

## INDIANA COMMERCE CONNECTOR

## REPORTER'S

## NOTEBOOKS

Daily Journal staff reports

## What will happen to home?

One man joked that he's got a home for sale. Another said he doesn't know what will happen to the quiet land he settled on 20 years ago.

Landowners who live between two state roads in the southern part of the county are wondering what will happen to their homes, their land and their lives if a proposed toll road is built.

They live south of Franklin, in mainly rural land between State Roads 44 and 252, exactly where preliminary drawings have shown the route of the beltway.

Jim Abraham lives near State Road 252 and thinks the state is trying to force the toll road onto his property, without much thought of how it will affect the home he built 20 years ago.

"These have all been farms since the Civil War. There's a lot of history," he said.

Now, he just has to wait for a more detailed route from the state, something officials have said will take anywhere two to four years.

Michael Lucas, who lives between the highways, joked to people at the meeting that he has a house for sale.

Lucas worried that his input won't have much of an effect on the state's plans and the toll road will plow through no matter what he says.

David and Cynthia Boxler, who live just south of State Road 44, wonder how they will be affected, since they live in a neighborhood and not on rural land.

They don't think the route will take their home away, but they wonder about what will happen to their neighbors.

"We're on edge. I doubt it will come through. I don't know how it will affect the rest of our neighborhood," David Boxler said.

## Ethanol vs. highway

A Shelby County farmer worries that his 1,000 acres might be split by the proposed beltway.

Phil Walts raises corn and soybeans, as did his father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

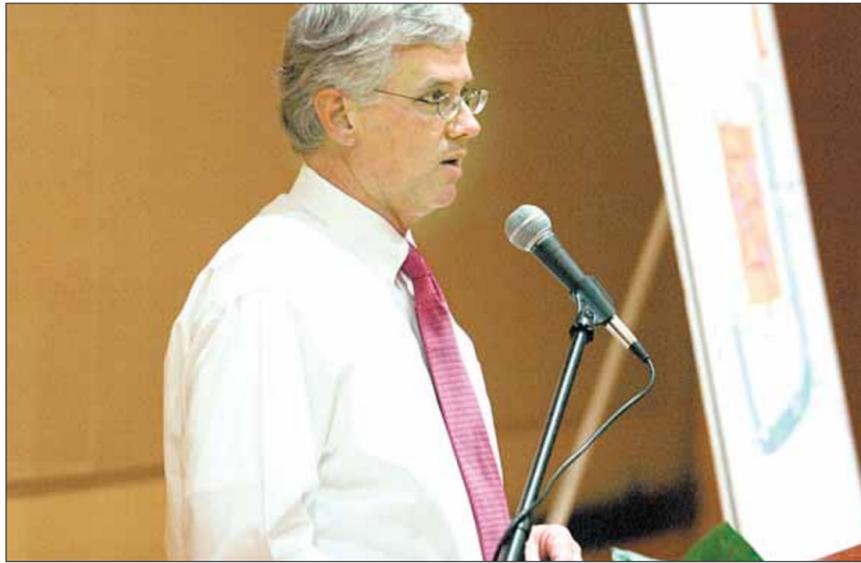
His father's crops ended up on the dinner table, but his go into gas tanks.

Walts sells his grain to an ethanol producer. He wants his sons to fuel the cars of tomorrow.

Though no route has been decided, Walts says a beltway poses a threat to his livelihood and his children's future. If his property were split, he'd probably be forced to sell it to developers.

"I know the general public does not appreciate my voice," he said. "But I ask the governor to respect my right to pursue my livelihood and keep up the family tradition."

Walts questioned the need for a new toll road.



Joe Gustin, Indiana Department of Transportation deputy commissioner, answers questions about a proposed beltway Monday night during a meeting in the Branigan Room at Franklin College.

"It would be more economical to improve existing routes," he said. "They've been sufficient to service industries."

Politicians can walk over farmers because they have fewer votes, Walts said.

"They can talk about the economic impact, but these are the values I hold sacred," he said. "I just want them to respect my property."

## Family farms

Richard Wells has farmed corn and soybean in Morgan County his entire life.

Some of his 270 acres is forested, and he sells the grain at a thin margin.

His son, Joe Wells, a Nineveh-Hensley-Jackson school board member, did not follow in the family tradition. But he bought a home just down the street on Mahalaville Road near Morgantown.

Both the family farm and the son's house fall under the gray on a preliminary map of the proposed beltway route. No route has been decided or announced.

