



PROTECT OUR WOODS

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INDOT Destroys Lives Orange County Citizens Unite to Fight Unnecessary Road Building

Paoli citizens have been working hard over the past five years to overcome business losses incurred from the new Wal-Mart Super Center located just outside the Paoli Square. Part of this recovery was a project to renovate the downtown streets, and make it more comfortable for pedestrians.

At the same time, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) along with state representative Jerry Denbo and the French Lick-based 37/145 Association have been planning a road building project that would hurt local businesses, and have dire effects on the social, economic, and environmental fabric of Paoli, Orange County, as well as other parts of southern Indiana.

This road project is called the 37/145 Connector Road, which includes three different projects:

1. An \$11 million, 2.7 mile bypass around the northwest of Paoli. Half of this road would follow the Indian Boundary Road, a country lane just two miles west of town off of State Road 150/56 West. The other half would be a new, cross-terrain highway ending between 800 and 1,000 feet south of the Paoli Airport off of State Road 37 North. Four properties would be directly affected, while over many families' lives would be irrevocably changed forever. Nearly 118 locally-owned businesses would be bypassed.
2. An upgrade of 37 North from the Paoli Square to Mitchell, and 150/56 West to French Lick from a two-lane state road to either a super-2 or four-lane highway.
3. The extension of State Road 145 (SR 145) from Eckerty in Crawford County to Interstate 64 in Perry County, already in early planning phase, will rip through one of the most scenic rural regions of Indiana, at a cost of \$52 million. (See associated story following.)

Bypass Not Needed

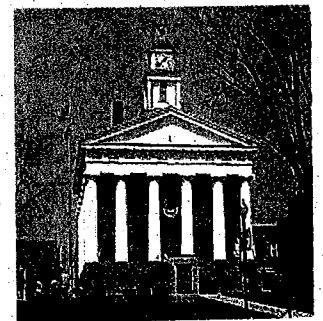
INDOT's stated purpose and need for these projects is to alleviate congestion on the Paoli Square, and complete Indiana's strategic plan to link people from Bedford and Bloomington to I-64 and Tell City. This is even though INDOT's own traffic plans show traffic on the Paoli Square as decreasing from 1996 to 2000. No studies revealing the need for this strategic linking have been released. To date, INDOT has not given citizens one piece of paper to prove that we indeed have a real purpose or need for these roads. An open records request filed on March 4, 2003 is still pending with INDOT's attorneys.

Despite INDOT'S claims about connection, safety, and congestion, the real reason for building this major arterial highway is to spur industrial, commercial and residential development throughout Indiana's most forested and rural area, taking the last area of this caliber away from Hoosiers forever. The proposed riverboat casino in French Lick is at the heart of this commercial development.

The citizens of Paoli, however, are organizing against the destruction of their homes and community. Business owners who depend on through traffic do not want to be bypassed, and taxpayers see the bypass as a draw for sprawl and strip mall development, and an exchange of locally owned business revenue to outside-owned corporations. People who live along the road do not want to exchange their quiet, rural lifestyles for a highway with no benefits. A coalition, referred to as Orange Countians for Appropriate Rural Roads (OCARR) was recently formed to help fight this ill-conceived road building and fight for better maintenance of local roads.

About two years ago, INDOT held a public information meeting at the Paoli High School. Although rumors have been floating around the community for years, it was there that most citizens first learned of the agency's plans to build this bypass. The majority of the people at this first meeting were outraged at this proposal, and asked INDOT and state representative Jerry Denbo to reconsider. INDOT refused to answer any questions publicly that night, and the citizens were ignored.

This January a quick search of the INDOT web page revealed that this bypass project was not dead. In fact, INDOT had allocated \$1.2 million to be paid to their consultants Butler, Fairman



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& Seufert, Inc. of Indianapolis for preliminary study and engineering.

We quickly put a small notice in the Paoli newspaper, and advertised a public meeting to discuss the bypass. We also put flyers in mailboxes of all people who would be directly affected by the road, as well as all the businesses that would be bypassed. Over 60 people showed up at the Orange County Complex that night.

We decided to host two larger public meetings the next few weeks, and invited all of our elected officials: local, regional, state and national, as well as INDOT and Federal Highway Administration managers. In February, we met in the Throop Elementary School. Nearly 90 people were in attendance, as well as state senator Becky Skillman, state representative Jerry Denbo, and Paoli town council member Bob Gilliatt. Everyone got a chance to give comments to Larry Gillian, a local resident and traffic engineer who presented an alternative to the INDOT bypass plan, to keep traffic on the Paoli square and alleviate the perceived congestion. Larry's alternative would create an upgraded roundabout by eliminating a traffic light, shifting some parking off the Paoli square, clearly segregating lanes, and creating a new one-way street.

