

Ohio Gubernatorial Candidates Say Voters Should Decide on Broadband, Infrastructure Spending

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(TNS) — Both of Ohio's major-party candidates for governor would hand off the call on upgrading Ohio's crumbling infrastructure to voters.

Democrat Richard Cordray and Republican Mike DeWine outlined their approaches in separate speeches Tuesday before a group of planners concerned about the state's roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

Cordray proposes to borrow the money by placing a "sizable" bond issue on the ballot for voters' approval and then paying it off from existing revenues over many years. His package would include money for transit and expanding broadband to underserved rural areas. He did not cite a number on the amount to be raised.

"I'll go to the people and make the case," Cordray said, expressing confidence that Ohioans would approve the ballot issue.

DeWine stopped short of endorsing an increase in the fuel tax, or a sales tax on fuel purchases, to address Ohio's needs, but said he would have a "candid conversation" with taxpayers about raising funds to repair and improve roads, bridges and other needs.

DeWine told about 300 members of the Ohio Association of Regional Councils that he plans to appoint a blue-ribbon commission of citizens and experts shortly after taking office to "come back with a quick assessment about where we are on infrastructure and come back with recommendations" on how to fund a fix.

"We'll then open discussion with the people of Ohio," DeWine said at the Downtown Hilton. "What are your choices? What are our options?"

Cordray took a slap at DeWine's suggested commission, saying, "Blue-ribbon commissions are often an excuse for not being ready to lead or not being ready to set a direction ... I think if you run for governor you bear a responsibility to set a direction, and I've made my commitment and I will follow through on it."

The American Society of Civil Engineers gave Ohio a "D+" in its [2017 infrastructure report card](#) the same grade granted America as a whole — citing a litany of drinking-water needs, iffy roads, deteriorated bridges and potentially hazardous dams.

Cordray said Ohio needs to step up and help itself because the Trump administration's proposed public-private infrastructure fix has resulted "in virtually nothing being put forward in Washington that is amounting to much of anything."

Both candidates bill infrastructure and transit upgrades as essential to maintaining Ohio's economic vitality and ensuring that workers can travel to their jobs, health-care appointments and education opportunities.

The conference at which Cordray and DeWine spoke consisted of regional planners, including the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, concerned about transportation and land use, among other topics.

DeWine also conceded that he's heard a chorus of complaints from officials of local governments that have experienced dramatic cuts in their state funding under the GOP-led Statehouse over the past decade. "I hear a lot about the (Local Government Fund). I understand that concern" and the burden that the opioid epidemic has placed on county social services, sheriff's offices and jails. "But, I don't know what the budget will look like."

Cordray said he would restore local government funds to allow first-responders and others to fight the opioid crisis. "The state legislature in Ohio has not respected and supported local governments across the state for some time ... this will require a fundamental shift."

While previously outlining his agenda to help Ohio's children, the attorney general strongly drove home his commitment to "significantly" improve state funding for county Children Services agencies that are bursting with foster children due to the drug addictions of their parents.

Ohio ranks last in the nation in the state's share of Children Services funding, DeWine said. "That fundamentally has to change."

Cordray has proposed universal pre-K education for Ohio children to help them enter school ready to learn.

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