

## IN OUR SCHOOLS

# Pipelines pump gas, oil money into cash-strapped districts

Springboro official expects \$7 million a year in new revenue



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I watch out for the interests of families, students and residents in Butler and Warren county schools. Find me at [mclark@enquirer.com](mailto:mclark@enquirer.com) or on [facebook.com/Michael D. Clark](https://www.facebook.com/Michael.D.Clark).

When Springboro Schools Superintendent Todd Petrey visits one of the construction sites of the 1,200-mile Enterprise pipeline in rural Warren County, he doesn't see a large pipe in a long ditch.

He sees money: about \$7 million a year for his district.

"Financially, it will be great for the kids in Springboro to bring in a new source of revenue," says Petrey. "And for the taxpayers in Springboro, it will truly assist in delaying any new future tax levies, which will take the burden off taxpayers."

The extra \$7 million projected for Springboro schools – combined with other budget cuts – means it can offer a rarity to local residents:

In November, voters will decide on a tax renewal issue that, if approved, would lower their annual school taxes by \$52 for a \$100,000 home.

The natural gas and drilling boom in eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania and West Virginia means some private pipelines are being laid through Greater Cincinnati. The new transmission lines mostly pump westward and south to Texas to fuel manufacturing and shipping to overseas customers.

## Pipelines help ease years of school budget cuts

In the 15-county Greater Cincinnati region, there are more miles of underground transmission pipelines than make up all the interstate highways in Kentucky.

What's new is more interstate transmission lines pumping excavated gas, oil and fossil-fuel based industrial liquids through our region.

And Warren County's rural areas increasingly serve as a pipeline transit corridor.

Rhonda Hammermeister has three children in Springboro schools and lives about five miles from the Enterprise pipeline now being laid through a farm field off of Utica Road.

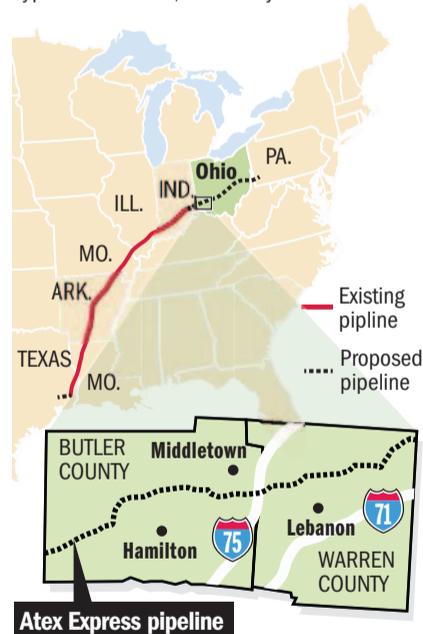
"I'm happy it's here because we've had to go through a lot of budget cuts, and we have seen a lot of good teachers and principals go," says Hammermeister. "We're a good district, but I've been worrying about



Springboro schools Superintendent Todd Petrey stands by the site of a new natural gas pipeline going through Warren County. The pipeline will mean millions of dollars for the schools. THE ENQUIRER/TONY JONES

## The pipeline's path

The 1,239-mile Atex Express pipeline of the Enterprise Products Co. runs from oil fields in eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania through Southwest Ohio and southern Indiana down to Texas. Most of the pipeline, which will transport the petroleum-based byproduct ethane, is already constructed.



Source: Enterprise Pipeline Co. The Enquirer

more cuts."

Holly Cahall, treasurer of Butler County's Monroe Schools, is eager for the money, which she estimates will be "hundreds of thousands of dollars" from the Enterprise pipe burrowing her way.

"It's like getting money without the expense of more students," says Cahall, whose district remains in state-designated fiscal emergency after a series of historically deep budget cuts. "We're lucky to have it coming here."

## SCHOOL'S VIEW

Watch the Springboro schools superintendent discuss the pipeline being constructed near the district, in a video at [Cincinnati.com](http://Cincinnati.com).

## Warren County has become a pathway for pipelines

Warren County is largely the winner in the local pipeline lottery. With the advent of new drilling technology, oil companies are extracting record bounties from the giant Utica shale formation that stretches from its namesake in New York into eastern Ohio.

Indeed, two existing pipelines, which have added a stable revenue stream to the budgets in Springboro, Wayne and Lebanon schools, are within a 1,000-foot-wide swath.

And the new Enterprise pipeline is projected to be used indefinitely, says Rick Rainey, spokesman for the Houston-based Enterprise Products. That could mean decades of additional dollars for nearby districts.

"Pipelines are valuable assets because, once in the ground, they can be repurposed should the energy demands of the nation or the region change," says Rainey.

The Enterprise pipeline, also known as the Atex Express line, will carry ethane gas westward for plastics productions. The two existing pipelines carry propane and natural gas.

Springboro schools take in \$3.5 million from the existing pipelines, expected to double to \$7 million in 2015. The district's annual operating budget is \$45 million.

Wayne Schools Treasurer Ron James estimates his district takes in a little more than \$1 million annually for its \$14 million yearly operating

budget.

"We were able to stabilize our (financial) forecast, stabilize staffing and meet rising medical insurance costs without a deficit in the budget," says James.

The pipelines also cut through a portion of Lebanon Schools where district Treasurer Eric Sotzing says "we ... receive approximately \$1.4 million in property tax revenues for the existing pipelines" that goes toward the district's \$43 million annual operating budget.

## Pipelines also mean debate over increased risks

Pipelines can also pump controversy into a region, as has the proposed \$7 billion Keystone XL pipeline, which would transport crude oil from Canada to Texas. Environmentalists and clean energy advocates claim the pipeline will endanger aquifers, wetlands and emit high levels of carbon dioxide.

Environmental advocates on Ohio don't share local school officials' enthusiasm for the pipelines, saying the risks outweigh the money.

"With any fossil fuel there is a high degree of risk," says Brian Kunkemoeller, conservation coordinator for the Ohio chapter of the Sierra Club.

The ethane that will be transported in the new pipeline is "explosive and very dangerous," he says.

"It's not the gas to heat your home. It's used to make plastics," he says. "These pipelines are not something the public needs but are for private companies."

Rainey, though, says "pipelines are the safest and most economical way to transport the energy products we use every day."

"In the unlikely event of a pipeline emergency, Enterprise personnel are fully trained to respond quickly, appropriately and with sufficient access to resources needed to limit the impact of an incident," says Rainey.

Michael Bunner, director of emergency services for Warren County, says "nothing notable" has happened since the interstate pipelines began transmission in 2006.

An Enquirer review of federal records in 2011 shows three incidents along transmission pipelines locally since 2006, along with a handful of problems that spurred federal regulators into action. None of the local incidents were rated "serious," the classification when somebody is injured or killed.

Dora Gentry's home across a soybean field in the Springboro school system stands next to the newly evacuated pipeline corridor and she's not happy about it. But she is not particularly worried, either.

"It creates a lot of dust while they are building it," Gentry says. "But other than being a pain, I like that it lowers taxes and is helping out the schools." ■

Mark Wert contributed to this story.