



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204-2797

FRANK O'BANNON  
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***O'Bannon: New I-69 – the “3-C” route – is  
an economic, transportation boost***

Governor Frank O'Bannon said today that the Indiana extension of Interstate 69 – the national north-south highway that eventually will take motorists from border to border – will be an economic engine for areas of the state not now served by an interstate highway.

The new highway will speed Evansville-to-Indianapolis travel times and promote accessibility throughout Southwest Indiana, he said.

O'Bannon visited Evansville – which stands to greatly benefit from the highway – to announce that he has accepted a recommendation from the Indiana Department of Transportation that the highway be extended along a route known as 3-C, which will follow IND 57 north from Evansville to Washington, proceed through Daviess County to the Monroe-Greene county line, head due east to IND 37 and follow that route to Indianapolis.

The route passes Crane Naval Weapons Center, solidifying it as a vital asset to Indiana and the nation.

“I drove here, on some narrow two-land roads, behind some slow-moving vehicles, but on the most direct route we could find,” O'Bannon said.

“And the experience – one I've repeated hundreds of times over the years – confirmed in my mind what years of studies and years of public input have suggested: That the best route for Indiana's future – as determined by the exhaustive and comprehensive study done by the Indiana Department of Transportation – is the route known as 3-C. . .

“It is a route to economic health and educational opportunities for many, many Hoosiers – those in its immediate vicinity, but also citizens from around Indiana and our northern and southern neighbors, who will feel more connected with the rest of the country.”

Route 3-C is expected to generate \$162 million in personal income growth a year; put 360,000 more Hoosiers within an hour of a major college or university; reduce the number of traffic accidents by 1,567 a year; and save freight shippers \$51 million a year in truck operating costs.

It saves 26 minutes of travel time over current routes – and that translates into \$1.38 billion in driver time and vehicle operating cost savings over 20 years.

The decision announced today is a major milestone in a lengthy process that will culminate with construction of the interstate. If every step proceeds as expected, the highway will be completed in eight to 14 years. It will cost \$1.7 billion, 80 percent of which will be paid with federal funds.

Extension of I-69 has been an issue for many years. But INDOT started the current process in December 1999 when it began an environmental impact study that looked at the project from a number of angles, including its value as an economic and transportation engine for Southwest Indiana.

The study team initially proposed 14 routes. That number was pared to five routes – with 12 variations – in late 2001, and more detailed study was conducted on each. Later, the U.S. EPA asked INDOT to consider hybrids of the five routes, which also were reviewed by the study team.

O'Bannon said he knew some people would be upset about the chosen route, but he pledged to “do everything in my power to minimize damage to farmland, forests, wetlands and other natural assets.”

He also acknowledged that some who live and work in the Terre Haute area will be disappointed with the decision.

“But we have not forgotten you,” he said. “With this decision, we are providing interstate access to a part of the state that has never had it.

“Terre Haute has been fortunate enough to have close access to Interstate 70 for many years. And we will make that even more valuable. Our long-term transportation plans call for I-70 to be widened to six lanes between Indianapolis and Terre Haute.”

The governor also noted that people who live in and near Bloomington are split on the value of having I-69 pass near their city, but that the state would work hard to ensure that the Bloomington way of life is preserved *and* that the city's economic footing is strengthened – just as Columbus and Seymour's characteristics were preserved but their economies improved when Interstate 65 was built.

“The I-69 Study Team now will begin the important work of finalizing the environmental report, working with the appropriate state and federal agencies to develop mitigation plans,” INDOT Commissioner J. Bryan Nicol said. “Once that work is completed later this year, the team will begin final alignment, design, land acquisition and construction on this important project for our state.”

*Reporters' contacts:*

*Governor's office: Mary Dieter or Andrew Stoner, 317-232-4578*

*INDOT: Roger Manning, 317- 234-1213*