



# I-69 Update

Official Newsletter of the I-69 Evansville-to-Indianapolis Study

Volume 4, August 2002

## Public Invited to Comment on DEIS Findings

### Upcoming Public Hearings

Monday, Aug. 19 - Terre Haute South High School  
3737 S. Seventh St., Terre Haute, IN 47802

Tuesday, Aug. 20 - Bloomington North High School  
3901 Kinser Pike, Bloomington, IN 47404

Wednesday, Aug. 21 - Evansville Harrison High School  
211 Fielding Road, Evansville, IN 47715

5 p.m. - Doors open for displays and interaction  
6 p.m. - Presentation on DEIS  
6:30-9:30 p.m. - Public comment

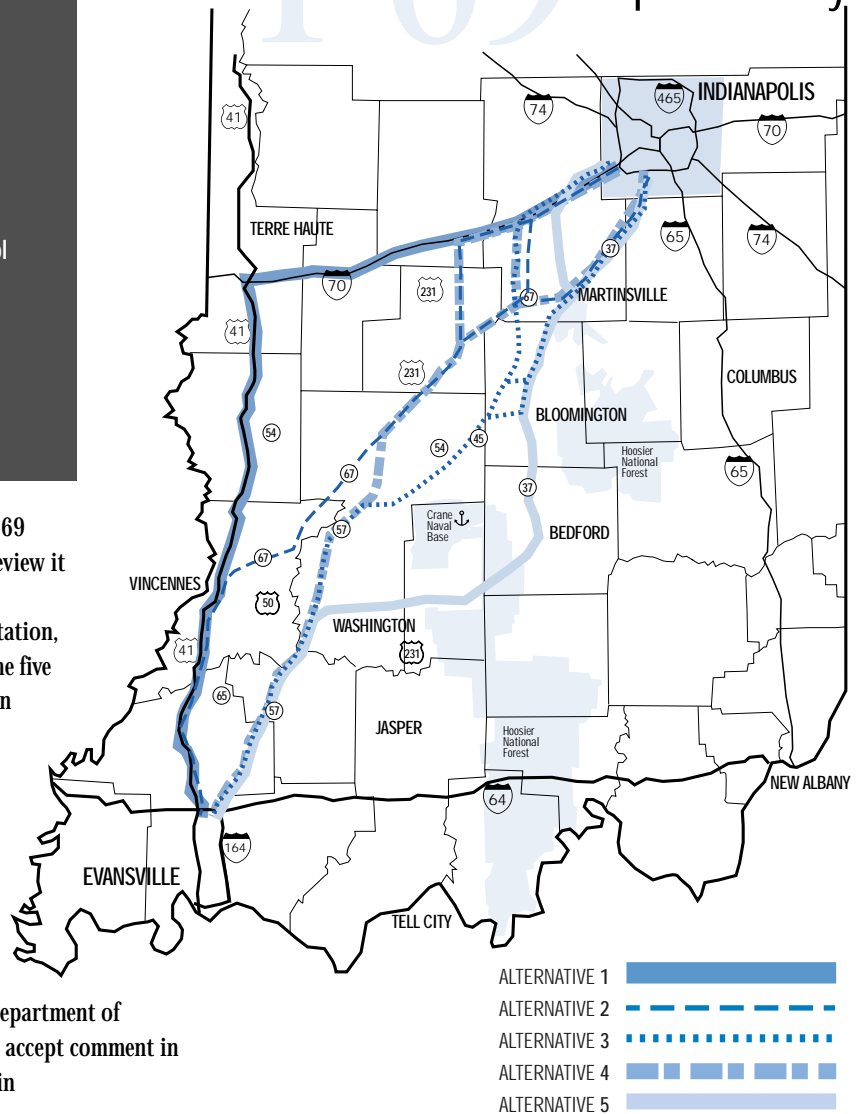
The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the I-69 Evansville-to-Indianapolis study is now complete and you can review it online at the official study Web site, [www.i69indyevn.org](http://www.i69indyevn.org).

The DEIS includes a comprehensive summary of the transportation, economic and environmental impacts to Southwest Indiana of the five I-69 alternatives and their variations. The environmental portion is a broad category that includes important social, natural and cultural elements such as threatened and endangered species, farmland, wetlands, land use, relocations and historical and archaeological sites.

During the formal public comment period, you may comment on the DEIS on the Internet by visiting the project Web site, which has a special page for accepting public comment on the DEIS electronically. You also can comment by a call to the toll-free hotline 877-INDY-EVN. The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) has scheduled three public hearings to accept comment in person. These have been set for Aug. 19 in Terre Haute, Aug. 20 in Bloomington and Aug. 21 in Evansville.

