

OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

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"The Daily Journal is dedicated to community service, to defense of individual rights and to providing those checks upon government which no constitution can ensure."

SCOTT ALEXANDER
founding editor, 1963

AT ISSUE

State officials have promised to attend public meetings to address questions about a proposed beltway around Indianapolis.

OUR POINT

Johnson County officials should request that at least two meetings be conducted here.

Secure opportunities to allow beltway discussion

The Daily Journal

Gov. Mitch Daniels has proposed construction of a limited-access highway to run 75 miles from Interstate 69 near Pendleton, south and then west through Johnson County and finally north to Interstate 70 west of Indianapolis International Airport.

He also proposed that a private company be allowed to build and maintain it and to charge tolls to make back the initial payment to the state. He calls it Indiana Commerce Connector.

But he didn't say what kind of commerce.

Also left unexplained was the route, the number of interchanges, the environmental and economic impact and questions about the use of eminent domain to acquire land.

State Sen. Tom Wyss, R-Fort Wayne, introduced a bill allowing a private firm to build and run a toll road this week.

Almost immediately questions were raised.

Some of the most cogent were asked by state Sen. Greg Walker, R-Columbus, who district includes the part of Johnson County most likely to be the site of the beltway, between State Roads 44 and 252.

He and several other members of the legislature, as well as local officials and members of the public, wanted answers.

Walker said bluntly, "I can't vote to support something if I don't know anything about it."

The governor's office and the Indiana Department of Transportation listened and have promised to attend meetings to listen to public concerns and answer questions. Johnson County officials should take them up on the offer.

Franklin Mayor Brenda Jones-Matthews and the Johnson County commissioners should request that at least two public meetings be conducted in the county to explain the project and to answer people's questions.

And because Johnson County will be affected by the project in such a major way, it would be good if Daniels himself attended one or both of the meetings.

An interstate-grade highway through an undeveloped part of the county would mean buying up farmland, something that is disappearing in the northern half of the county because of residential developments.

What will the economic benefit be? The governor talked about creating jobs, but what kind of jobs?

The road could mean a profound transformation in the character of the southern part of the county. Proceeding without addressing the issues is asking too much.

State officials want to listen, so invite them. Johnson County residents will give them an earful.

Focus: Iraq

President facing final chance to win war

Scrrips Howard News Service

President Bush, who rarely admits mistakes, conceded in prime time that errors and misjudgments had been made in Iraq, but the plan he announced is hardly a bold departure from the existing strategy.

In most respects, it is more of the same: more troops, more advisers, more reconstruction aid. Whatever the merits of competing strategies offered by the Iraq Study Group, the hawkish Sen. John McCain, former U.S. commanders in Iraq and the Iraqis themselves, Bush chose to ignore them.

His plan calls for committing 21,500 more troops, some of them already en route. On top of the 130,000 already there, that is still fewer than the 165,000 deployed two years ago for the Iraqi elections.

The plan has the single goal of securing Baghdad and, for it to work, relies heavily on the performance of the Iraqi military and police and the wholehearted cooperation of the Shiite-leaning government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whose aides have already expressed skepticism about the buildup. The reliance on the Iraqis means that the ultimate success of the plan is out of Bush's hands.

And the strategy itself has an inherent contradiction. The president says it is vital to the war on terror that we stay and win, yet at the same time he says our patience is not unlimited. Still, Bush said, U.S. commanders on the ground have told him this plan can work.

For the president, it has to.

The Bush White House has been wrong at almost every step of the war: wrong about weapons of mass destruction; Saddam Hussein's links to al-Qaida; being welcomed as liberators; financing the reconstruction out of oil revenues; disbanding the army; dismissing most of the government; and foreseeing the deep-seated sectarian hostility.

Time is running out on the ambitious venture that will define his presidency. He has just two more years in office. The public has turned against the war and, increasingly, so too are his fellow Republicans. The Democrats have vowed to block funds for any kind of sustained buildup.

Bush is running out of chances to get it right on the war. This one may likely be his final one.



What happens to homeowners if property taxes go up.

SPEAK OUT: INDIANA COMMERCE CONNECTOR

Commerce connector crucial for state's future

To the editor:

There's nothing quite like the feeling of holding a grandchild in your lap. The joy and potential that flows through them is the greatest energy source in the world. If we could bottle that, gas prices would go tumbling right through the ground where those oil rigs sit.

Every time I pick up one of my granddaughters or grandson, however, I find myself wondering about Indiana's future.

What kind of Indiana will they have to raise their children and grandchildren?

Will there even be the kinds of jobs available to keep them living in this state that the Wyss family has always called home?

Or will home end up some other place, far away from their family roots?

That's why the state we build and improve upon has always been very important to me. For example, the roads we build today are literally the roads to our grandchildren's future. Maybe if we do it right, they won't have to get on a road that leads out of Indiana.

I'm more convinced than ever that our state is taking the right road to economic development. Gov. Mitch Daniels has been criticized by some for his Major Moves legislation, but I believe history will show the wisdom of this move. The road construction that's happening in this state now would never have been possible without Major Moves money. Even when economic times are good, the ability to do multiple comprehensive road projects is rarely there.

While we are able, we should utilize the money of people elsewhere to build these projects here at home. The people in Pennsylvania are currently studying what Indiana is doing in regard to roads. No wonder. Even as you read this article, Indiana continues to make money from that so-called controversial lease of the toll road.

The Indiana Department of Transportation reports \$6 per second is being earned on investments from Major Moves. That's \$22,000 an hour. Now that's something to build on.

You know, people often complain about economic development efforts in this state. The poor souls who are economic development directors in our 92 counties have one of the toughest jobs there is. But as we build these new roads, we are planting seeds of economic development with every mile of pavement that's poured.

