

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission study to target Intel impact outside central Ohio

Mark Ferenchik
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Planning has been in earnest near the Intel site in New Albany, but now officials are trying to see just how much the \$20 billion project will change the lives for those living a county or two away.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission wants to provide professional services and help for communities within a 40-minute drive of the Intel site in New Albany in Licking County with transportation and land use plans, targeting Knox, Marion and Morrow counties in particular for what their needs will be as the region grows.

MORPC has issued a request for proposals for that work, which it wants to begin in November.

The Ohio Department of Transportation has already been working on similar planning, but within 20 minutes of where Intel plans to spend \$20 billion on the project, which is expected to draw nearby suppliers and the jobs and traffic and housing needs that come with that.

Intel has said it expects 5,000 to 7,000 construction workers to be on the site eventually. The two chip manufacturing plants are expected to open in 2025 and employ 3,000.

"Basically, Intel, when it was announced, it was a major shock to communities out there," said Nick Gill, MORPC's transportation study director.

Gill said officials have already been working on immediate and short-term impacts. "What's long-term?" he said.

MORPC will also be helping smaller jurisdictions in the area with planning.

ODOT spokesman Matt Bruning said officials are looking at what improvements need to be made to local road networks, and what the business impacts might be.

"There might be a hotel that locates in an area where there isn't one now," he said.

"There should always be a more coordinated effort on something like this," Bruning said. "Within Ohio we don't control every roadway in the state."

In Morrow County, about 45 minutes north of Columbus, officials are already asking about the need to increase the capacity at the Interstate 71/Route 61 interchange, and the I-71/Route 95 interchange, said Jamie Brucker, director of operations for the Morrow County commissioners.

Near the latter, developers are building Chester Crossing, a multi-use development with 500 units of housing, including apartments, condominiums and single-family homes, Brucker said.

Brucker said officials there believe Intel will benefit Morrow County. He said county residents could be commuting to Intel while other businesses might want to set up shop in the county.

He mentioned that a 707,000-square-foot warehouse was finished earlier this year near the Dollar Tree Distribution Center at the I-71/Route 61 interchange.

"Moving people is something we're keeping an eye on," he said.

Gus Comstock, executive director of Marion CAN DO!, an economic development group, said having available housing could be a big draw for businesses looking to locate in the region. He said his group is hosting a Sept. 21 meeting with Jon Melchi, executive director of the Building Industry Association about housing trends and needs.

"Communities with housing are going to be the winning communities," Comstock said.

"We feel like we're getting things ready. There are a number of developers looking up here," he said.

Melchi said he will discuss overall housing trends in Ohio and what the communities of the future will look like.

"Not just do we have a housing deficit, we have an aging housing stock," Melchi said. While communities may have a number of homes available, they may not align with what current or future homeowners want, he added.

Knox County officials have already worked on an Intel growth strategy, which includes transportation ideas on how to make east-west traffic movement

easier, said Jeff Gottke, president of the Area Development Foundation of Knox County.

"More of like an audit of our preparedness, with some suggestions to get there," Gottke said.

"If we want to maximize the benefits of growth, we should all be thinking about the next 10 years," he added.