Feeling they've been kept in the dark, they drove a half-hour to Franklin to find out whatever they could about the plan.

Not all of Richard Wells' land is tillable, but he wonders what he'd do if his land were cut up by 400 feet of highway.

"We know there's no specific route, and we're willing to wait," he said. "But we can't see how this won't have an impact on the family farm."

As far as they're concerned, they're now just waiting on offers for their property, even if it takes years.

"It's clear from tonight that the community does not want

this project," Joe Wells said. "But I don't think it's going to play on the minds of the people making the long-term decisions."

Richard Wells worked as an appraiser before and is sure he'll receive fair market value.

His son could see a beltway bringing industries and property tax dollars to schools.

"Some good may come of it," he said. "But at what cost the good?"

## Questioning party loyalty

A proposed toll road is raising emotions and challenging the political allegiance of landowners.

Some directed their anger toward state processes. Others said the proposed project turned them away from the man who proposed the idea, Gov. Mitch Daniels.

While federal officials still debate a proposed natural gas pipeline through Johnson County, state officials are now looking at a toll road that would affect similar parts of the county, said Joseph DeHart, a former county commissioner.

"I've about had it with bureaucracy. Where does it quit?" he asked.

A few speakers said they're having second thoughts about having supported Daniels.

Greenwood attorney Phil Wilson said the governor was trying to ram the beltway through the legislature without further oversight.

Many beltway opponents voted Daniels into office, he said.

"Johnson County bleeds Republican," Wilson said, gesturing to the hundreds in attendance. "I think most people in this room are Republican."

A Morgan County man worried about the state abusing its power of eminent domain, which allows government to force landowners

to sell their property.

Darby Simpson, who said he's been a Republican for years, opposes the beltway.

"He's gonna make a Democrat out of me yet," he said of Daniels.

Steve Miller, who lives in Union Township, said the project didn't make sense. Most of the traffic is on the north side of Indianapolis and the toll road should be built there, but he said that won't happen.

"This is nothing more than an I-69 bypass for Governor Daniels," he said.

Deb Baker, who lives near Trafalgar, questioned the expense to taxpayers.

Taxes fund the Indiana Department of Transportation studies and likely would be spent on the land acquisition, she said.

"They're trying to tell us this is a tax-free project that won't cost Indiana anything. It'll cost us taxes and cost the farmers. We're not talking about a sentimental idea with these farms, but decades of real income," she said.

## Agriculture is business, too

Three farmers have a message for the state: Farming is a business, too.

A Johnson County farmer told an Indiana Department of Transportation official she was fed up with state officials who talk about attracting big businesses through a proposed toll road.

Land they will take, mainly farmland, is hurting the business of agriculture, said Linda Norton, who has farmland across the county.

"Farmers are tired of not being considered big business," she said.

Two other farmers, both whose land could be affected by the pro-

posed toll road, are wondering whether they'll be able to pass the family business on to their children.

Scott Logsdon, who farms about 550 acres on the south side of the county, and his neighbor don't think the state views them the same way.

"I feel they think farming is not a business in Indiana. Agriculture is a major business," Logsdon said.

Logsdon and Scott DeHart, who farms more than 1,200 acres on the south side of the county, are young farmers, trying to carry on a tradition.

After part of Logsdon's land was crossed by a proposed natural gas pipeline, he thought he'd be left alone, especially since development isn't a high priority on the south side of the county.

"I thought we were out of the loop for something like this," he said.

Now, both see the planned toll road as a problem, which could stop them from continuing their work.

"Economic development for us would be just devastating," Logsdon said.

## Get-away be-gone

A Greenwood resident bought an old farmhouse on 20 acres south of State Road 252 two years ago.

Phil Brewer wanted a place where he and his wife could get away from the bustle of the city.

He's fixed up the property, and they hoped to move there eventually.

Brewer now wonders whether it was a good investment, if a toll road brings traffic and sprawl through the area.

"We just wanted a less hectic, rural life," he said. "For me, this is a quality-of-life issue."

Brewer said he learned nothing from the public information session Tuesday and doubts public input will be taken into consideration in a final decision on the road.

"The governor's just giving us doublespeak," he said. "He's made up his mind, and they're already accusing us of provincialism. It tells you something when that's the initial reaction."

Brewer said he voted for Gov. Mitch Daniels, and he doesn't regret it — yet.

"You check the box, and you lose control," he said. "This project is going to be in the hands of a private consortium."

