



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
100 North Senate Avenue
Room N755
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2228
(317) 232-5533 FAX: (317) 232-0238
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FRANK O'BANNON, Governor
CRISTINE M. KLIKA, Commissioner

Writer's Direct Line
(317) 233-4675

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I-69 PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT DETAILS IMPORTANT TRANSPORTATION AND ECONOMIC NEEDS IN SOUTHWEST INDIANA

INDIANAPOLIS – The I-69 study's draft Purpose and Need Statement identifies very clearly the need for an improved connection between Evansville and Indianapolis. The lack of regional accessibility and continuing economic stress in rural southwest Indiana are major themes in the draft statement posted today on the project Web site.

A standard part of all transportation studies conducted under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Purpose and Need Statement evaluates the need and defines basic goals for I-69 from Evansville to Indianapolis. The draft Purpose and Need Statement and a separate executive summary are available on the study Web site (www.I69indyevn.org) or by calling 877-INDY-EVN (877-463-9386).

“We examined transportation and economic needs in Southwest Indiana. This valuable information provides a solid foundation for defining the project goals and screening of potential I-69 alternatives,” said Cristine M. Klika, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT).

The transportation needs analysis determined the following:

- **Evansville to Indianapolis Linkage:** Evansville residents have the least efficient connection to Indianapolis of any major city in Indiana.
- **Regional Accessibility:** Southwest Indiana as a whole has a much lower level of accessibility to employment opportunities, medical institutions, airports and population centers than any other part of Indiana.
- **Congestion:** Overall, congestion is not a major problem on the highway network in Southwest Indiana, when compared to the rest of the State. However, there are some highly congested highway segments within Southwest Indiana.
- **Safety:** Overall, safety levels in rural counties of Southwest Indiana are worse than safety levels in rural counties elsewhere in the State. In addition, several counties and several individual highway segments in Southwest Indiana have accident rates that are significantly higher than the statewide average.

The economic needs analysis determined the following:

- **Economic Stress:** Twelve of the 19 rural counties in Southwest Indiana are rated by the Rural Development Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as “stressed.” The three most stressed counties in the state are all in Southwest Indiana. In reaching this conclusion, the USDA found the following:
 1. **Poverty:** Ten of the state’s 20 counties with the highest poverty rates are in Southwest Indiana.
 2. **Unemployment:** Five of the state’s eight counties with the highest unemployment rates are in Southwest Indiana.
 3. **Household Income:** Eleven of the state’s 14 counties with the lowest household income levels are in Southwest Indiana.
- **Population and employment growth rates:** These rates in Southwest Indiana – and in Indiana as a whole – have lagged significantly behind the national averages over the past 30 years.
- **Economic Growth:** A panel of economic development specialists from the Council on Urban Economic Development (CUED) found that one important factor restricting economic growth in Southwest Indiana is the inadequacy of the highway network. The CUED panel found that improvements to the highway network have significant potential to enhance long-term economic growth prospects in the region. CUED is a national association of economic development specialists with expertise in both urban and rural development issues.

Based on the results of the needs analysis and federal and state policy decisions, the draft Purpose and Need Statement identified ten goals for the proposed I-69 extension. The ten project goals are grouped into three categories:

- Strengthening the highway transportation network in Southwest Indiana
- Improving opportunities for economic development in Southwest Indiana
- Supporting completion of I-69 as a national and international trade corridor

“The draft Purpose and Need Statement is a work in progress. As always, we welcome comments and input from the public at this important point in the I-69 study,” added Klika.

The draft Purpose and Need Statement released today will be the focus of the next round of public involvement meetings, set for:

- Martinsville: Monday, May 7, Martinsville High School, 1360 E. Gray St. 6:00 pm to 9:30 pm
- Oakland City: Tuesday, May 8, Wood Memorial High School, 943 S. Franklin St. 6:00 pm to 9:30 pm
- Sullivan: Wednesday, May 9, Sullivan High School, 902 N. Section St. 6:00 pm to 9:30 pm

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CONTACT: Roger Manning, INDOT Office of Communications, (317) 233-4675