



## INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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### ***I-69: Transportation Commissioner Comments***

By Cristine M. Klika

Commissioner, Indiana Department of Transportation

From the start of the I-69 Evansville-to-Indianapolis Study, we at the Indiana Department of Transportation have recognized that there are a wide variety of groups with very strong and passionate opinions about the nature and location of an improved transportation link between Evansville and Indianapolis. Each of these groups is working for the best interest of the people of Indiana, as they see it. In support of differing viewpoints, a number of claims and statements have been asserted that are premature or not quite accurate. I hope to shed some light on these issues and reaffirm the need for the current study.

Let's look at the facts:

**The study that recently got underway is completely new and different from past studies.** Previous studies simply were not broad enough to give us a clear picture of all options – including building a new road, improving existing roads, and not building at all – nor did they consider all the ramifications of these options. Until all that information is collected and considered, INDOT cannot make a good decision – hence, a new study.

**Any new route connecting Evansville and Indianapolis will cut travel times,** but there is no accurate measure yet of how much time might be saved. The study has collected “speed data” for the past few months, and computer models using that data will help determine how much time any given route would save. Past estimates of travel times were incomplete, considering only portions of a road, for example, or traveling on non-interstate roads. Some statements compare time differences between “the two routes.” Again, more than two routes are under consideration in this new study, so no comparison can be made at this time.

**Governor Frank O'Bannon cannot speed up the study.** The timeline for the study follows state and federal requirements, notably the National Environmental Policy Act, and will take about two more years. Neither the governor – nor anyone else – can shorten this process.

**Federal funding restrictions will not limit the range of alternatives considered in this study.** Congress has provided approximately \$63 million specifically for connecting Evansville to Bloomington or Evansville to Indianapolis. Of these funds, approximately \$48.7 million are specifically tied to an

Evansville-to-Bloomington route. However, regardless of these restrictions, the National Environmental Policy Act requires an even-handed analysis of all reasonable alternatives for connecting Evansville and Indianapolis, including alternatives that do not connect Evansville and Bloomington. If the study results in a decision to select an alternative that does not serve Bloomington, the \$48.7 million could be reallocated to the alternative that is chosen.

**Current legislation makes it unlikely that the route would be lost to another state.** Federal legislation currently calls for a Canada-to-Mexico route (“Corridor 18”) to include a connector between Indianapolis and Evansville. To change this so the route would go through another state would require congressional action.

**At this time, it is impossible to predict that one type of land – agricultural, forested, residential or commercial – will be disproportionately affected by a particular route.** Any new highway would take a significant amount of land, but different routes would use different kinds of land. For example, a route that goes through a largely agricultural area might use farmland or might follow existing transportation corridors. Any figures citing numbers of acres that will be “lost” are premature.

Engineers and natural scientists are currently conducting studies to begin estimating costs of the various options and assessing what impact various routes might have on existing communities.

Balancing all the viewpoints, needs and concerns of the people who will be affected by this decision is a new process. Years ago, interstate construction meant a group of engineers gathered in a room, planned the most direct route, and plowed through whatever was in the new highway’s path. Few, if any, public meetings were held; no environmental concerns were considered. But now highway planners and state leaders recognize the flaws in this approach and seek to correct them by gathering the best answers possible. As a result, INDOT is going well beyond the requirements of the federal government in involving the public in the study. Therefore, it is critical that the study proceed unimpeded by misinformation.

As the study team makes its major findings, information is continually made available to the general public, and is posted on the project’s Web site: [www.i69indyevn.org](http://www.i69indyevn.org). INDOT will ensure that the final report is thorough and impartial. I firmly believe it will give the people of Indiana the best answer to the question of how – or whether – to further connect Indianapolis and Evansville.