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## UPDATE OF STUDY FOR BIG CREEK/I-71 RELOCATION & RESTORATION INITIATIVE IS COMPLETE

Cleveland, Ohio—An update to the 2015 Big Creek / I-71 Relocation and Restoration Initiative is complete. The Initiative looks at several environmental, economic, and community challenges and opportunities in the heart of a highly urbanized area straddling the cities of Cleveland and Brooklyn, Ohio and proposes land use changes that could significantly improve the character of these communities.

The study advocates for the removal of the Denison Access ramps from the abandoned "Parma Freeway," paving the way for the naturalization of the Big Creek valley. By re-routing the creek into its historic streambed, vital ecosystems can be restored and over 70 acres of new greenspace can be created. These areas can feature recreational facilities and a connected trail system linking Brookside and Big Creek Reservations to local neighborhoods.

"[The] objective —to remake the area in question in ways that are best suited for the next 50 years, at least—is right on target...[This] project is exactly what Cleveland and old inner suburbs like Brooklyn need" – Tom Bier, Senior Fellow, Levin College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University

The study also highlights the economic potential of a new I-71 interchange at Ridge Road, designed to alleviate truck traffic from residential areas while spurring investment in the urban core. By tackling the challenges of urban sprawl, this initiative aims to invigorate both industrial and retail sectors, addressing the stagnation that has affected the area.

"This is an impressive body of work and makes good sense. Now we have to find the will—and dollars—to make it happen" – Jim Rokakis, former Director, Thriving Communities Institute, former Cuyahoga County Treasurer and former Cleveland City Councilman

With 2015 cost estimates ranging from \$83.1 million to \$115.9 million, the study serves as a crucial foundation for the next steps, which will include:

- Solicit public input
- Assess economic impacts
- Perform traffic modeling, and
- Develop a preferred plan with current cost estimates, a phasing/implementation strategy, and identified funding sources

In 2015 the City of Brooklyn applied for funding for this purpose through the Northeast Ohio Coordinating Agency's Transportation for Livable Communities Initiative (TLCI) grant program. Although supported by Cleveland City Council, and other public officials and public agencies, the request lacked support from Cleveland's Administration and was not awarded.

After nearly a decade of further analysis of the land use challenges that remain, and with a new Cleveland Administration in place, it was felt that an update of the initial study was warranted. In this 2024 version of the study, land use conditions and problems are updated, as are existing and potential alternatives to address these challenges.

Construction phasing plans for a new concept plan were developed, to better illustrate a potential construction process and funding strategy. A summary of the 2016 planning grant that was not awarded is covered, and recommendations for a new planning strategy are given. Now, both communities need to agree on the next steps towards further study and implementation.

To explore the full findings of the initiative, visit: <http://bigcreekconnects.org/BC I-71/>

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