



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

BLOOMINGTON FIELD OFFICE (ES)

620 South Walker Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47403-2121
(812) 334-4261 FAX 334-4273

June 27, 2003

JUN 30 2003

FILED

Mr. Jay Marks
Bernardin Lochmueller & Associates, Inc.
7830 Rockville Road
Indianapolis, Indiana 46214-3105

Project Des. No: 9405230
Road(s): US 31
Waterway: Several
Work Type: 4-lane highway construction on new alignment
County(ies): Marshall and St. Joseph

Dear Mr. Marks:

This letter is in reference to the Interagency Review Meeting and Tour of the US 31 study corridor between US 30 in Marshall County and US 20 in St. Joseph County on May 15, 2003. You requested any additional Agency comments on the draft Purpose and Need and Alternatives discussed at the meeting.

These comments have been prepared under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 661 et. seq.) and are consistent with the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mitigation Policy.

The draft Purpose and Need statement lists 3 purposes: 1) reduce congestion, 2) improve safety, 3) address statewide mobility. The limited information provided on the meaning of a "Statewide Mobility Corridor" and a "Commerce Corridor" indicates that "such corridors have upper level design standards, high-speed and free-flowing conditions, no less than partial access control, and no non-motorized vehicle/pedestrian conflicts". This appears to be redundant with the first 2 purposes of reducing congestion and improving safety. Since US 31 is already designated a "Statewide Mobility Corridor" and a "Commerce Corridor", properly attaining the requirements of this designation may be a sufficient purpose and need, since safety and reduced congestion are an integral part of that designation.

If commuters to South Bend are major users of US 31, a study of origins and destinations should be undertaken to help determine which alternative would best serve their needs; e.g. if they are going downtown or north through town to the University of Notre Dame, constructing the new highway far to the west or far to the east likely would not serve their needs and they would continue to use the existing roadway. The same determination should be conducted for truck traffic, since trucks headed for destinations in Michigan or Elkhart would have different needs to each other and to those going into South Bend.

We understand that 2 additional alternatives have been added to the project study as a result of the May 15, 2003 meeting, one utilizing the general corridor of high tension powerlines west of existing US 31 and one utilizing the abandoned railroad corridor east and west of existing US 31 to the fullest extent possible.

There also need to be one or more alternatives that would connect with US 20 at the existing Ironwood Road interchange. The current lack of any alternatives utilizing this interchange is glaring in its omission. When there was a query during the May 15th tour about the potential use of Ironwood Road as an alternative, the answer was "No, due to significant development in the area". Such a response is unacceptable when the environmental impact analysis has only just begun and a large number of alternatives need to be reviewed without prejudice. If "too much development" is a legitimate reason to dismiss an alternative before it is even seriously evaluated, then the majority of the alternatives presented at the May 15th meeting would also need to be dismissed immediately, particularly those utilizing any portion of existing US 31 north of Roosevelt Road, including the existing US 31/US 20 interchange.

An advantage to commuters to utilizing Ironwood Road is that it is already 4 or 5 lanes north into South Bend from US 20, it provides direct access to Indiana University South Bend, and it provides easy access to downtown and the University of Notre Dame.

We also recommend consideration of an alternative that departs from existing US 31 further south and east than West 4A Road, such as near West 6th Road and Lilac Road, then goes essentially straight north before turning northeast around Pleasant and Riddles Lakes. From there it could follow Alternative G to Roosevelt Road, where it could go west to existing US 31 or east to Ironwood Road.

Based upon the preliminary information available to us, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not support the use of Alternative A, generally parallel to existing Oak Road. This is due to significant natural resources in the vicinity, as presented by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources personnel on May 15th, including Potato Creek State Park. In general, we do not favor any of the alternatives west of existing US 31 because of the natural resources in the area and the more rugged terrain, which would require significant cut-and-fill to construct the highway and its interchanges.

Other comments on the US 31 study corridors, including federally endangered species, remain as stated in our May 2, 2002 letter to the Federal Highway Administration concerning the Federal Register Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposed project. If you have any questions about our comments and recommendations, please call Elizabeth McCloskey at (219) 983-9753.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth S. McCloskey
 Acting
 for Scott E. Pruitt
 Supervisor

cc: Matt Fuller, Federal Highway Administration, Indianapolis, IN
 Jason Randolph, IDEM, Office of Water Management, Indianapolis, IN
 Christie Kiefer, Indiana Division of Water, Indianapolis, IN
 Keith Poole, Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife, Peru, IN
 Hank Huffman, Indiana Division of Nature Preserves, Indianapolis, IN
 Jim Webb, Potato Creek State Park, North Liberty, IN
 Steve Sperry, INDOT, Room N848, Indianapolis, IN
 Virginia Laszewski, USEPA, Region 5, ME-19J, Chicago, IL
 Charlie Simon, Corps of Engineers, Detroit, MI



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

DETROIT DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BOX 1027

DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48231-1027

June 10, 2003

IN REPLY REFER TO

Engineering & Technical Services
Regulatory Office
File No. 96-150-019-0

RECEIVED

JUN 13 2003

BLANK

Kia Gillette
Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates
7830 Roackville Road
Indianapolis, Indiana 46214-3105

Dear Ms. Gillette:

We are writing to follow up on the May 15, 2003 interagency meeting in Plymouth, Indiana. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the purpose and need and preliminary alternatives for proposed improvements to US 31 between South Bend and Plymouth, Indiana. We have considered the information presented at the meeting, written materials forwarded to our office, and in-house resources.