As in all previous public meetings on the study, comments will be limited to two minutes. This is because of the number of speakers expected. A lottery will determine the speaking

### Evansville-to-Indianapolis Study



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— Tom Cervone



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For an electronic version of this newsletter, please visit the project Web site at [www.I69indyevn.org](http://www.I69indyevn.org).

## Agencies and Experts Tour Sensitive Environmental Areas



The Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge was one of more than a dozen stops on the field review tour.

the Hoosier National Forest are more than points, lines or shapes on a map. A first-hand look was necessary to create an accurate picture of the environment.

“All GIS, as well as models, must be grounded for truth for confidence in the data,” said Tom Cervone, chief of environmental studies for Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates. “Field reviews provide an interpretation of the environment, both human and natural, for quality, functions and values.”

In early June, agency representatives spent two busy days exploring Southwest Indiana’s natural and human environment, including wetlands, floodplains, farmland and forests. Representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Highway Administration, Indiana Department of Transportation and Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates comprised the group.

The bus tour made more than a dozen stops for field review. Also, participants were able to see many other areas during the drive. They visited the habitats of the Indiana bat, the evening bat and the copper belly water snake. They saw karst and caves in the Tincher Pond and Beanblossom Bottoms areas. They toured wetlands at Pigeon Creek and Rock Springs, to name just two. They viewed many other environmentally sensitive areas, including a proposed landfill, surface coalmines, a reservoir and Amish farms.

The tour accomplished several things, Cervone said. “It gave the participants an opportunity to gain valuable insight about these environmentally sensitive areas,” Cervone said. “It gave the participants a first-hand look at the differences between the alternatives. We communicated with each other about these areas and had the opportunity to talk to the owners and local authorities.”

Among the locations on the tour were Patoka River Wildlife Refuge, Smother’s Creek, Rock Springs, Tincher Pond in the Hoosier National Forest, Sycamore Land Trust, Beanblossom Bottoms, the Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge and Blue Springs Cavern. Four stops featured guest speakers who discussed the importance of the sites to the environment.

In weighing the benefits and impacts of the alternative routes in this study, it has been crucial to gain detailed knowledge of the sensitive environmental areas in Southwest Indiana.

The study team has worked hard to accomplish this, using widely varied methods. One state-of-the-art technical tool used is the Geographic Information System (GIS), which maps aspects of the environment in terms of points, lines and shapes. More than 170 data layers make up the GIS.

However, resources such as Tincher Pond in



Tom Cervone, chief of environmental studies for Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates

# PUBLIC COMMENT

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order. Individuals can submit more lengthy comments in writing. Before taking comments at the hearings, members of the project team can answer individual questions at displays illustrating the study's major findings.

All comments will become part of the public record and carry the same importance regardless if individuals choose to express them in person at the public hearings, by telephone, by Internet or by mail. The study team must receive comments by Nov. 7 to consider them in the final EIS.

"When we started this study with a clean slate three years ago, we said we were going to actively seek public input. INDOT has gone well above and beyond federal requirements for public involvement in this study by holding 15 public information meetings during development of the EIS," said INDOT Commissioner J. Bryan Nicol. "These additional opportunities for public comment have contributed significantly in directing the study team as it has evaluated potential corridors for this important highway."

The Indiana Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and the study team will review each comment received during the DEIS comment period. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will provide written response to issues raised in the comments.

## Speaking out



"I-69 is a vital economic development tool for Vincennes and Knox counties. I think in the future people will see that this interstate has done more for economic development in Indiana than tax restructuring."

— Troy Woodruff, president & CEO,  
Knox County Chamber of Commerce



"The advantages and immense opportunities I-69 will create will truly benefit the entire state, while providing valuable economic development, marketing and business creation opportunities.

Indiana has a once in a lifetime opportunity to be part of an interstate system connecting Canada and Mexico. As one of these privileged states, we will possess an important and unique commercial link to more than 150 counties, hundreds of municipalities and two of the United States' largest international trading partners."

— Reginald K. Henderson,  
director of small business  
and economic development,  
Indiana Chamber of Commerce

## GIS Facts and Stats

- The study team used a Geographic Information System (GIS) to map various aspects of the environment. More than 170 data layers make up the GIS.
- Gibson County has been the epicenter of five recorded earthquakes, the greatest number in the study area.
- There have been 48 sightings of the bald eagle – a federally threatened species – in the study area. Of those, 21 sightings were made in 2002.
- Greene County is the largest county geographically at about 349,132 acres. Vanderburgh County is the smallest with about 151,071 acres.
- Thirteen National Natural Landmarks are in the study area. Four are in Orange County and include Pioneer Mother's Memorial Forest and Wesley Chapel Gulf, one of the world's great karst areas.
- There are about 526 sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Of those, 186 are in Indianapolis.
- Evansville is home to the greatest number of Big Tree Champions. Many of the 20 Big Tree Champions are in Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve. The Big Tree Register lists the largest known species of trees in the state.