## Favoring road lonely path

A Franklin man realized quickly he was the only one in a room of 400 who supported the proposed toll road.

Scott Richardson was the only person to speak in favor of the project, thanking the state for doing studies and informing people about the project.

Richardson, who lives near

downtown Franklin, said he knew going into the meeting he would be in the minority and hoped the other people wouldn't be too upset with his comments.

"It felt a little bit like a mob at the end of 'Frankenstein' with torches," he said.

Richardson wanted to speak at the meeting to present a different viewpoint to the community and to thank state officials and let them know someone thinks the idea will benefit the state, he said.

Living in Colorado in the 1970s, Richardson said he remembers what happens when local communities fight progress. A beltway around Denver that should have been built 20 years ago was built about five years ago because local officials fought the project, he said.

He hopes Johnson County won't repeat that mistake.

"If we stick our heads in the sand and we don't look forward, we're really going to hamstring our kids and grandkids," Richardson said.

The state needs to plan for growth now, instead of waiting until more people move to the county and it becomes more difficult to build infrastructure around developments and homes, he said.

"It's going to happen. We can either plan for it, or we can let it happen later," he said.

"If we wait until later the planning will take longer and the cost will be higher."

## Route wouldn't help traffic

A local businessman questions the economic sense of a proposed toll road, which would link six counties around the east and south of Indianapolis.

Such a route does not fit with the patterns of local commerce, said Mike Jarvis, a developer and former president of Franklin Power Products. Most companies in the surrounding counties already do business with Indianapolis firms, he said, adding that the state needs wider roadways through the center of Indianapolis.

"It's not new technology to build roads on top of roads," he said. Congestion on Interstate 465 does create transportation problems, Jarvis said.

"Something needs to be done," he said. "I credit them with throwing out ideas."

Central Indiana continues to grow, and better transportation will prove a critical need, Jarvis said.

Putting an outer toll road around only half of Indianapolis does not address that need, he said.

"It's a patch solution that doesn't solve the problem," he said. "Halfway around the city is only half the issue."

Building a new road will always cause resentment among property owners, he said.

"If there's another road, it should be a logical road."

## ● Crowd

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

employers haven't yet located there, a Union Township man said.

"Franklin's industrial park is practically empty," Steve Miller said.

He didn't know what would attract businesses to the beltway, instead of other areas that already are developed and served by utilities.

Landowners didn't focus their questions on a specific route for the project. Joe Gustin, deputy commissioner of public-private partnerships with the Indiana Department of Transportation, said a specific route might not be available for up to four years.

Residents instead asked for details of the project, including how the county would make up

for lost taxes when land is used for the project and who and what might travel the road.

A Shelby County man worried about whether hazardous chemicals and materials could pass through his quiet neighborhood once the road is built.

Phil Stieneker, who owns land within a mile of where the route could be located, worried about hazardous materials that usually would be transported along Interstate 465 coming to the toll road.

The answer from Gustin drew laughter and outcry from people at the meeting: He didn't know.

"There are going to be a lot of questions asked that we don't know the answer to. I want to be honest and tell you that," he said.

Darby Simpson, a Morgan County resident, asked why the state wasn't considering mass transportation, such as a rail system.

Gustin said that would be something the state could study,

but that mass transportation systems had not been profitable across the county so far.

Local officials, including a county council member, a former commissioner and the county council attorney brought up concerns of lost tax dollars and accessibility to county roads.

A Greenwood attorney said losing land to the project will hurt the county's budget.

Some farmers pay tax bills as high as \$2,400 a year. If farmland is taken across the entire county, taking thousands of acres from the tax base, the county won't be able to pay for services, Phil Wilson said. "The county is 25 miles wide. You multiply that out, it's astronomical; and Johnson County won't be able to pay its bills," Wilson said.

Businesses generate more property taxes to local governments than homeowners, Gustin said. A beltway may attract more businesses to the area, he said,

but there's no guarantee businesses will come.

A former commissioner and a county council member also wondered about how many overpasses and underpasses the road will have.

"As part of the design, we've got to have ways to get over and under this," said Joseph DeHart, a former county commissioner.

County council member Charles Canary had a laundry list of questions at the meeting's end that went unanswered, such as whether counties would pay for connecting roads and whether connecting roads would bypass main county routes.

"The bottom line is the people don't want this," he said. "This idea was originated by the government and not the people. What happened to government by, for and of the people?"

Residents said they left with little more information than they had when they came to the meeting.

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