In 1996, we reviewed similar information in response to a request for concurrence on purpose and need and alternatives to be carried forward. A copy of our previous letter is enclosed. The nine alternatives currently presented appear to be substantially the same as those identified in 1996. Our views on the project also follow along the lines of our previous comments. Based on the available information, we offer the following comments.

We concur with the purpose and need for the project with minor reservations. Our reservations center on whether the "statewide mobility corridor" is a legitimate project purpose. Is a "statewide mobility corridor" a planning goal, or are there required standards? As presented, the items mentioned already appear to be addressed by the purpose statements on congestion and safety. If there are standards characteristic of a statewide mobility corridor that are trying to be achieved, these should be clearly identified. Otherwise, this could be eliminated without losing the intent of the project.

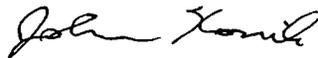
There are wetlands, lakes and streams throughout the project area which may be within the jurisdiction of the Corps of Engineers. Many of the wetlands are concentrated in the northern portion of the project area. Notable wetlands are associated with the glacial features west of US 31 and north of Lakeville. The authority of the Corps of Engineers to regulate the discharge of dredged and/or fill material is contained in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and regulations promulgated pursuant to that Act. Upon further refinement of alternatives, our staff can work with the applicant to identify those waters within Corps' jurisdiction. Any discharges of dredged or fill material into regulated waters of the U.S. would require a Department of the Army permit.

We have considered the preliminary alternatives presented. While a route through the southern part of the study area is not devoid of impacts, the northern portion has difficult social, environmental, and logistical challenges. We do not support carrying Alternative A forward due to its proximity to Potato Creek State Park. The route of Alternative B through the heart of the glacial moraine may also result in unacceptable adverse impacts. Based on previous information, Alternatives C and D appear to have a relatively large impact on wetlands compared to other options. As stated in our previous letter, exploring additional alternatives east of US 31 may be advisable to try and reduce impacts. No options are currently identified between Ironwood and IN 331, east of US 31.

As discussed at the recent meeting, some short-term improvements are currently being planned for US 31. If improvements are currently planned for US 31, this would establish a new baseline. Proposed alternatives should be compared to US 31 with improvements, rather than to US 31 in its current condition. We suggest that wetland delineations be completed when the number of alternatives is narrowed down, typically as part of a draft Environmental Impact Statement. Please keep us advised on the progress of your review.

If you have questions, please contact Charles M. Simon at the above address or telephone (313) 226-2221. Please refer to File Number: 96-150-019-0.

Sincerely,



John Konik
Chief, Permit Evaluation Branch A
Regulatory Office

Enclosure

Copy Furnished
South Bend Field Office

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

DETROIT DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BOX 1027

DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48231-1027

November 22, 1996

IN REPLY REFER TO

Construction-Operations Division
Regulatory Branch
File No. 96-150-019-0A

Steve Cecil, Chief
Division of Pre-Engineering and Environment
Indiana Department of Transportation
100 North Senate Avenue, Room N755
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2249

Dear Mr. Cecil:

We are writing in response to your letter dated October 1, 1996, regarding review of several projects under the Statewide Implementation Agreement for an integrated NEPA/404 process. The list of projects included one within the Detroit District regulatory boundary in Indiana. The proposed U.S. 31 improvement from Plymouth to South Bend, Indiana was scheduled for discussion on purpose and need, and on alternatives to be carried forward.

We have reviewed the information in your letter, along with Early Coordination information supplied by Bernardin, Lochmueller in a letter dated September 13, 1996. Although we were unable to participate in the November 13, 1996 meeting, please accept these comments as our District's position concerning the information presented.

We concur with the purpose and need for the project with some reservations. The purpose could be more clearly defined along the lines of the project, rather than the study of the project. The purpose appears to be to provide improved vehicle travel between Plymouth and South Bend. Although the need for the project mentions safety, information to support safety problems with the existing route is not presented.

The proposed road in this corridor faces numerous social, logistical, and environmental challenges. The alternatives discussed all reflect the complexity of these issues. From our regulatory perspective, all of these alternatives involve considerable impacts to wetlands and waterways. The Existing Upgrade, the alternative with the least estimated wetland impacts at 45 acres, may still cause or contribute to significant degradation due to the size of these impacts. Based on our review of the alternatives, further consideration should be given

to selecting a route which would avoid and minimize the wetland impacts while fulfilling the project purpose. Since there generally are fewer wetlands east of the existing U.S. 31, perhaps additional focus on this area might be productive. A bypass north of Lakeville also is worthy of investigation to avoid the extensive wetland areas northwest of the town. For aid in the evaluation of alternatives, a breakdown of some impacts (i.e. wetlands) by segments would help focus the impact evaluation, and facilitate combination of alternatives to reduce impacts.

