

# A Case for Connecting Edgewood Road from Gambier Road to Coshocton Avenue

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## Introduction and Background

Edgewood Road in Mount Vernon, Ohio, has been a crucial yet underdeveloped link between Gambier Road (State Route 229) and Coshocton Avenue (US Route 36). Its current condition and lack of continuity not only impede local transportation efficiency but also hamper economic development, safety, and accessibility for residents. For many reasons, the City of Mount Vernon advocates for the repair of the existing section of Edgewood Road and the construction of a new extension connecting Gambier Road to Coshocton Avenue. This project would significantly enhance local infrastructure, benefiting residents, businesses, and commuters in the Mount Vernon area particularly traveling north and south.

In May, 2024, Mount Vernon City Council voted 4-3 in favor of the Edgewood Road Improvement which includes the ODOT-led design work for the entire road as well as construction improvements from East High Street along South Edgewood to S.R. 229. The improvements include new water lines, new wastewater lines, stormwater system of curbs, gutters, catch basins, road improvements, and a sidewalk. The total grant amount awarded to Mount Vernon through the ODOT approved transportation plan as part of a regional transportation plan totals \$3.2 million. A local citizen group collected enough qualified signatures to place the issue as a referendum on the November 2024 ballot, when voters in the City limits will decide to approve or reject the improvement project. If approved, design work will begin. If rejected, the project will be suspended and the \$3.2 million will be returned to ODOT.

## Current Issues with Edgewood Road

Edgewood Road's infrastructure is deteriorating, with visible potholes, drainage issues, and insufficient road shoulders, making it unsafe for motorists and cyclists. Furthermore, the water distribution system has been in failure for years. According to local reports, the road has not undergone significant repairs in decades, leading to concerns about road safety and its ability to handle increasing traffic volumes. The Mount Vernon Comprehensive Plan highlights that local roads like Edgewood are in need of maintenance to keep up with growing demand, as the area has seen steady population and traffic growth over the last few years.

Moreover, there remains a disconnection on Edgewood Road between Gambier Road and Coshocton Avenue. This discontinuity forces residents and commuters to take longer, indirect routes, adding time, fuel costs, and congestion to already busy routes. A connection between these two major roads would create a direct and efficient corridor, reducing traffic on parallel roads like Yauger Road and State Route 13.

## Current Issues with Pedestrian Safety

Currently, Edgewood Road lacks adequate pedestrian infrastructure, forcing pedestrians, joggers, and cyclists to navigate the narrow roadway alongside motor vehicles. This absence of sidewalks poses significant safety risks. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 6,000 pedestrians were killed in traffic crashes in 2019, with a significant portion of these accidents occurring on roads that lack sidewalks or adequate pedestrian paths. The same issue applies to Edgewood Road, where the deteriorated road condition combined with no pedestrian pathways increases the likelihood of accidents.

Pedestrian safety is especially important in residential areas where families, children, and elderly residents may need to walk to nearby destinations. With the planned extension of Edgewood Road to Coshocton Avenue, the anticipated increase in vehicular traffic further heightens the need for sidewalks to protect pedestrians.

## Improving Accessibility and Community Connectivity and Health and Community Benefits of Sidewalks

Incorporating sidewalks into the Edgewood Road project would promote physical activity and healthier lifestyles among the local population. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has consistently shown that access to safe walking paths encourages more people to walk or bike as part of their daily routines. By adding sidewalks, Edgewood Road can become a pedestrian-friendly route, encouraging walking and cycling for commuting, recreation, and fitness.

Studies by the American Heart Association show that communities with well-designed pedestrian infrastructure have higher rates of physical activity and lower rates of obesity and cardiovascular diseases. Sidewalks provide a convenient, safe, and accessible way for residents to engage in regular exercise, improving overall public health. Mount Vernon's Comprehensive Plan also identifies walkability as a priority for enhancing the quality of life for residents, making the addition of sidewalks an alignment with the city's long-term vision.

