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FRANK O'BANNON, Governor
CRISTINE M. KLIKA, Commissioner

Writer's Direct Line

Monday, June 11, 2001

Letters to the Editor
The Indianapolis Star
P.O. Box 145
Indianapolis, IN 46206-0145

To the Editor,

The Voices for I-69, in its June 6 letter to the editor of the Indianapolis Star, again raised the question of whether Indiana could lose I-69 to another state by moving too slowly. I would like to dispel those concerns with some pertinent facts.

The I-69 Indianapolis-to-Evansville project is one of the longest interstate highways ever analyzed with an environmental study under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act. Completing this important work in three years means the project is on an accelerated schedule. Our study is about 50% complete. And I can report that the I-69 project team is on schedule.

The Federal Highway Administration national coordinator for I-69, Gene Cleckley, agrees. Mr. Cleckley has stated publicly, in my presence, that "Indiana is right with the other states" in the process. In fact, Indiana is a leader among the states in constructing a large segment of I-69. Construction in other states is taking place for very small segments of the national I-69 project. And Texas, with more sections of the proposed highway than any other state, is just getting started, according to Cleckley.

The question of losing I-69 to Illinois first arose after Congress designated the section of I-94 from Michigan to Chicago as part of Corridor 18. At that point, Illinois was added to the National I-69 Steering Committee. However, my counterpart, Illinois Transportation Secretary Kirk Brown has told me unequivocally that Illinois has other priorities for its transportation system and is not planning to pursue I-69 in any way whatsoever. Mr. Cleckley of FHWA has also dismissed the idea offered by some I-69 advocates that Indiana could lose the project to Illinois, saying, "I don't see how that could be, from a national perspective."

Be assured, the Indiana Department of Transportation and its project team are working hard to identify a corridor for Southwestern Indiana that will make travel safer and easier between Indianapolis and Evansville, while also improving the region's economic vitality, and protecting its environment and character.

With that in mind, we plan to meet our schedule to screen down to three to five route alternatives by late summer of this year, and publish a draft Environmental Impact Statement by next spring with an expected final decision on a preferred corridor by late 2002. I can assure you that the I-69 project has been and remains a top priority for INDOT.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cristine M. Klika".

Cristine M. Klika
Commissioner, Indiana Department of Transportation