We would not object to the elimination of the Far West and Far East alternatives from further consideration, as these options have similar impacts to other alternatives with much higher costs. These alternatives also would not appear to fulfill the project purpose.

The remaining alternatives could be carried forward, but we do not consider this list complete. We hope that further analysis will reveal less damaging alternatives not only on wetlands, but on other social and environmental factors as well.

Should you have any questions, please contact Charlie Simon, Project Manager, at the above address or telephone (313) 226-2222.

Sincerely,

GMM
Gary R. Mannesto
Chief, Regulatory Branch
Construction-Operations Division

Copy Furnished

USFWS
IDNR, S. Jose
IDEM, M. Maupin/H. Keuhne

JK

**Questionnaire for the Indiana Department of Transportation,
Aeronautics Section**

Project No: _____ **Des/Bridge No:** _____

Project Description:

US 31 Corridor from US 30 near Plymouth, IN to US 20 near South
Bend, in Marshall and St. Joseph Counties

Requested By:

Bernadin, Lochmueller, & Associates

Are there any existing or proposed airports within or near the project limits? YES

If yes, describe any potential conflicts with air traffic during or after the construction of the project.

The Plymouth Municipal Airport is located 4041 feet West of US
31 at a point that is approximately one mile North of US 30.

This project may have an impact on air operations at the
Plymouth Municipal Airport depending on the height of equipment
used. Please continue to send correspondence to INDOT
Aeronautics Regarding this project.

This information was furnished by:

Name: Martin J. Blake
Title: Project Manager, INDOT-Aeronautics
Date:

April 25, 2003

RECEIVED

APR 28 2003

BLA-100Y

Mr. Jay Marks
Bernardin Lochmueller & Associates
7830 Rockville Road, Suite C
Indianapolis, IN 46214

Re: U.S. 31 Study
St. Joseph and Marshall Counties

Dear Mr. Marks:

The Transportation Task Force of The Chamber of Commerce of St. Joseph County met on April 24, 2003 to express our opinion on the U.S. 31 Study. The decision of the task force was to recommend that the alternatives be reduced to five, C thru G, for further study.

These five routes are the only routes that meet the performance measures of statewide mobility as proposed in the plan for the following reasons:

1. Routes that deviate from the existing route by several miles will leave significant traffic on the "old" U.S. 31 which will continue to fail the level of service standards.
2. Routes east of the existing U.S. 31 will fail to *"provide safe, free-flowing, high speed connections between the metropolitan areas of the state and surrounding states."* The "performance measure" of the "statewide mobility" component should provide for a high speed connection of U.S. 31 to the Indiana Toll Road and the Michigan segment of U.S. 31.
3. Routes A and B to the west of the existing U.S. 31 should be rejected because of significant "wetland" issues as well as the extra mileage for traffic coming from Mishawaka and Elkhart.

The Commerce Center
401 E. Colfax Ave. Suite 310

P.O. Box 1677

South Bend, IN 46634-1677

Phone: 219.234.0051

Fax: 219.289.0358

www.sjchamber.org

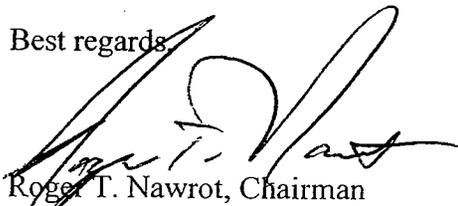
The task force recommends early narrowing of choices for several reasons:

1. Economic development over a significant area of the county is likely to be impacted by an overhang of uncertainty.
2. Individual landowners should know their status as soon as possible.
3. This process has already exceeded project time lines as initially proposed.

As you are aware, the local community has been unanimous in their support for moving forward on this project. The Purpose and Needs as presented are clear and easily support construction of this upgrade to freeway standards. The task force understands the process and time that is required to designate a route for approval by the federal government. However, we also understand that this process can be expedited when there is political agreement.

Considering the economic impact that this project will provide for our community and the state, it is our hope that you will make every effort to show progress in a timely manner. We would be pleased to provide additional information and support whenever necessary.

Best regards,



Roger T. Nawrot, Chairman
Transportation Task Force



CITY OF SOUTH BEND
STEPHEN J. LUECKE, MAYOR
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

APR 28 2003

ELGIN

April 24, 2003

Mr. Jay Marks
Bernardin Lochmueller & Associates
7830 Rockville Road, Suite C
Indianapolis, Indiana 46214

Re: US 31 Freeway Study
St. Joseph and Marshall Counties

Dear Mr. Marks:

It was a pleasure to see you again on April 10, along with INDOT, and the many from the South Bend area who recognize the importance of a freeway from South Bend to Indianapolis. I was unable to attend the evening Purpose and Needs presentation. I wish to put these comments on the record for your consideration as you proceed with evaluation of the environmental impact of the alternatives and select a preferred route.

