

From WashTennKyNevDOT to INDOT?

When the Seymour District's Bill Read, Ryan Cox, Joe Middeler and Jerry Hoover get together, they represent INDOT and a whole lot more. They also exemplify WashTennKyNevDOT. Say what?

The four carry forth experiences from the departments of transportation at, respectively, Washington, Tennessee, Kentucky and Nevada while working to improve INDOT.

"We are blessed to have four distinguished employees in our district who came from other DOTs," said Seymour District Deputy Commissioner Tony McClellan. "Those experiences add great value to make our district, and INDOT as a whole, better."

Here are their stories.



Seymour District employees who came from other state DOTs include (from left) Bill Read (Washington), Ryan Cox (Tennessee), Joe Middeler (Kentucky) and Jerry Hoover (Nevada).

Bill Read, Utility and Railroad Engineer

After growing up in Union City in Randolph County and graduating from Purdue University, Read got married in 1969. One week after the wedding, the new couple headed to Washington state, where Read began working at the Washington State DOT (WSDOT).

"Oh, what an exciting time it was," said Read. "We were building the original interstate system."

Read was stationed in Ellensburg, in the middle of the state where I-90 intersects with I-82. He started out designing small structures for I-90 and its frontage roads over Snoqualmie Pass through the Cascade Mountain Range. After working in design, he moved on to a survey crew, then to construction, working on two I-90 bridges. One, at the top of Snoqualmie Pass, featured 10-by-10 cast-in-place box beams. The other bridge, west of the pass, was a 750-foot, two-span steel-girder.

Another project involved the construction inspection and staking of a 15-mile section of I-82. This project was the southern half of a then-new 30-mile section of I-82 between Ellensburg and Yakima.

“It was located in the high desert, with sagebrush and rattlesnakes,” said Read. “I worked as an inspector, doing compaction tests on the grade and concrete testing for the pavement.”

Washington has 39 counties to Indiana’s 92.

“I lived in Kittitas County, which is 100 miles wide,” said Read. “Washington has mountains, canyons and deserts, with dry weather east of the Cascades and wet weather west of it. The different terrains and weather created survey and design challenges.”

Read shakes his head. He can’t believe that was nearly 50 years ago.



Bill Read makes a presentation during a technical session at Purdue Road School in 2016.

“For surveying, we used transits, levels, chains and more to collect field information for design,” said Read. “In construction, we used laths and hubs to control the grade. To control the paving operations, we used blue tops, which were 2-by-2 wood hubs that were painted blue on top. These are much different than our methods used today.”

Read continued: “We ran survey lines through the forest and over rock slides covered with vine maple. The vine maple was so thick at times that we could clear enough to survey only 100 feet in a day. We also surveyed on forest duff, which is a collection of pine needles and cones that could be as much as 5 feet deep. That was like surveying on a waterbed. It was a lot of work, but it was great to be a part of transportation history at that time.”

Read, though, is clearly not stuck in the past.

He left WSDOT in 1972 for a long and varied career, mostly in Indiana. After a stint as a design engineer for an Ohio consulting firm, he worked for a contractor in Union City as an estimator, bidder and building designer, before performing those same duties for a larger construction company in Fort Wayne. He received his professional engineering license and started his own firm, continuing to estimate and design buildings. AECON Inc. purchased his engineering firm and hired Read as vice president of sales with some responsibility for the design and management of road and bridge projects. He then became a sales representative for an Indianapolis consulting firm, and then an engineer for the Scott County Highway Department.

INDOT hired Read in 2007. He began as the Seymour District’s design manager before taking on positions of consultant services engineer, project manager, and now utility and railroad engineer.

“The real pull for me to come to INDOT was the opportunity to help guide young engineers in the design process and in their careers,” said Read, who currently lives in Columbus, Ind. “I believe that all of my combined experiences of designing, surveying, and working in construction have given me the background to meet the challenges of dealing with the projects that INDOT works on. My sales experience has been helpful in communicating well with those I work with both inside and outside INDOT.”