Comments. Finalizing recommendation of the preferred alternative.

Announcement of preferred corridor.

# GIS Technology Creates Environmental Atlas

The Geographic Information System, or GIS, is a powerful tool used to create a visual picture of the environment in the 26-county study area. GIS is a combination of hardware, software and data that can be used to map and analyze information about the human, natural and economic environment. The GIS data are stored as computerized data layers, which typically contain information on a specific aspect of the environment. For example, a GIS map represents the locations of churches as points, streams as lines and coalmines as shapes.

The GIS data layers contain more than simply the feature's location. For example, the church data layer contains the geographical location, name, address, county, and more for every church. This makes the GIS a powerful tool in data analysis. For example, it can be used to determine how many and which churches are within each two-mile study band.

Michael Grovak, I-69 project manager for Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates, describes this tool as essential for undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the five different alternatives, each 140-155 miles long.

"Without this tool, it is difficult to imagine how we could have carried out our responsibilities to do a thorough assessment of the impacts of each route," Grovak said. "It is especially valuable in how it allows us to share impact information with citizens and review agencies."

The Environmental Atlas created by the study team comprises more than 75 data layers. The atlas is a companion document to the Environmental Impact Statement. It contains a detailed series of maps for each alternative. To accomplish this, analysts overlaid about 75 data layers on aerial photographs, along with each two-mile wide study band and proposed alternative corridor.

Data for the GIS contain information gathered from federal and state government agencies and private individuals and organizations. Data on businesses and other buildings were field checked to ensure accuracy. Lists of historic and potentially historic structures, and threatened and endangered species found for each alternative are included in the atlas.

The DEIS and the Environmental Atlas are both available on the official study Web site at [www.i69indyevn.org](http://www.i69indyevn.org).

## Speaking out



"IACT supports any improvement to state and municipal infrastructure that promotes economic development and expands the capability of Indiana citizens to travel between cities and towns."

— Matthew C. Greller, executive director, Indiana Association of Cities and Towns

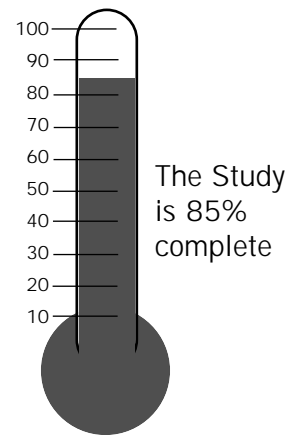


"An extension of I-69 will have a positive impact upon Huntington County and Northeast Indiana. It will mean further economic development by increasing more immediate access to an expanded market."

— Kathy Branham, president, Huntington County Council

## What's Next

- The public comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) ends Nov. 7. All comments, made at the public hearings on Aug. 19, 20 and 21 or by letter, e-mail or calls to the project hotline, will receive equal consideration.
- The study team will prepare responses to the issues raised in the comments. The responses will be included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).
- A single preferred alternative will be identified, following review of comments on the DEIS.
- The FEIS will be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for its approval.
- FHWA will issue a Record of Decision (ROD), which will conclude the Tier 1 process.



# Owen Valley Students Produce I-69 Documentary

## Project Sparks Web site Creation

Riley Fields isn't an engineer, a politician or a state official. But the 14-year-old knows as much or more about the I-69 project than most people.

Fields, a recent graduate of Owen Valley Middle School in Spencer, spent a good part of his eighth-grade year producing a documentary as part of a distance-learning program made possible by the Center of Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC) and INDOT. Formerly called the Corporation for Educational Communications (CEC), the CILC has been a forerunner in distance education.

"I hope that what I've done is to educate people. Having an opinion is good, but having a strong opinion based on the facts is better," said Fields. "I just want to be sure that people are in the know and that INDOT can make a good decision based on those opinions."

Through the program, called "I-69: Making Connections," Fields and other students filmed interviews with Owen County residents and presented their documentary to INDOT officials.

"At first, I didn't know anything. Among other things, now I know that I-69 stretches from Mexico to Canada and will definitely affect the way I live," Fields said. "That's big!"

Lyle Sadler, an INDOT project manager, said the students went above and beyond normal procedures to make sure that opinions were heard.