The Purpose and Needs presented for this project ring true locally as warrants for this project. Safety is listed second in the study, but the people of South Bend and in particular the people who live along the current US 31 view safety improvement as the most important need for this roadway. The map showing crashes on state highways is too densely marked with fatalities from LaPaz to Gilmer Park.

Morning and afternoon traffic on US 31, in Lakeville and onto the Saint Joseph Valley Parkway interchange currently operates at Level of Service E and F. Many years ago congestion was interpreted as a sign of vibrant activity. Like soot from a smokestack, congestion is now considered an indicator of poor planning and misdirected investment.

Statewide mobility is the basic tenet of the state highway system. The original network of state highways was drawn to connect all the county seats and larger towns with the Capitol via a state road. Routes were also chosen to connect to the routes planned by adjoining states. This

Mr. Jay Marks
April 24, 2003
Page 2

mobility is necessary for the economic vitality of all north central Indiana. Rational alignment with a substantially improved US31 in Michigan should be consistent with a recognition that US31 provides an interstate corridor from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada.

The comments heard at the kickoff meeting a year ago and at the public meetings concerning the major investment study in 1997 were unanimous in support of upgrading the corridor. We have also heard that the cloud of uncertainty arising during what seems like endless studies adversely affects decision-making for many in the corridor who need to either buy or sell, or to build or improve, along the corridor. The anxiety for a route decision spreads even to our City where a rebirth of the Ireland Road retail shopping corridor is underway.

The City of South Bend understands the difficulty of your task and INDOT's to provide a safe, uncongested road improving statewide mobility. There is a wide range of topography in the Marshall/Saint Joseph US 31 Corridor. There is a wide range of land use, and there is a wide range in population density. We will not offer advice as to a preferred route at LaPaz and Lakeville. However, at the north end of the corridor we definitely prefer that the US 31 Freeway connect to the Saint Joseph Valley Parkway as near as practical to the current interchange. Alternatives H and I defeat the Need and Purpose goal of Mobility. They add 4.3 miles and 8.7 miles, respectively, to the trip from LaPaz to the existing Parkway interchange with US 31. Alternative A passes through several environmentally sensitive areas. It also passes very close to one of the State Parks system's best used recreation areas (Potato Creek State Park). Traffic noise will detract from that experience. Alternative A will require a new interchange with the Parkway on valuable land used for mint, a rare cash crop that thrives in muck soils. Alternative B is also on and near environmentally sensitive land. Alternatives C thru G meet the Parkway at its existing interchange or within a mile or so. Any of these would satisfy the City's desire for a safe, direct access to the Ireland Road Corridor, now the Erskine Hills shopping district, a Sales Tax Increment Financing District.

We hope you are successful in discerning the best outcome for the State of Indiana. If you need more information from me or the City staff please let me know.

Sincerely,



Stephen J. Luecke
Mayor



County of St. Joseph, Indiana
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

732 COUNTY-CITY BUILDING
227 WEST JEFFERSON BLVD.
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA 46601
TELE (574) 235-9626
FAX (574) 235-5057

DIVISIONS
HIGHWAYS
SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL
BRIDGES
ENVIRONMENTAL

April 10, 2003

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MARK A. DOBSON DIST. 1
BEVERLY D. CRONE DIST. 2
CYNTHIA A. BODLE DIST. 3

TO: Jay Marks – Indianapolis Branch Manager
FROM: Susan D. Al-Abbas – St Joseph County Engineer
RE: US 31 Study comments

COUNTY-ENGINEER
SUSAN D. AL-ABBAS, P.E.

RECEIVED

MAY 02 2003

BLA-1100V

Question 1.

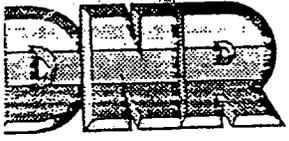
Based on current and future traffic on the 31 corridor, we believe that the purpose and need is not met by considering corridors to the far East or even too far West. When considering these proposed alternatives A-I, what consideration was given to the actual destination of the traffic on this corridor? We do not support the H and I alternatives and are concerned that A and B maybe too far to the west. Also, we are concerned that alternative A is too close to Potato Creek Park and that alternative C is located too close to the old County Landfill.

We prefer that the new route address the current need of the corridor-----not create a new problem and leave the current problem unaddressed. Thus, we believe that the new corridor should stay as close as possible to the existing 31 roadway. Alternatives C, D, E, F and G would accomplish this. But, before any of these corridors are considered further, we believe that the destination study must be completed, if not done so already, and consideration must be given to how each roadway segment would connect to the US 20 by-pass and other roadways. Furthermore, we would like the corridor to allow for future development of Lakeville. This can only occur if the new corridor is moved either east or west of the town.