The next week, Jerry Denbo hosted a meeting in the Paoli High School auditorium for Orange County residents and INDOT managers. Nearly 100 people attended and over one dozen spoke out against the bypass at that meeting. One person spoke for it.

The meeting went well until INDOT once again refused to publicly answer any questions, and avoided discussions about timetables and other issues. When asked about the effect this bypass would have on the area's businesses and rural character, one INDOT manager answered that she wished she had a crystal ball to see into the future, but that INDOT did not know. One of the managers laughed during her one-minute presentation. Due to the serious nature of losing one's home and/or business, the humor was not appreciated. One manager threw on her coat and threatened to leave the room when a resident voiced his concern about the lack of trust he had in the process. Is this the type of public participation Hoosiers want to live by?

As far as we know, INDOT is in the process of developing an environmental assessment for the bypass portion of this project, which will be released and available for public comment late this summer. The proposed plan to upgrade of State Roads 150/56 and 37 to super-2 highways has not been analyzed by Orange Countians for Appropriate Rural Roads (OCARR). We are awaiting the results of our open records request so that we can decide how to interact with this process.

OCARR has stayed well organized via e-mail alerts and door-to-door canvassing. We are carefully monitoring the progress of House Bill 1902, which transfers the Patoka Lake casino license to a new Historic Commission in French Lick. The Senate Finance Committee will hear the bill on Thursday, April 3, 2003. If the bill passes the Senate, Orange Countians will have a chance to vote on the bill via a countywide referendum sometime this year. OCARR feels very strongly that if this bill is defeated, the road building proponents will not have any more reason to proceed with their plans.

Fighting This Bypass

We still have a great opportunity to defeat this bill, as well as the Paoli road building projects. Some of the hurdles we face are that people view both the casino and the road projects as economic development. Almost all of our elected officials are either supporting these projects or remaining neutral. However, there is a great grassroots effort to force our officials to take up this cause. There are also plans in the works for some Paoli residents who support the bypass alternative and are anti-casino, to run for the Paoli town council later this year. Other efforts include lawn signs, citizen polling, door-to-door canvassing, petition drives, a walk over the trail of destruction, and more public meetings in key public spaces, like the Orange County courthouse lawn in Paoli. A group of citizens visited Indianapolis in April to officially present the citizen's common-sense alternative plan to INDOT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) managers.

Our elected and INDOT and FHWA officials need to hear from everyone in southern Indiana and elsewhere that protection of our rural quality of life is the best economic development for the twenty-first century. We need to tell our elected officials that our scarce tax dollars need to be spent on projects that benefit, not take away from children and businesses, and that economic development can begin here at home with citizen's ingenuity and creativity. The Orange County Community Development Committee is working on a number of creative economic development projects. Please support Protect Our Woods' efforts to help OCARR meet the goal of keeping traffic moving safely and smoothly in our commercial centers, without destroying our rural heritage and local economy.

Please help keep this destruction of a large slice of rural Indiana from happening by **immediately** doing any or all of the following:

1. Contact your state legislators and ask them to oppose state support for the bypass or connector highway around Paoli (INDOT now refers to the bypass as a connector highway due to the negative implications of the word bypass). Call your state senators at 1-800-382-9467 or write them at, State House, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204, and state representatives at 1-800-382-9842 or the same address and ask them to vote no on the casino or HB 1902, and against funding the Paoli bypass.
2. Contribute to the Protect Our Woods Road Litigation Fund being set up to fight this highway. Send whatever you can afford to: Protect Our Woods, John Maier, President, 6587 S. Co. Rd 575 E., Hardinsburg, IN 47125.
3. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper explaining why you think this highway and the casino is a bad idea.
4. Let Governor Frank O'Bannon know that you will NOT be supporting his party's efforts to elect a democrat to the governor's office in 2004

if this highway and casino project are not halted and replaced by alternatives that truly respond to local needs.