Ryan Cox, Area Engineer

A native of central Kentucky, Cox received an athletic scholarship to play baseball at the University of Alabama-Huntsville, where he majored in engineering. Within six months after graduation, Cox was hired in January 2006 in the hydraulics section of the structures division at the Tennessee DOT (TDOT) headquarters in Nashville.

Among other duties, he was responsible for the hydraulic design of items such as bridges, culverts and channels that impacted midsized streams.

“Since I was stationed at TDOT’s central office location in the big city of Nashville, and most of my work took place within the small confines of a cubicle, I was ready for a career change of scenery,” said Cox. “Coupled with my wife being a New Albany, Ind., native and that we were accustomed to a small-town, country-like setting growing up, we decided to plant our roots in Indiana after the birth of our second child. We live out in the country in Floyd County.”

INDOT hired Cox in December 2013 as a Seymour District project engineer in construction, which allowed Cox to work outdoors more.

“Coming from the small town of Campbellsville, Ky., I have always been an avid outdoorsman, so I feel fortunate being able to spend a portion of my workdays outside the office,” said Cox, INDOT’s area engineer for Clark, Floyd, Harrison and Washington counties since August 2014.

Differences between TDOT and INDOT include the number of regions (four vs. six) and pay.

“This may come as a shock to many INDOT employees, but some DOTs, such as TDOT, are paid quite a bit less in general regarding various job classifications,” said Cox. “As an experienced professional engineer, that was a big factor in deciding to consider a position at INDOT.”

However, Cox is grateful for his time in Tennessee.

“Being involved in the earlier design phases of projects at TDOT has greatly benefited me regarding my daily construction tasks at INDOT,” said Cox. “That experience has enabled me to review projects from multiple perspectives in constructability reviews, meaning I catch more errors or make more suggested improvements to project plans and other contract documents before the project gets let.”

Cox is a fan of Major League Baseball’s Chicago Cubs and, of course, college basketball’s University of Kentucky.

“Joe Middeler and I are both from Kentucky, so we have to stick together and cheer for the Wildcats while being surrounded by Hoosier and Boilermaker fans,” said Cox.

Cox praised his coworkers by saying: “They are all hardworking, knowledgeable individuals always willing to help one another. They are the type of people who make you look forward to coming to work.”

Joe Middeler, Area Engineer

Before arriving at INDOT in May 2012, Middeler spent 12 years at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) — four as a co-op student while attending the University of Louisville, where he

received bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering, followed by eight years as a full-time engineer.

At the KYTC, Middeler started as an engineer in training and progressed to a section engineer, which is similar to an area engineer at INDOT, except section engineers supervise maintenance, operations and construction employees instead of just construction workers.

"Because there are 12 districts in Kentucky and six here, the areas of coverage were much smaller," said Middeler. "My workload at INDOT is greater, which I enjoy because I like to keep busy. At the KYTC, I didn't really enjoy having to also supervise some maintenance and operations employees. My interest has always been in construction, so I am happy that's my role at INDOT."

Middeler was stationed at a field office in New Castle, Ky., about 45 minutes northeast of Louisville. He said his experience at the KYTC has helped him at INDOT.

"I had been involved with many different contracts and dealt with a wide variety of contractors, which was great preparation for the situation here," said Middeler.

Middeler grew up in Bedford, Ky., 12 miles south of Madison, Ind. His wife is a Hoosier native, and she did not want to live in Kentucky.

"The answer to that situation was that we live in Indiana," said Middeler. "We live in North Vernon. I have really enjoyed my time in Indiana and plan to stay. My parents still live in Bedford, Ky., about an hour away. That has been a transition, as previously I was five minutes away from them."

Jerry Hoover, Right-of-Way Services Manager

With his 10-gallon hat (worn outdoors only) and western roots, Hoover is of the belief that "once a cowboy, always a cowboy."

