



Members Brief

An informational brief prepared by the LSC staff for members and staff of the Ohio General Assembly

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Memorial Highways and Bridges

Highway and bridge designations, including memorial designations, may be made either through the legislative process or upon the initiative of local political subdivisions. For legislative designations, there are no express standards regarding whom or what may be the subject of a highway or bridge designation. The majority of legislative highway and bridge designations are memorial designations for military personnel killed in action, law enforcement or firefighters killed in the line of duty, and statewide public officials. However, highways and bridges may be designated in honor of events, groups, and other persons significant to the state or a region of the state.

To request a highway or bridge designation bill, a legislator need only provide the exact name of the proposed designation and the precise segment of the roadway or bridge that is being designated. Highways may have multiple designations at various points along a route, and designations may overlap. In addition to legislative designations, there are several processes by which one or more local political subdivisions may establish a highway or bridge designation.

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Highways and bridges designated by the General Assembly

The most common way for a highway or bridge to be given a special designation, especially a memorial designation, is through legislation. In Revised Code Chapters 5533 and 5534, the General Assembly has designated more than 500 highways, bridges, and similar infrastructure locations. Ohio law does not expressly detail guidelines for how the General Assembly must make these designations. As such, the General Assembly may designate any stretch of highway or bridge, the designation can be of any length, the designation can have multiple start and stop points along a route, and designations may overlap.

Additionally, the General Assembly may establish a highway or bridge designation for any person (living or dead), any group, or any event. The majority of these legislative designations are memorial designations honoring military personnel killed in action, law enforcement or

firefighters killed in the line of duty, and public officials who were significant to the state or a region of the state. A highway designation will not change the official highway route number or name of the highway being designated.¹

Highways and bridges entirely within a municipal corporation

The one limitation on the General Assembly's authority to designate highways and bridges occurs if the location of the highway or bridge is entirely within a municipal corporation. While the General Assembly may designate such a highway or bridge, the municipal corporation may override the designation with its own naming choice because of its home rule authority.² Thus, a state legislator proposing a designation within a municipal corporation will often consult with the municipal corporation regarding the proposal. This is partially a financial consideration as well. While the Ohio Department of Transportation will pay for the costs of creating and installing the designation markers on state highways or bridges located outside of a municipal corporation, it is largely the responsibility of the municipal corporation to pay for the installation costs within its jurisdiction.³

Drafting considerations for designations

When a legislator requests a bill designating a highway or bridge, the following information helps the drafter complete the bill:

1. The name of the person, group, or event being honored by the designation. A link to an obituary or similar biographical information is helpful, especially if the person is not a statewide or well-known figure.
2. The official name or number of the highway or bridge to be designated (e.g., U.S. Route 62, State Route 315, I-71, or Township Road 65).
3. The approximate starting and ending location of the designation. The boundaries are typically intersections with other highways or the border of a political subdivision.
4. The county within which the highway or bridge to be named is located.

Highways and bridges designated by local political subdivisions

Ohio law permits a county, township, or municipal corporation to officially assign a distinctive name, "commemorative of an historic event or personage or a commonly accepted and appropriate name" to any state highway or bridge that is a part of the state highway system in that local authority's jurisdiction.⁴ Each local authority also is generally permitted to assign names to its own highways or bridges along its highways as well – e.g., a county may name county

¹ R.C. Chapters 5533 and 5534.

² Ohio Constitution, Article XVIII, Section 3.

³ "[Memorial Highways Guidance](#)." Guidelines for highway designations from the Ohio Department of Transportation may be found by searching "Memorial Highway" on the Department's website at: transportation.ohio.gov.

⁴ R.C. 5511.09.

roads.⁵ Thus, not all designations need to be enacted by the General Assembly through legislation. A legislator may want to consider using the local resolution process, specified below, for designation requests that honor an individual who was important to a small community or that honor an individual who may not receive the support of both legislative chambers of the General Assembly.

A county or township may designate a state highway or bridge after adopting a resolution in support of the proposed name and sending in a request for the name change to the Director of Transportation. If approved, the county or township, at its own expense, may erect markers indicating the new name of the highway or bridge. However, a municipal corporation may act “pursuant to its [home rule] authority” and may designate a state highway or bridge within its jurisdiction by resolution, without consulting any other state authority.⁶

If a county or township wants to change or remove the name of a state highway or bridge designated by the county or township, it is permitted to do so, pursuant to approval of the Director, and provided it is done in the same manner as the current name was designated. A municipal corporation is also permitted to change or remove a name on its own authority. However, if a municipal corporation has designated the name of a highway or bridge within the municipal corporation, “no other name may be assigned to that highway or bridge” by any other local authority.⁷

⁵ R.C. 5541.04 and 5543.04.

⁶ R.C. 5511.09.

⁷ R.C. 5511.09.