

WHEREAS, public officials from Ohio, Michigan and Indiana acknowledged the importance of commerce among the three states as it relates to Ohio residents who have jobs in these other states, and also the production of products in Ohio that are shipped to Michigan or Indiana, and vice versa; and

WHEREAS, local public officials who testified offered their assistance, with the help of their local communities, towards resolving the Commission's problems; and

WHEREAS, testimony was provided by the Office of Ohio State Representative Stephen Buehrer, who expressed concern that closing the interchange would be short-sighted and detrimental to economic development efforts in northwest Ohio; and

WHEREAS, testimony was also offered by Ohio legislators, Senator Lynn Wachtmann and Representative James Hoops, who pointed out that closing the subject interchange would not necessarily resolve the problem of commercial vehicles escaping the Ohio Turnpike; and

WHEREAS, as a result of all the information gathered, including the traffic study, the Ohio State Highway Patrol study and the public hearings, the Commission's Executive Director is now in a position to make a recommendation to the Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Commission's Executive Director concurs with the recommendations in the report to keep the S. R. 49 interchange open, but wishes to seek local assistance, as offered, in attempting to alleviate the problems created by the S. R. 49 escape route for commercial vehicles; and

WHEREAS, the Executive Director further recommends that the Commission should continue to explore avenues to make travel on the Ohio Turnpike more economical, by providing added incentives for commercial operators to use the Ohio Turnpike, as well as encouraging the local enforcement of speed and weight limits on the parallel routes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED that the Commission accepts the Executive Director's recommendation to keep the S. R. 49 interchange open indefinitely and to continue to explore avenues to make travel on the Ohio Turnpike more economical; and

FURTHER RESOLVED that, to provide incentives for the Ohio Turnpike's commercial operators, the Executive Director should encourage local officials to increase the enforcement of speed and weight limits on the parallel routes and to take any additional measures, as necessary, to respond to the Governor's three-point program approach to move commercial traffic from parallel routes to the Ohio Turnpike.

(Resolution No. 49-2004 adopted October 18, 2004)