"They hit the mark right on," he said. "They assisted in helping us listen to what was being said and what we needed to communicate. We were incredibly impressed with their documentary work and research." Fields and the "I-69: Making Connections" team spent their free periods at school interviewing people at the local Wal-Mart and at a nearby grocery store.

"Half of the people we talked with thought the direct route would bring more business and improve how they live. Others were concerned about preserving nature," Fields said. Not only did Fields produce and package the documentary on his iMac, he voluntarily created a Web site about the project. The site – [www.socsc.k12.in.us/schools/ovms/i69/main.htm](http://www.socsc.k12.in.us/schools/ovms/i69/main.htm) – is packed with information on the I-69 project.

Marlane Waits, Fields' math teacher, said the students' goal was to inform those most affected and ensure opinions were heard. She added that the Internet was an important tool because it gave students access to both sides of the I-69 issue.



The "I-69: Making Connections" Team

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Aaron Smith, Amanda Parker, Whitney Deal, Brittany Haltom.

BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Samantha Skivofilikas-Keith, Heather Keith, Jennifer Hamilton, Patricia Macy, Katie Lewis, Riley Fields

"It was great to work with them on issues not from a book, but from their own backyards," Waits said. "The learning was real. They participated in the community as honest brokers, and I believe they made a difference."

But the students' success in making a difference is not their first or last. Last year, a 125-member team of eighth graders – Fields included – spent the spring semester surveying opinions of residents in Owen County, investigating myths and facts related to the I-69 project, studying land use and route maps, and researching federal laws and procedures required for the environmental impact study.

Waits said that the "I-69: Making Connections" project sparked the interest of many students who want to volunteer their skills and expertise to eighth graders involved in similar projects next year. Fields said he will update the Web site and mentor other students in the future. He said one day he might want to become a film director or producer.

When asked his opinion about the preferred route?

"My role now is to stay neutral," he said. "It's not easy, but I think there's enough information out there to make the right decision."

## Get involved!

For more information about the Center of Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC) and other programs like "I-69: Making Connections," please call Monica Cougan, director of community connections for the CILC at 317-231-6526. You may also write her at [mcougan@visionathena.org](mailto:mcougan@visionathena.org) or 251 E. Ohio St., Suite 960, Indianapolis, IN 46204.

# Transportation Planning Definitions

**Corridor:** A band approximately 2,000 feet in width within which a highway could be built. A corridor has been defined for all route concepts carried forward for detailed analysis.

**Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS):**

A report presenting the impacts of alternative projects prepared for public comment.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):**

A document prepared by a government agency that evaluates the impacts of a proposed federal action on the environment. Alternative projects are evaluated for the kind and magnitude of their respective impacts.

**Field Check:** Physical inspection of land used to confirm or learn more about impacts the transportation project would have on some portion of the natural or socio-economic environment.

**Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS):**

A revised version of the DEIS, reflecting the consideration of public and resource agency input.

**Preferred Alternative:** The alternative that FHWA and INDOT identify in the FEIS as their preferred course of action. The approval of the preferred alternative is not granted in the FEIS itself; the actual approval is granted in the ROD.

**Public Hearing:** A formal, required, meeting at which a public agency receives public comments on a proposed action. There are specific findings or recommendations upon which people are asked to comment.

**Public Meeting:** A forum for which there is no legal requirement at which the public agency seeks citizen input. Fifteen were held in this study.

**Record of Decision (ROD):** A document prepared by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that formally concludes the current study process. In this study, the ROD will approve a particular corridor for the I-69 project between Evansville and Indianapolis, or will select the No-Build alternative. The ROD will not select the exact

alignment for the project within the selected corridor; final decisions regarding the exact alignment and mitigation measures will be made as part of subsequent studies.

**Resource Agency:** A state or federal agency providing input to the consideration of environmental impacts of a proposed action.

**Route Concept:** Initially, all routes were specified as route concepts, which were conceptual routes that might be thought of as points on a map connected by a simple line.

**Working Alignment:** A band 240-to-470-foot wide used to estimate environmental impacts of locating a highway within a corridor. The final location of the highway may change slightly based upon subsequent study.

## Voice your opinion, stay informed

INDOT is striving to make public participation in this project as easy as possible. You can stay informed and voice your opinions, comments and concerns in several ways:

- Visit the official project Web site at [www.i69indyevn.org](http://www.i69indyevn.org) to comment online.
- Call the 24-hour toll-free hotline: 877-INDY-EVN or 877-463-9386.
- Send comments on the DEIS to:  
Michael Grovak, project manager  
Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates  
6200 Vogel Road  
Evansville, IN 47715
- Attend one of the formal public hearings on the DEIS in Terre Haute, Bloomington and Evansville on Aug. 19, 20 and 21.

