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# PROTECT OUR WOODS

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## Evansville Highway State Officials Suppress Facts

*by Bob Klawitter*

The Indiana Department of Transportation may be guilty of illegal contracting and hiding important information from the public. The Environmental Impact Statement required for the Evansville highway is supposed to be an impartial report. But research by Tom Tokarski of Citizens for Appropriate Rural Roads (CARR) has revealed biases and cover-up.

Tokarski has uncovered an internal DOT document showing Indiana highway officials believe that the new highway would save only eight minutes of travel time over the existing route--I-70 and US 41 past Terre Haute. On a billion dollar highway, each minute saved would cost taxpayers \$125 million. Officials do not expect this information to appear in the final report, "given the political nature of the project."

## Economic Damage to Terre Haute

Upgrading the I-70/US 41 corridor would encourage economic development at Terre Haute. But the new route from Bloomington to Evansville

would divert traffic from this already developed area, encouraging development in rural areas of Greene, Davies, Pike, and Gibson Counties instead. Thus the decision to build a new highway is clearly a political decision to economically favor one part of the State over another. Surprisingly, a study by highway promoters agrees.

**The Mid-Continent Highway (I-69)**, a report commissioned by The Southwestern Indiana Regional Highway Coalition admits: "a good portion of the economic impact involves firms relocating to a new better location--overall demand and output for the nation is only marginally affected." This report argues that relocating jobs is good for the favored area: "the redistribution of employment that can result from the construction of a new transportation system may be desirable, even if it comes at expense to areas where those jobs might otherwise be located."

According to CARR, State Senator Maurice Doll, whose 39th District includes Terre Haute, is considering introducing a bill in the State Legislature prohibiting the State from spending any more money on the new highway. Senator Doll's bill should get support from many other Senators whose constituents will have to pay the cost of relocating jobs away from their cities. Legislators representing ethnic minorities in

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Drawing by Peggy Sue Howard

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metropolitan areas of northern and central Indiana have special cause for concern.

### Racist Economic Policy

The Hudson Institute's 1991 study, *The Future of Southern Rural Indiana*, reveals a racist bias behind the relocation of industry and jobs to southern rural areas. David Reed, who wrote both the Hudson Institute and I-69 studies, emphasizes the white, ethnically British character of the population of rural southern Indiana, where less than one per cent of residents are black. Reed claims the rural southern work force "is highly regarded for both its work ethic and its trainability -- products of what we have called the 'cultural capital' of the region." Yet more than one third of this southern white population have not graduated from high school, and only 10% have college degrees. Some corporate personnel managers report confidentially that they have a hard time finding manageable employees among the often fiercely independent southern Indiana rural white population.

The truth is that southern rural populations will also be damaged-- by dispossession, pollution, and the destruction of their farms, forests, caves, wetlands, and rural communities and life-styles.

### Biased Consultants

Tokarski found that DOT officials were planning to hire Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates of Evansville to prepare the Environmental Impact Statement, without seeking competitive bids from other environmental consulting firms. Bernardin,

Lochmueller employees have revealed their company's bias by vigorously promoting the Evansville to Bloomington route at public meetings. DOT is now letting competitive bids, postponing completion of the study until at least late 1993 or early 1994.

Meanwhile, DOT has been reluctant to provide more information requested by Tokarski under the Freedom of Information Act. The State's reluctance suggests that further improprieties and suppressed facts may be hidden in State files.



Intermittent forest stream

photo by Tom Dustin