Our greatest concern is satisfying the purpose and need of the corridor. Supporting traffic and improving safety issues for both State and Local traffic is the utmost importance. Once this roadway is relocated and built, we will become one of the responsible parties in caring for the old 31 roadway. Therefore, we will only support a corridor that addresses the needs.

Question 2.

Without knowing the environmental issues and destination information it is difficult to simply draw a line on a map.



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

PATRICK R. RA

Executive Office
402 W. Washington Street, Rm. C-256
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2748

November 25, 1996

Tom Cervone, Ph.D.
Environmental Manager
Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates, Inc.
Hulman Building, Suite 606
4th and Sycamore Streets
Evansville, IN 47708

RECEIVED

NOV 27 1996

BLA

Re: DNR #6115 - U.S. 31 Corridor Study: Plymouth to South Bend; Marshall and St. Joseph counties, BLA Project #193-0043-OCS

Dear Mr. Cervone:

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources has reviewed the above referenced study in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Page 2 of Chapter 2 of the study states that the study's purpose is "to evaluate various transportation alternatives ... that would reduce traffic congestion on U.S. 31 with minimum impacts to the environment ...". Our agency offers the following comments to assist in achieving this purpose. A letter of concern from a potentially affected landowner is also enclosed for your information.

This proposal will require the formal approval of our agency pursuant to the Flood Control Act (IC 14-28-1) for construction in a floodway. A copy of this letter and any subsequent correspondence(s) should be included with permit application materials.

The study contains adequate documentation of state-listed plant and animal species within the project area. As project planning continues, an analysis of potential impacts upon those species should be conducted and provided for agency review and comment. This should include a detailed, in depth analysis of potential impacts and problems upon rare species, natural communities, the overall natural landscape, and environmental aesthetics for the various alternatives. For clarification purposes, pointed campeloma (an aquatic snail) should be included in the section discussing mussels.

As presented in the study, the Existing Upgrade Alternative appears to involve the least amount of new disturbance to the existing natural landscape. It also appears to be the most beneficial in terms of benefit to cost ratio, net present value, and projected traffic volume. The Near East Alternative appears to be the next best alternative in terms of minimizing impacts to the environment.

The Far Western Alternative and Western Alternative #4 cross the most prominent

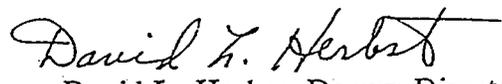
portions of the Maxinkukee Moraine. This area constitutes one of the best examples of glacially formed landscapes in northern Indiana. Prominent features include knolls which rise 50-60 feet above their basins, numerous sloughs, enclosed basins, small lakes, and ponds. Construction of either alternative would result in significant adverse impacts to these features as well as wetland, wildlife, and botanical resources. Although the routes avoid recorded occurrences of state-listed plant and animal species, this area has not been intensely surveyed for these species. Therefore, it is likely that state listed species such as the eastern massasauga and blanding's turtle would be directly impacted. Given the probable impacts to these features and species, our agency opposes these alternatives. We would also oppose the use of Western Option 1, Western Option 2, and Western Option 3; while impacts would be to a lesser degree, they would be significant and adverse.

Staff offers an additional alternative which appears to reduce traffic congestion while minimizing environmental impacts to a greater extent than any of the presented alternatives (see enclosure). We recommend inclusion of this alternative in the study for analysis and possible alignment selection. In addition, a wider right-of-way should be considered to provide for potential expansion to meet future traffic congestion beyond the scope of the current proposal. This could avoid the need to build additional new highway(s). Our agency will withhold recommendation of an appropriate alignment until this alternative has been incorporated into the study.

Regardless of the alternative chosen, the project will impact fish, wildlife, and botanical resources. The following measures should be considered to minimize these impacts. Unavoidable wetland impacts should be mitigated in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding agreed to by the Indiana Department of Transportation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and our agency. Replacement wetlands should be in kind, in the same immediate watershed, and should be protected in perpetuity through deed restriction or conservation easement. Limited access should be addressed to minimize primary and secondary impacts. Wildflowers and native grasses should be utilized (with a maintenance plan) from the roadside ditch to the fence on the outside of the lanes rather than mowing.

We appreciate this opportunity to be of service and apologize for not being able to respond sooner in this matter. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Steve Jose at (317) 232-4080.

Sincerely,


David L. Herbst, Deputy Director
Department of Natural Resources

DLH:SHJ

Enclosure

21201 Kern Rd
South Bend, IN 46614
August 15, 1996

Dear Sir:

The State Highway Department is proposing a limited access highway to replace US31. Their suggested Option 1 in St. Joseph County would go through my property. Their proposed interchange at Kern Road would encompass nearly all of it.

I am writing you to draw attention to the fact that of this 10 acres, 7 acres is Federally Designated Wetlands. The rest is house, drive and railroad elevation. Over an acre of the wetlands consists of tussocks of sedge - the only such I am aware of in this area. It is also home to snakes - including one very large specimen - that are identical to the Smooth Green Snake pictured on the Indiana Endangered Species poster.

