

## **Selection of Preferred Alternative for I-69 Evansville to Indianapolis Questions and Answers**

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The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) has identified Alternative 3C as its preferred alternative for the Evansville-to-Indianapolis portion of I-69. This alternative connects Evansville to Indianapolis via Washington and Bloomington, and provides direct access to the Crane Naval Surface Warfare Center.

### **COST**

**1. Where will the money come from to pay for this \$1.7 billion project?**

- Governor O'Bannon has directed INDOT to put together a financial strategy for this project. INDOT will retain the services of public financial experts to develop a long-term financial strategy for the I-69 project. The financial strategy will be separate from the environmental documentation. The cost is \$1.7 billion, 80 percent of which will be paid by the federal government.

**2. What about the potential for cost increases?**

- The existing cost estimates are sound. INDOT will continue to refine the cost estimates throughout the remaining stages of the process, to take into account environmental mitigation commitments and other issues.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

**3. What percentage of the preferred alternative involves new terrain?**

- Approximately 35% of the length of the preferred alternative will incorporate an existing four-lane highway (SR 37). The remainder of the project (approximately 65%) will be on two lane state road corridors or on new terrain depending on the final alignment.

**4. How will INDOT address the impacts on farmland?**

- The critical factor affecting farmland preservation over the long term is not this project, but rather the effectiveness of land use planning at the local level. As part of the planning process for this project, INDOT will lend assistance to local governments to facilitate the development of land use strategies that allow for growth, while protecting farmland. INDOT will also consider purchasing development rights, from willing sellers, along this corridor. INDOT is committed to working with the Indiana Farm Bureau to address these issues as the project moves forward.

**5. How will INDOT deal with the “karst” terrain near Bloomington?**

- To minimize the impacts from new highways on sensitive karst terrain, INDOT entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1993 with IDNR, IDEM, and the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service. The MOU lays out strict requirements that must be followed for this project. INDOT will follow the MOU to the fullest.

**6. How will INDOT deal with the impacts to forested lands?**

- To offset the loss of core forest, INDOT will work closely with the U.S. Forest Service and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to preserve and re-forest land. This project presents an excellent opportunity to enhance and strengthen existing core forest habitat within the protected boundaries of federal and state-owned forested areas – for example, the Hoosier National Forest. INDOT will work to see that the impacts of this project will be more than off-set by the permanent protection of forest lands in Indiana.

**7. How will INDOT deal with the wetlands issues that EPA raised in its comment letter?**

- The wetlands permitting process will be getting under way shortly. INDOT already has discussed the requirements with the agencies involved in the wetlands permitting process – the Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, Indiana Department of Environmental Management and others.
- As part of the permitting process, INDOT will explore ways to further reduce wetlands impacts. New wetlands will be created where impacts are unavoidable.

**8. How will this project affect the endangered Indiana bat?**

- The preferred alternative has been carefully routed to minimize impacts on habitat for the Indiana bat, particularly the areas within a 5-mile radius of the “hibernacula,” or caves.
- Additional consultation is needed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. This work will be done over the next several months, before the Final EIS is issued. It will include the preparation of a Biological Assessment (BA) and, then, a Biological Opinion (BO) for the project.

**9. What about impacts on the Patoka Wildlife Refuge?**

- In the early 1990s, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service specifically reserved a corridor for I-69 through the Patoka area. The route that has been chosen stays inside the reserved corridor in the Patoka area, so this project complies with the Service’s original plans for the refuge.
- To offset the impacts of this project, INDOT will immediately undertake discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about ways that INDOT can facilitate the Service’s efforts to acquire land within the acquisition boundary of the Patoka Wildlife Refuge. In particular, INDOT will explore options to assist funding the Service’s land-acquisition efforts, which are critical to the long-term success of the refuge.

**10. What about the impacts to historic and archeological sites?**

- Extensive work has already been completed to identify historic and archeological sites listed in or eligible for the National Register and efforts have been made to avoid these sites. To the extent necessary, any outstanding historic preservation issues will be resolved prior to the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. If route adjustments are made, those adjustments will be reflected in the FEIS.

**11. What about impacts to the Loggerhead Shrike?**

- INDOT will be developing a mitigation plan in cooperation with IDNR to preserve habitat for the loggerhead shrike.

**12. What about the potential for impacts to the Thousand Acre Woods?**

- The project avoids impacts to the Thousand Acre Woods, which is owned by the Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy submitted a comment letter that they still have some concerns that they would like INDOT to consider. INDOT will be meeting with the Nature Conservancy in the coming months to receive their input and make sure their concerns are addressed before the Final EIS is issued.

**IMPACTS ON HOMES AND BUSINESSES**

**13. What about relocations of families and businesses?**

- Any alternative that upgrades existing four-lane routes – in particular US 41 and SR 37 – would involve a significant number of relocations. Approximately 35% of the preferred alternative 3C is on existing four-lane highway routes, mainly along SR 37 between Bloomington and Indianapolis. It is important to note the “Mann Road option” – which would have resulted in a greater number of relocations – has been withdrawn from further consideration and, therefore, the overall number of residential relocations for the preferred alternative will be reduced in the Final EIS.