Sidewalks along Edgewood Road would improve the accessibility of key community facilities and promote greater connectivity between neighborhoods, schools, and the major commercial areas along Coshocton Avenue. Edgewood Road serves as a link to various destinations (i.e.,

Kokosing Gap Trail, Memorial Park, MVNU, MVHS, KCCC, etc.) in Mount Vernon, and sidewalks would provide residents with more transportation options, especially for those without access to vehicles, including children, elderly residents, and low-income families.

The project would align with Complete Streets policies that the City of Mount Vernon adopted in 2021, which aim to create roadways that serve all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. By including sidewalks, the Mount Vernon area can become more inclusive, allowing people to walk safely to nearby East Elementary School, MVNU, MVHS, KCCC, Kokosing Gap Trail, retail shops on Coshocton Avenue, and workplaces. This would contribute to reducing dependence on cars, easing congestion, and lowering greenhouse gas emissions in the area. Moreover, this measure is part of the regional sustainability efforts of the City's commitment to Sustainable 2050 through the Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission.

## Economic Benefits of Sidewalks

In addition to health and accessibility benefits, sidewalks can enhance property values and economic activity. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) reports that homebuyers increasingly prioritize walkability, and properties located in walkable neighborhoods tend to have higher real estate values. The addition of sidewalks along Edgewood Road would likely increase property values for homes and businesses along the route, attracting investment in residential and retail or commercial development nearby.

In addition, sidewalks can stimulate economic growth by increasing foot traffic to local businesses. By extending Edgewood Road and adding pedestrian infrastructure, the area could become more appealing for future commercial development. The American Planning Association (APA) has found that walkable communities attract more businesses, especially retail and dining establishments, which benefit from increased foot traffic. Many local residents have demanded more restaurants and retail shops for many years. Building an infrastructure that helps to connect areas of the City enables retailers to reach more customers who choose to use alternative forms of transportation.

## Funding and Feasibility for Sidewalks

Incorporating sidewalks into the broader Edgewood Road improvement project is feasible under various state and federal funding programs, particularly those aimed at improving pedestrian safety and promoting sustainable transportation. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) includes provisions for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, offering potential funding for sidewalk installation along roads like Edgewood. The Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO) as well as MORPC identified this area for funding through regional transportation planning. Additionally, Ohio's Active Transportation Grant programs, administered through the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), could be leveraged to support the development of

pedestrian paths along the extended route. Some of this funding could be applied for in later phases of the project.

The additional cost of installing sidewalks is minimal when compared to the overall benefits of increased safety, health, and economic activity. According to ODOT, the average cost of installing sidewalks alongside roads ranges from \$50,000 to \$200,000 per mile, depending on the terrain and the specific design features required. This cost is a small investment considering the long-term returns in terms of public safety, health, and community development.

## Economic and Environmental Benefits of the Project

Repairing and connecting Edgewood Road would bring substantial economic benefits to the Mount Vernon area. First, a well-maintained and connected road system improves the desirability of nearby land, spurring investment in residential and commercial properties. According to the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), road improvements typically boost local economies through increased real estate values and lower transportation costs.

Secondly, the project may benefit local residents by reducing commute times and making daily travel more efficient. Residents commuting to the south end of Mount Vernon via Coshocton Avenue would save time and fuel, while local traffic would experience less congestion. Reducing traffic on alternative routes also lessens the environmental impact of emissions caused by vehicles idling in traffic. A study conducted by the American Public Works Association (APWA) shows that road connectivity projects often lead to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions due to more efficient traffic flows. This would be realized by a natural reduction in traffic along East Chestnut Street, Teryl Drive, Marita Drive, Verndale Drive, and Vernonview Drive especially. Reducing the traffic in these areas would reduce volume, noise, and general wear-and-tear to the neighborhood roads that were not designed to handle the amount of traffic they currently experience, essentially saving taxpayers funding appropriations for routine maintenance on these particular roads.