This property consists of Rensselaer Loam and Rensselaer Mucky Loam and is home to chimney crawdads, green heron, sensitive fern, blue flag, ironwood/blue beech, skunk cabbage, marsh marigold, monkey flower, great blue lobelia, thoroughwort, and a large variety of dragon flies as well as a plant that looks like the pictures of the endangered swamp pink. (Unfortunately, I have never seen this blooming.)

I wanted to make sure that you were aware of this wetlands habitat before it was too late.

Sincerely,

Jeannine Machowiak

Jeannine Machowiak

Jeannine M. Machowiak
21201 Kern Rd.
South Bend, IN 46614-5042



*Division of Nature Preserves
402 West Washington Room W 267
Indianapolis, In 46204*

BERNARDIN • LOCHMUELLER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

6200 Vogel Road • Evansville, Indiana 47715-4006 • www.blainc.com
Phone 812.479.6200 • Toll Free 800.423.7411 • Fax 812.479.6262

One Source for a World of Solutions

US 31 Plymouth to South Bend Environmental Impact Statement Interagency Meeting and Bus Tour - 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM Plymouth, Indiana May 15, 2003

An Environmental Review Agency meeting was held at the Plymouth Fire House and Visitation Center Conference Room on May 15, 2003. The meeting was held to provide an interactive approach between INDOT and environmental review agencies on regulatory guidance, potential major issues, and touring of preliminary corridors. Those present at the meeting include the following:

Virginia Laszewski, USEPA – Region 5	(laszewski.Virginia@epa.gov)
Tarlochan Bansil, Env., Planning & Engineering – INDOT	(tbansil@indot.state.in.us)
Steve Sperry, Env., Planning & Engineering – INDOT	(ssperry@indot.state.in.us)
Jason Randolph, Section 401 – IDEM	(jrandolp@dem.state.in.us)
Don Abraham, Laporte District – INDOT	(dabraham@indot.state.in.us)
Chris Baynes, INDOT	(cbaynes@indot.state.in.us)
Robert Dirks, FHWA – IN	(robert.dirks@fhwa.dot.gov)
Keith Poole, Fish & Wildlife – IDNR	(kpoole@dnr.state.in.us)
Alysen Dirks, Wife of Robert Dirks	
Charles Simon, Detroit District - Army Corps of Engineers	(charles.m.simon@usace.army.mil)
Elizabeth McCloskey, US Fish & Wildlife Services	(elizabeth_mccloskey@fws.gov)
Hank Huffman, Heritage Program – IDNR	(hhuffman@dnr.state.in.us)
Dave Isley, BLA	(david@blainc.com)
Tom Cervone, BLA	(tcervone@blainc.com)
David Ripple, BLA	(dripple@blainc.com)
Jim Gulick, BLA	(jimg@blainc.com)
Jay Marks, BLA	(jmarks@blainc-indy.com)
Kia Gillette, BLA	(kgillette@blainc-indy.com)
James Mosley, BLA	(mosleyjas@aol.com)
Sara Dyer, Dyer Environmental Services	(dyerenviron@netscape.net)
Neal Sanders, R/W Services	(neal@indy.net)
Linda Weintraut, Weintraut & Associates	(lweintraute@ameritech.net)
Jeff Plunkett, Landmark Archaeological & Env. Services	(jplunkett@landmarkarchaeology.com)
Tom Beard, Landmark Archaeological & Env. Services	(tbeard@landmarkarchaeology.com)
Jim Dittoe, Winning Communities	(Winningcomm@aol.com)

Introduction – US 31 Study Overview

Participants of the meeting signed the attendance sheet and were given a handout packet of information. The meeting began by Tom Cervone introducing Kia Gillette who discussed the purpose of the meeting and briefly reviewed the itinerary for the morning and afternoon sessions. Kia went on to explain the contents of the handout packet to the attendees. The handout packet contained the bus tour itinerary, bus tour map, the draft purpose and need and preliminary alternatives summary, general alternative map (all corridors), general alternative map (individual corridors), aquatic field report (Heston Ditch) and the Federal TES species list by county (Marshall and St. Joseph Counties). Maps presented within the packets include land cover, wetlands/floodplains, contours, St Joseph Aquifer, prime farmland, hydric soils, muck soils and a map of Potato Creek State Park. Exhibits displayed at the meeting included aerial photo maps of the study area, general alternative maps (all corridors) and general alternative maps (individual corridors).

Jim Dittoe, Public Outreach Coordinator for the project, introduced himself, welcomed all present, and thanked the agency representatives for participating in the meeting and bus tour. He briefly described his role in the project and then asked the group to introduce themselves. After the introductions, Jim introduced Dr. Dave Ripple who proceeded to give a power point presentation on the US 31 EIS Study. Topics discussed during Dr Ripple's project overview included the purpose, progress to date, and the overall purpose and need to reduce traffic congestion, improve safety and address statewide mobility.