5. Send your letters to the editor and state legislators to US Senator's Lugar and Bayh and Congressman Baron Hill and ask for their help to halt this destructive federally funded highway.
6. Call or write Bryan Nicol and John Baxter, of INDOT and FHWA, respectively: Bryan Nicol, INDOT, 100 N. Senate Ave., Room IGCN 755, Indianapolis, IN 46204, 317-232-6787, John R. Baxter, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration, Indiana Division, 575 N. Penn St. Room 254, Indianapolis, IN 46204, 317-226-7475, john.baxter@fhwa.dot.gov, and Matt Fuller, Environmental Engineer, Federal Highway Administration, same address, 317-226-7475, ext. 5234, matt.fuller@fhwa.dot.gov.

Please call Karyn Moskowitz at 812-723-5504 or e-mail moskie@blueriver.net for any comments or questions, or to help in these organizing efforts.

By Karyn Moskowitz

Wall in the Woods: SR 145

In a surprise move by INDOT last fall, plans to build a brand new section of state highway 145 to link with Indiana 37, right through the heart of the Hoosier National Forest Purchase area, moved ahead when the Federal Highway Administration approved a Record of Decision even though the EPA still had major objections to the supplemental draft EIS. Flouting NEPA rules, INDOT announced the notice of intent even though the EIS had not been accepted. The comments of HEC, POW and others were ignored as well. At a meeting in Eckerty May 15, 2002, INDOT officials unveiled the specific route and explained purchase of right-of-way to an overflow crowd, who for the most part, spoke against the highway for which a need has clearly never been established.

Since that time, Protect Our Woods has spoken with attorneys who felt that we had a good case against INDOT. However, taking this to court is never foolproof, and would be very expensive. Two meetings in January and February of this year with local landowners along the route produced little in the way of support for fighting this outrageously expensive and destructive new highway which would cost over 60 million dollars. This ten-mile new cross-terrain super-2 limited access highway directly transects 42 farms, displacing many people, making it an ordeal for many farmers to access their fields and livestock, thus making it harder to make a living from farming. This is also the perfect set-up to spur sprawl and development. Some portions of this road would be 70 feet high, a gigantic dam crossing through some of what were once southern Indiana's wildest forests, possibly making it the largest earthmoving project in the history of southern Indiana. Despite serious budget shortfalls in the state, and cuts to educa-

tion and social services, INDOT is moving ahead to acquire property rights and to begin construction of this highway. Even though INDOT is already acquiring property rights, it isn't too late to stop this project. Please call Karyn Moskowitz at 812-723-5504 or e-mail moskie@blueriver.net for information about how you can help.

Is There Hope for the Valley?

Jobs and highways. These two seem to be linked and politicians argue that we need highways in order to bring jobs into the community. In Orange County, the high unemployment rate is being used to sell people on the idea that a new highway is needed to bring tourists in to gamble in a casino that is needed to provide jobs for all those unemployed in Orange County.

A group of Orange Countians led by Jerry Denbo who have been heavily lobbying in Indianapolis to bring a casino to the Springs Valley area, finally hit the big time. Governor Bayh signed into law a provision that would make possible a casino in the French Lick/West Baden area; however a local referendum must first be passed to allow the project. Opponents of the casino include many church people who recognize the moral issue at stake, but many other individuals oppose the casino for financial reasons. They point out that the boom/bust cycles of gambling are what created the downturn in the fortunes of French Lick in the first place.

Studies differ on the effects of gambling in the communities the casinos enter because different places produce different results. However, they seem to indicate that large cities can assimilate casinos with fewer negative impacts than small rural communities. Some of the main problems with locating casinos in rural areas are that the character and quality of day to day living changes for the worse. Casinos bring lots more traffic as well as large numbers of outsiders who aren't connected to the community and don't care about it. Also local businesses begin to cater much more to tourists than to the residents, and important services are often lost.

Social problems also intensify. In Deadwood, within two years after the casino opened there, child abuse increased 42%, domestic violence rose 80% and police costs were nearly doubled as the size of the force doubled. In addition, bankruptcies go up, as do cases of drug abuse. Teenagers are also gambling more. According to a report from the *Annapolis Institute Archives* there is growing evidence that is it the poor that are gambling. "The state governments try to expand their revenues on the backs of the poor people...what the state calls its 'gross revenues from gambling' is another way of labeling 'net losses by citizens'."

By The People, For the People

What are the kinds of jobs we could create that wouldn't sell out our morals or the quality of small town life? Andy Mahler of Paoli had a concept to turn the dome into an Indiana University satellite campus, a center of higher learning which specialized in classes in folk art, folklore, music, etc. Bob Klawitter and some other Protect Our Woods members talked with State Senator Richard Young a few years ago about turning the dome into an international environmental center. The

