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**For immediate release**

**Monday, March 29, 2004**

## ***I-69 corridor gets final go-ahead from federal government***

*'Record of Decision' signals move to next stage of project, final alignment*

Gov. Joe Kernan today joined Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Division Administrator Robert F. Tally, Jr., and Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) Commissioner J. Bryan Nicol, in announcing the Federal Highway Administration's approval of the I-69 extension between Evansville and Indianapolis.

With today's announcement, which was made in both Evansville and Washington, Ind., the I-69 project is another step closer to construction. The highway will lead to improved access and safety for communities and businesses throughout Southwest Indiana, while shaving 27 minutes off the travel time between Evansville and Indianapolis.

"This road will serve as an economic development engine for all of Southwest Indiana," Kernan said. "It will be a vital link for not only Evansville and our capital city, but also for the many communities of all sizes along the route. Job growth is sure to follow its path.

"In addition, I-69 is particularly important to the future of the Crane Naval Surface Warfare Center," Kernan said. "The new interstate will increase Crane's capacity to move shipments to and from the military base. And its onsite intellectual resources, combined with the improved accessibility I-69 will bring, will enhance opportunities for high-tech development around the center."

The approved corridor, known as Alternative 3C, connects Evansville to Indianapolis via Oakland City, Petersburg, Washington, Crane Naval Surface Warfare Center, Bloomington and Martinsville. In signing a formal Record of Decision on March 24, Tally gave the federal government's final approval and made the I-69 extension a reality.

"Indiana did an outstanding job in its study for FHWA," Tally said. "The quality of the environmental impact statement, in particular, made the approval of the corridor that much more simple and timely."

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The late Gov. Frank O'Bannon announced the preferred corridor on Jan. 9, 2003. The federal approval of this corridor marks the completion of the Tier 1 environmental study and a milestone that has never been reached in any previous study for this project.

The Record of Decision allows FHWA and INDOT to move forward into the next stage in the development of the project, which is known as Tier 2 final alignment work. This will include determining the specific alignment of the interstate within the corridor.

During Tier 2 final alignment work, the 142-mile corridor will be broken into six sections and each section will go forward independently. Local officials and residents along the route will have many opportunities to help plan and design the highway that works best for their respective communities. To facilitate maximum public involvement, local offices will be established in each of the six sections, Community Advisory Committees made up of key local stakeholders will be established, and detailed meetings to discuss individual highway sections will take place in each community.

“With more than 200 documented public meetings so far, we’ve taken extraordinary steps to involve the public in this project,” Nicol said. “And the high level of commitment to public involvement will continue during the Tier 2 final alignment work.”

INDOT estimates I-69 will cost \$1.78 billion to build, with 80 percent of that paid with federal funds and 20 percent with state funds. The state’s portion comes only from gas tax revenues, *not* from the state’s general fund.

Based on sound assumptions on the future of federal transportation funding, INDOT’s 25-year long-range plan, which includes I-69 and many other priorities around the state, has been determined by the FHWA to be financially reasonable.

It is anticipated that the I-69 extension will generate \$3.5 billion in additional personal income growth and 4,600 additional, permanent jobs by 2025.

The highway also will prevent nearly 40,000 serious injuries and reduce travel time between Indianapolis and Evansville, saving Hoosiers \$1.1 billion in driver time and vehicle operating costs during the first 20 years. It will put an additional 37,000 Hoosiers within a 30-minute drive of major urban areas, where major medical facilities, educational institutions and job opportunities are located.

INDOT expects it will take eight to 14 years to build I-69. Complete information on the I-69 Study is available at [www.i69indyevn.org](http://www.i69indyevn.org).

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