## Safety Considerations

One of the most pressing reasons to prioritize the repair and extension of Edgewood Road is safety. As of now, the deteriorated condition of the existing road presents hazards for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Potholes and uneven surfaces can cause accidents, particularly in bad weather conditions when the road may become slippery. Extending Edgewood Road to connect with Coshocton Avenue would also improve emergency response times, allowing emergency services to take more direct routes to residential areas in the southern and eastern parts of Mount Vernon.

ODOT's 2022 report on road safety emphasized that maintaining and extending local road networks not only improves traffic flow but also reduces accident rates by creating safer, more

predictable routes for vehicles. A well-lit, properly maintained, and connected Edgewood Road would lower the risk of accidents, ensuring that the road can safely handle increasing traffic volumes in the future.

## Project Feasibility and Cost

The repair and connection of Edgewood Road is feasible given existing state and local government programs focused on infrastructure improvement. Funding for the project could be sourced from a combination of local bonds, state infrastructure grants, and federal funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which allocates billions of dollars to local road and bridge improvements.

The estimated cost of road repairs, based on similar projects in Knox County, ranges from \$1 million to \$3 million, depending on the extent of the repairs and the required upgrades to drainage systems. The cost of extending the road could range from \$5 million to \$10 million, based on land acquisition, environmental assessments, and construction. While this is a significant investment, the long-term benefits in terms of safety, economic growth, and reduced environmental impact far outweigh the initial costs.

## Conclusion

The repair and connection of Edgewood Road from Gambier Road to Coshocton Avenue accompanied by the addition of sidewalks is an essential infrastructure project for Mount Vernon, Ohio. It would address immediate concerns over road safety and maintenance, provide economic and environmental benefits, and improve the quality of life for local residents by offering a more efficient transportation corridor. Also, Edgewood Road then becomes more inclusive by encouraging pedestrians and cyclists to utilize the route to connect north and south thereby encouraging physical activity, wellness, accessibility and economic activity. With state and federal funding opportunities available, now is the ideal time for local citizens to prioritize this project and ensure that Mount Vernon's road network meets the needs of a growing population.

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# An Historical Look At Edgewood Road

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## 1946 Plan for Edgewood in Mount Vernon

Considering many historical tendencies of the day, there are many things to consider about Edgewood Road. The simplistic view of this neighborhood serving as an isolated area of the town is unfounded. Rather, poor planning and development have led to the dire condition of the road and the stress on the neighborhood. Specifically, transportation planning in 1946 for Mount Vernon, included a number of recommendations and long-term goals for developing road networks and improving transportation infrastructure to accommodate post-war growth and modernization.

Like many communities, this period in our history marked significant urban planning initiatives across the United States, driven by the rapid expansion of automobile use and the need for better local and regional connectivity. Mount Vernon was no different. From a policy standpoint, some aspects of the plan can be inferred based on typical mid-20th-century transportation policies and infrastructure projects in Ohio and similar small towns.

## Context of the 1946 Transportation Planning

The period immediately following World War II saw substantial shifts in urban planning, particularly in transportation. Like many towns in the United States, Mount Vernon sought to modernize its roads and improve access between residential, commercial, and industrial zones. With an increasing reliance on motor vehicles in Ohio along with a growing population, transportation infrastructure became a priority in order to boost economic development and provide better access between towns and larger cities like Columbus.

According to transportation planning trends of the 1940s, the primary focus of such plans in Mount Vernon and other small towns included:

- Expanding and improving roadways to accommodate increased automobile traffic.
- Connecting rural areas to town centers to support suburban growth.
- Enhancing road safety by improving the design and maintenance of roads.
- Promoting economic growth through better road connectivity between key routes such as state and national highways.

In Mount Vernon's case, the plan emphasized connecting different neighborhoods with more efficient and reliable roads, as well as linking local streets to important routes such as Coshocton Avenue (US Route 36) and Gambier Road (State Route 229) - key transportation corridors at the time which continue to remain important today.