Dr. Ripple identified segments and intersections along US 31 which presently fail to meet INDOT minimum design standards for Level of Service (LOS). He also identified crash rates exceeding statewide rates.

The following questions and answers were entertained during his presentation:

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, "Why do your alternatives start north of West 4A Road?"

A. Dr. Ripple responded that the portion of US 31 from US30 to Michigan Road is a four-divided arterial with partial access control and wide median that can accommodate forecasted future traffic. In contrast, the portion of US 31 from Michigan Road to the US20 Bypass lacks access control, has little or no median, cannot accommodate forecasted future traffic, and currently experiences serious peak-hour congestion. Jim Gulick added that the portion of US 31 from US30 to Michigan Road had a 60-foot median and could be easily upgraded to freeway standards on the existing alignment by the addition of grade separations at cross roads; whereas, the facility north of US30 with little or no median passing through small towns could not be as easily improved. Virginia asked if improvements to US 31 south of US30 were being examined. Jim Gulick responded not at this time because US 31 south of US30 also had partial access control with a wide median and appeared adequate for future traffic.

Q. Virginia Laszewski and Robert Dirks asked, "Are there particular times associated with peak hours, commuting concerns and travel time congestion?"

A. David Ripple responded that congestion corresponded with morning and evening peak-hours. Tarlochan Bansji replied that INDOT's Standard Design Manual dictates those standards. Virginia asked that applicability of public transit to the corridor and the potential of transit to relieve congestion be addressed in the DEIS.

Q. Elizabeth McCloskey asked, "Are INDOT's committed projects such as 5th lane and intersection improvements taken into consideration during the LOS projections?"

A. Dr. Ripple replied that committed projects were not included at this stage of the study process. However, the addition of turn lanes or traffic signals would have little effect on through movement capacity, and would not be sufficient to address future traffic needs on US 31.

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, "Do we include intersection traffic concerns in the study?"

A. Dr. Ripple replied Yes. We study both signalized and unsignalized intersections. He stated the focus is primarily on traffic signals, but noted the number of driveways coupled with traffic signals and their frequency impacts the capacity and speed by which traffic may flow on existing roadways.

Q. Charles Simon asked, “From a safety standpoint, is the area of US 31 between Lakeville and US 20 considered urban or rural as it relates to crash rates?”

A. Dr. Ripple replied that US 31 is functionally classified as a rural arterial and should be compared to facilities classified likewise statewide. Chris Baynes suggested that INDOT conduct a review to ensure that the appropriate classification applies and to coordinate this review with Robert Dirks.

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, “ Will measurable objectives be available for the third need, statewide mobility and will these objectives be the same as identified for the needs of congestion and safety?” She also questioned the statewide mobility as a need for the project.

A. Dr. Ripple replied Yes, measurable objectives will be available and every effort will be made to avoid double counting of objectives.

Dr. Ripple went on to discuss the Statewide Mobility Corridor and the Commerce Corridor policies and objectives as described in the INDOT Long Range Plan. He reviewed the three project goals, the associated performance measures, and explained how US 31 fails to meet the policy objectives for the Statewide Mobility Corridor and the Commerce Corridor. Dr. Ripple discussed the performance measures for evaluating project goal achievement. Upon request, he provided the definitions for vehicle travel miles (VTM) and vehicle travel hours (VTH). He also made distinctions between the two and provided examples for each. Dr. Ripple concluded this overview with discussion on the Statewide Mobility Corridor and Commerce Corridor designation and the associated performance measures of increase vehicle speeds reduce travel time and reduce pedestrian conflicts. During the discussion of the purpose and need and the performance measures, a comment was made that it would be helpful to rank or score the alternatives by the performance measures.

Overview of Preliminary Alternatives

Dr. Ripple then asked Jim Gulick to present an overview of the nine preliminary “build” alternatives. Jim discussed the commonly shared characteristics of all nine alternatives. He identified the alternatives, which were labeled A through I and extended from west to east. Jim stated the alternatives were based on the INDOT 1997 Major Investment Study (MIS). He pointed out where each corridor shared a common southern terminus. Jim went on to discuss the unique characteristics and alignment of each individual alternative. Characteristics identified for each alternative included their starting points, direction, how they parallel US 31, their relationship to Lakeville and LaPaz, and where each alternative ends. Jim concluded his presentation by encouraging the group to review the exhibits situated around the room and to ask the consultants any questions they may have.

Hank Huffman from the IDNR Heritage Program disseminated a map and a report of the study area to the group. He briefly discussed the contents of the report and the findings from the latest review of the study area. He also explained the map’s legend and the corresponding areas on the map. Hank stated that that the Potato Creek State Park was concerned with the proximity of the western most alternative. Tom Cervone concluded that the intent of the meeting and bus tour was to promote productivity by sharing comments, providing an exchange of informational materials and essentially, and to have an enjoyable day. The morning session began at 9:30 AM and ended at 11:15 AM.