**14. What about impacts to the Oliver Winery?**

- INDOT will develop avoidance options as well as innovative design techniques that will lessen any potential impact to the Oliver Winery. The goal of these efforts will be to preserve access to the Oliver Winery, so that the winery is not displaced by this project. Similar attention will be given to other potential commercial and residential impacts the project’s route, so that relocations are minimized to the greatest extent possible.

**15. Why was the Mann Road option eliminated?**

- The decision to remove the Mann Road option was based upon the high number of overall residential impacts that would occur along this corridor and due to the higher environmental impacts of this corridor.

**16. How will you minimize impact on the Amish and Mennonite communities around Washington?**

- At this time, a preferred corridor alignment around the City of Washington has not been determined. INDOT and FHWA will be working closely with the Amish and Mennonite communities, the environmental regulatory agencies, and others to review the issues before making a decision about the route around Washington. That decision is expected to be made by the time the Final EIS is issued.

**CONSIDERATION OF OTHER ROUTES**

**17. Did INDOT reconsider the US 41/I-70 alternative, as requested by EPA? Given its lower cost and environmental impact, why wasn't it selected?**

- After receiving EPA's comment letter in early November, INDOT re-examined the US 41/I-70 alternative (known as Alternative 1), including its performance, its environmental impacts, and its cost. This additional review included a comprehensive examination of the US 41/I-70 alternatives in comparison to the five preferred alternatives. The FHWA was actively involved in this review.
- This additional review re-confirmed the findings presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, in which the US 41/I-70 alternative was identified as non-preferred. In particular, INDOT concluded that:
  - The US 41/I-70 Alternative provides some travel time savings between Evansville and Indianapolis – about 12 minutes – but does virtually nothing to improve accessibility in Southwest Indiana as a whole. It also doesn't do much for safety or economic development. And it does nothing to improve access to Crane or Bloomington.
  - The US 41/I-70 Alternative costs close to a billion dollars. It would displace hundreds of homes. It would take more businesses, by far, than any other alternative. It would also take more than a thousand acres of farmland. It is not a low-cost route, nor is it a low-impact route.
- In the end, INDOT concluded that the right transportation decision for the State of Indiana is to select an alternative that not only provides a substantially faster connection between Evansville and Indianapolis, but also greatly improves transportation linkages throughout Southwest Indiana. Alternative 3C serves that critical function: With this route, all of the major population and employment centers in Southwest Indiana will be directly connected by a four-lane highway network.

**18. What happened to the "Hybrid Route" that was suggested by EPA?**

- During the comment period, EPA asked INDOT to consider combining portions of various preferred routes. In particular, EPA suggested considering a hybrid that would have included

portions of US 41 and SR 37 and would have connected both Vincennes and Bloomington.

- The study team took a serious look at the hybrid that EPA proposed, as well as other possible combinations. The study team found that none of these hybrids offered significant overall advantages compared to the existing preferred alternatives. For example, the estimated cost for the EPA Hybrid was over \$ 2 billion.
- INDOT had an obligation to give EPA's comments serious consideration, and has done so. A response to EPA's comment on the hybrid issue will be included in the Final EIS. INDOT has found nothing that would require a Supplemental EIS to be prepared, nor has INDOT found any reason to conduct additional public hearings on the hybrid alternatives.

### **NEXT STEPS**

#### **19. What are the next steps in the process?**

- The identification of a preferred alternative is an important milestone, but it is not the end of the process. In fact, substantial work remains to be done.
- The next major milestone in the study is the publication of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). As part of that process, work will proceed on several fronts. These include:
  - Circulation of materials to the environmental resource agencies outlining the rationale for the selection of the preferred alternative, and coordination with those agencies regarding procedures for moving forward.
  - Preparation of a Biological Assessment (BA) for submittal to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The BA will focus, in particular, on the project's potential impacts to the endangered Indiana bat. Following the BA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will prepare a Biological Opinion (BO). The BO will be included in the FEIS.
  - Pre-application consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Indiana Department of Natural Resources regarding the wetlands permitting for this project. This effort will involve, among other things, a discussion of plans for avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating wetlands impacts of the project.
  - Further consultation regarding historic properties and archeological resources under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
  - Further coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and others regarding the mitigation of impacts on forested lands, including the potential protection and/or-re-forestation of lands within the Hoosier National Forest.

- Further coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management regarding the exact location of the highway in the Patoka area, as well as the potential for mitigating the project's impacts by facilitating the Service's assist in efforts to acquire and protect additional lands within the acquisition boundary of the Patoka Wildlife Refuge.
- Further coordination with local governments (in particular, in Monroe County) regarding land use measures that could be adopted to minimize the impacts of highway-related development on karst terrain.

**20. How long will it take for a Final EIS?**

- It is expected that a Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be issued in mid-to-late 2003, with a final Tier 1 Record of Decision (ROD) issued shortly thereafter.

January 9, 2003