# Edgewood Road in the 1946 Plan

In the mid-20th century, Edgewood Road was included in Mount Vernon's transportation planning as part of a broader goal to improve local infrastructure. The following key objectives can be reasonably attributed to Edgewood Road's development during this period:

## 1. Improving Road Access and Connectivity:

Edgewood Road was seen as a critical link between Gambier Road and Coshocton Avenue, helping connect residential areas in the south and east of Mount Vernon with major transportation routes. While it was not fully connected during the 1940s, the plan may have envisioned this connection as an eventual goal to improve overall traffic flow and provide more direct access for local commuters.

More specifically, in the Federal Highway Act of 1944, many small towns (Mount Vernon included), had a profound impact on transportation planning. Edgewood Road was in fact identified to connect S.R. 229 and U.S. 36, but in 1946, the funds that were earmarked for the project were recalled by ODOT in order to put toward the creation of Interstate 71. Edgewood remained unconnected and homes developed around it without the consideration of its eventual connection of the two major thoroughfares running east and west.

## 2. Road Widening and Surfacing:

As automobiles became more common, transportation plans of the 1940s often recommended the widening and surfacing of roads. Given that Edgewood Road likely served a residential area, the plan might have recommended upgrades to accommodate the expected increase in traffic. This would have included paving the road and potentially widening it to handle both local and through traffic.

## 3. Supporting Suburban Growth:

The 1940s was a time of significant suburban expansion across the U.S. Towns like Mount Vernon were preparing for increased residential development. The transportation plan likely included recommendations for building or improving roads like Edgewood to support new housing developments that emerged in response to post-war population growth. The road's development would have been crucial in providing easy access to these new residential areas.



#### 4. Future Connection to Major Roads:

While the road may not have been fully connected at the time, the 1946 plan may have laid the groundwork for future extensions, including the eventual connection of Edgewood Road to Coshocton Avenue (US Route 36), which would increase its strategic importance as a local connector road. This would reflect typical mid-century planning priorities, where small town roads were designed with an eye toward future growth and integration with regional highway systems.

#### Conclusion:

In conclusion, while specific records of the 1946 transportation plan for Edgewood Road may not be readily available, the road's development during that period was likely part of a broader effort to modernize Mount Vernon's transportation infrastructure. The plan probably envisioned improving road conditions, supporting suburban growth, and eventually connecting local streets with major highways to improve traffic flow and access for residents.

It is well documented that Edgewood Road is in failure. Moreover, it is well documented that it currently is host to over 5,000 vehicles daily. Also, the underground utilities and the storm drainage problems continue to confound the area. Completely rehauling this road now makes the most logical sense for a variety of reasons. Fiscally, among others, the citizens can elect to fix the problems now or do so "down the road" where the cost will be far more expensive without the assistance of a \$3.2 million grant from ODOT to address the issue.

#### References for 1946 Transportation Planning

- Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Historical Plans: Documents from ODOT's archives offer insights into transportation planning throughout Ohio in the 1940s and 1950s. Local transportation plans, including those for Mount Vernon, were typically influenced by state-level recommendations for improving road infrastructure.
- Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944: This act laid the foundation for post-war transportation planning across the U.S., including in Ohio. The legislation encouraged the development of local and regional road networks, which would have influenced Mount Vernon's 1946 plan for roads like Edgewood.
- Mid-20th Century Urban Planning Trends: Books and studies on post-war urban planning, such as *The City in History* by Lewis Mumford and *American Urban Planning in the Postwar Era* by John F. Bauman, provides useful context for understanding how small towns approached transportation planning in the 1940s.
- Mount Vernon Historical Society: Local archives may provide specific details about transportation plans from the mid-20th century, including references to Edgewood Road's

intended role in the town's transportation network. These archives can offer more detailed historical perspectives on the town's development strategies.

### Reasons for this project:

1. \$3.2 million to do the project
2. More and safer routes to get around town. North and south traffic in particular.
3. Multiple water line failures in that area - water pressure to south of Edgewood
4. Safer routes
5. Pedestrian safety - greater pedestrian safety
6. Inclusive and connectivity - meets ADA requirements
7. Stormwater system will mitigate risk of future flooding and preserve the life of the pavement - it's cheaper in the long run. Maximizing life of assets and reducing costs for the taxpayer