US 31 - Plymouth to South Bend Bus Tour

Following the meeting, the group boarded the bus at 11:30 AM to begin the tour of the nine preliminary alternatives. The tour followed the route outlined on the tour map provided within the handout packet. Some areas of interest discussed before lunch were the Yellow River crossing with bridge and highway design for the first 4 miles, muck soils in the project, socioeconomic implications in going through La Paz and Lakeville, fishes in Heston Ditch, a discussion on La Ville High School and the Lakeville Bog, and lastly, cemeteries, topography and older structures (including barns) along the corridors. The Bus Tour in Marshall County and a small portion of St. Joseph County lasted from 11:30 AM to 12:50 PM.

The group had lunch at the Potato Creek State Park (Whispering Winds Pavillon) from 12:50 PM to 1:30 PM. During lunch, Jim Webb (Property Manager) and Tim Cordell (Interpretive Naturalist) provided the group information on the park and answered questions on a variety of topics. The Potato Creek State Park and IDNR representatives expressed concern regarding the noise, lighting, and roadside run-off impacts to the Park that would come from a new road. Alternative A was of particular concern because of its close proximity. Mr. Webb also noted the high number of vehicle/deer collisions in the vicinity of the Park, and that this could be a problem for a new road in this area. The Swamp Rose Nature Preserve was also identified on the northeast corner of the Park. It contains the New Oak Bog (possibly a fen). They also reported on the occurrence or not of a number of federal and state listed species. Similarly, they discussed the prairies in the area and how they are burning to maintain them, along with the restoration of some 19 wetlands in the area. The group thanked both Jim and Tim, and returned to the bus for the second half of the bus tour.

The second half of the bus tour included the section of the alternatives in St. Joseph County. Areas of interest were Swamp Rose Nature Preserve and the Potato Creek State Park, agricultural impacts, new development, relocations (which included a comparison of the last mile of Corridors H and I), socioeconomic impacts along US 31 in the urban section of South Bend, the St. Joseph Sole Source Aquifer, potential Environmental Justice issues, Wharton Lake, Catfish Lake, geological features, and others. Linda Weintraut discussed an old African American Settlement on Oak Road between Park and Osborne Streets. She also identified a number of National Register homes along Sumption Trail.

In the vicinity of Woodland, Jeff Plunkett from Landmark Archaeology gave a brief talk on the history of the federally recognized Indian Tribes. He stated some tribes may be found in the State of Michigan and may have significance and/or potential interest in the project. He also related natural features to the probability of archaeological sites. Hank Huffman indicated there might be a "Glacier Moraine" extending through the study area north of Roosevelt Road and west of Locust Road. This notable geologic feature may well be what is known as a "kame." Hank also discussed the possible location of "Pine Station" which once existed on the old abandoned railroad track near a possible wetland area.

The following questions were asked during the tour of the nine alternatives:

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, "Are there any new or additional interchanges proposed for the area of existing alignments along US 31 before West 4A Road?"

A. Jim Gulick indicated that there are no new interchanges proposed for the area.

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, “ Has anyone checked with the NRCS for soils categories such as prior converted versus farmed wetlands and are there any or potential impacts or associated mitigating concerns?”

A. Yes. Kia Gillette has contacted this agency and will work with them on use of their digitized soil maps and the completion of AD 1006 forms(a form completed in coordination with the NRCS in order to determine impacts to farmland due to a project, it is not specifically associated with prior converted/farmed wetlands).

Q. Is the abandoned railroad portion of the corridor owned by the railroad or is it privately owned?

A. While current ownership of the abandoned railroad bed may vary with location, most abandoned railroad beds have reverted to abutting property owners.

Q. Hank Huffman asked, “What research exists on the historical significance and natural history of Pine Station?”

A. If Alternative A were selected INDOT would avoid the Pine Station area. The study team will research this concern with appropriate staff and agencies.

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, “ What are the State of Indiana designated uses for the ditches and streams within the study area, and are they meeting those uses and if not, why not?”

A. This question requires a thorough literature and appropriate coordination with a number of environmental review agencies. Such information is forthcoming.

Q. Virginia Laszewski inquired, “Has the team looked for alternatives in the areas north of Kern Road between US 31 and SR 331?”

A. Jim Gulick replied that a lot of development exists in areas north of Kern Road and would make it difficult to place an interchange between SR 331 and US 31.

Q. Virginia Laszewski inquired as to the potential use of Ironwood Road as an alternative.

A. Jim Gulick answered No due to significant development in the area.

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked, “Does South Bend have a bus service?”

A. David Ripple said yes. The organizational ability to extend bus service down the US 31 corridor and the extent to which such service would relieve congestion will be addressed in the DEIS.

Q. Virginia Laszewski asked about the kinds of concerns associated with aligning alternates along power lines? If possible, a corridor alternative adjacent to an existing powerline ROW could reduce forest and wetland fragmentation.

A. Chris Baynes replied, “INDOT have undertaken such projects in the past, but there are a lot of issues such as the high cost associated with locating power lines. The location of alternatives adjacent to power lines will be investigated and addressed in the DEIS.