Hoover arrived at INDOT in June 2016 after a wildly successful and colorful past out west.

He graduated from high school in Oakdale, Calif., at age 16, bypassing college for a job as an architect/mechanical drafter for a consulting firm two hours away in Santa Rosa. He studied for his General Engineering Contractor license and started his own California construction company at age 24, specializing in the utility industry.

"We installed buried fiber cables throughout the United States, including those at the Naval Air Station Fallon, a desert training base that's home to the Naval Fighters Weapons School, also known as TOPGUN, as in the 1986 movie starring Tom Cruise," said Hoover. "While specializing in fiber optics and communications, we also constructed numerous other utilities like power, water, and gas lines."

By 1996, with business still booming, Hoover had saved enough money to sell his business and semi-retire in his mid-30s in — ironically — Fallon, Nev., the home of TOPGUN. He purchased a hay ranch in Fallon, maintaining a herd of 750 female goats and selling 4,000 meat goats per year.

Because of Hoover's previous work in Fallon from 1994 to 1996, county government officials knew him well. Churchill County has the only county-owned telephone company in the United States, and officials made him an offer he couldn't refuse as the county's utility manager. About 10 years later, in 2006, the Nevada DOT (NDOT) called, appointing him as statewide right-of-way assistant chief.

“I drove about 45 minutes to Carson City, where NDOT had a 10-seat Cessna Citation jet that I’d fly in daily to job sites,” said Hoover. “Nevada is a huge state, and the plane was a very viable method of transportation. We had two headquarters — one in Carson City and the other in Las Vegas.”

After a 2008 divorce, he met, as Hoover describes, “the lady that God made for me, my Eve,” and married her in 2016. She’s from Corydon, Ind., about an hour from Seymour. The Hoosier state beckoned.

“I guess I was destined to come here,” said Hoover. “I went from NDOT to INDOT, which sounds almost the same. Ironically, both offices are located on U.S. 50.”

After arriving in 2016, though, Hoover had a rough transition after purchasing a ranch perched on the hills overlooking Corydon. The thickly wooded, rolling terrain of southern Indiana made him claustrophobic, as he was used to seeing the horizon for miles. Also, the humidity affected him; he suffered from heatstroke the first summer and had to learn how to acclimate to his new home state.

“We are fortunate to have Jerry on our INDOT team,” said Seymour District Capital Program Management Director Chris Wahlman, Hoover’s supervisor. “His past experience working in a senior leadership role for NDOT brings a fresh perspective to INDOT, and has raised the bar for our right-of-way services section.

Jerry fosters a culture that embraces innovation and takes a broader look at other DOT practices to find better ways of delivering great service and achieving results.”



Jerry Hoover wears his cowboy hat outside the Seymour District administrative building.

Wahlman said Hoover’s presence has affected his own professional outlook.

“We talked about the differences between NDOT and INDOT, and Jerry mentioned that out west, with Silicon Valley and the technology sector, there was a natural culture of innovation that spilled over into other areas of the economy, including government service,” said Wahlman. “He noticed that in the Midwest, with our strong manufacturing base, that the manufacturing culture/way of thinking spilled over into our processes. In a way, we see this in specialized functional groups and ‘silos’ that we work in. We sometimes process things in a linear fashion, while tending to stick to tried-and-true methods. It really opened my eyes to some of the reasons we do what we do, and broadened my horizons on what can be possible if we look outside our organization for best practices.”

The strengths of INDOT are not lost on Hoover, though. He said, “INDOT has a diverse, amazing pool of knowledge with impressive longevity.”

In his spare time, Hoover enjoys hunting and house remodeling. He landed a 33-point buck in Corydon last fall with a bow and arrow in Harrison County, qualifying for the Indiana Deer Hunters Association (IDHA) Hoosier Record Buck Program.