I've always considered transportation to be one of the greatest forms of economic development there is. It's high time the people in other parts of the state experience what those

WRITE A

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Daily Journal invites readers to submit letters, opinion columns and e-mail comments for the opinion page.

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in northeastern Indiana already have: interstate road projects that create jobs. There's a reason why Honda and Toyota's new factories went where they did.

And just think: If the governor's commerce connector plan is successful, the new Interstate 69 connecting Evansville with the rest of Hoosier land will be a freeway, not a toll road. Traffic congestion around Indianapolis will be eased. The economic future will not only be brighter, but safer as well, safer for those grandchildren who might some day be daily commuters in or around our state's capital city.

So the next time you hear someone complain about all these road projects, ask them if they have children and grandchildren. Ask what kind of roads they'd like for them to be traveling. It's amazing how dimples, curly hair, a sweet voice and bright eyes can energize a political conversation.

Sen. Tom Wyss,
R-Fort Wayne

Editor's note: Wyss is the chairman of the Indiana Senate committee on homeland security, transportation and veteran affairs. He is author of Senate Bill 1, the bill that would create the Commerce Connector around Indianapolis. He is also vice chairman of transportation with the National Conference of State Legislators.

Few questions have been answered about beltway

To the editor:

We say no to the foreign-owned toll road.

Over the Thanksgiving holiday, Gov. Mitch Daniels submitted an op-ed in the Daily Journal about the toll road. Gov. Daniels said that he welcomed "dialogue" but also claimed that mayors of the cities affected were enthusiastic about the proposal.

However, it should be noted that dialogue involves a two-way conversation. It is also helpful if both parties had the information needed to make a clear decision.

With the beginning of the Indiana General Assembly this week, it seems that the governor's office is ready to proceed on getting some form of legislative permission to move forward without providing any specifics of the proposal.

Members of the Indiana General Assembly and mayors of Johnson County should demand specifics before endorsing any action that would allow the governor to proceed.

As appeared in the Daily Journal in the Jan. 6-7 edition, residents of the affected counties have many questions and have been given very few specifics, not even a map (beyond the one with the wide, shaded line of where it might go).

As natives of Franklin who still operate a family farm outside of Franklin, we believe that some very basic questions should be asked by mayors and lawmakers before any blanket authority is given to the governor.

For example, will the governor promise to rule out the use of eminent domain to kick out residents and farmers, only to have the state turn around and give that land over to a foreign-owned company?

Not only would there be likely legal issues, but it just seems so many people as being wrong.

If the proposal is truly not going to cost the taxpayers money (presumably because the foreign-owned company would front the costs) then why can't the foreign-owned company come out of the shadows and give Hoosiers some specifics such as the cost of tolls (is there variable pricing for rush hour or fixed pricing?), the economic projections of the revenues for the company, a guarantee not to have toll increases at the will of the company and what the guaranteed profit for the company is?

We believe that before any authority is given to proceed that mayors and lawmakers of the affected counties should be given the specifics. Only then can we have a dialogue.

Finally, and we know that this point has been raised in this paper before, it is interesting that the governor did not announce this until one or two days after the election.

Perhaps he should have truly listened to the voters of northern and southern Indiana, who gave a clear message that they did not want a foreign-owned toll road before he announced a scheme to impose a foreign-owned toll road on the people of central Indiana.

Hugh Vandivier and David Vandivier
Natives of Franklin

Toll road won't improve Hoosier economy

To the editor:

Regardless of what the governor and the Indiana Department of Transportation tell the public, this connector, which I call the "Comedy Corridor" because it surely is a joke, is part of the North American Free Trade Agreement super-corridor. It is sections of independent utility and is part of Interstate 69.

Those who claim we need this highway for the jobs seem to have forgotten that it was NAFTA that started our decline. Building the governor's Comedy Corridor simply moves sprawl to other areas, causing blight in existing areas.

The highway lobbyists, with all their money, inserted protections into the Major Moves legislation that allow the state to let existing roads deteriorate. These existing roads are termed competing roads to the toll roads. It does not take a roads scholar (pun intended) to understand that Hoosiers, given the choice, will not drive a toll road.

There is a movement under way across this nation to turn every major highway into a profit center for the multinational corporations.

The recently passed federal highway bill contained provisions to toll existing highways. Most certainly we should expect to see the existing interstates 65, 69, 70 and 74 tolled, as well as other highways, both existing and planned.

There are a number of privately operated toll roads that have been returned to public ownership because they don't make money.

The movement to privatize roads is an idea solely of the money, for the money and by the money. The sooner every American wakes up to this fact, the sooner we can regain control of our country again.

William A. Boyd
Indianapolis

Roadway better suited for northwest side of Indy

To the editor:

Regarding the proposed Commerce Connector: Why not route it on the north and west side of Indianapolis?

This route would be just as effective in relieving traffic on the Interstate 465 belt as the proposed route.

Concerned citizens of Johnson County should contact their elected officials and legislative representatives and voice their ideas and opinions. Do we really want a four-lane toll road running through the beautiful farmland community of southern Johnson County?

We should all give it serious consideration and speak out.

Wayne Cox
Trafalgar

Who needs spontaneity for surprise birthday bash?

My wife is a planner. She doesn't like surprises.

This is not to say she is not a spontaneous person.

Why, at the drop of a hat, my wife would jump into a cab (that she had arranged a week beforehand), then board a plane (if she had reservations two months ahead of time to get super-saver tickets) and head for some last-minute destination (more like 4,000 minutes, but minutes none the less).

Even the hotel would be a spur-of-the-moment decision, once she had researched every Internet site for the best possible deal in the solar system. Yes, that's how impulsive she is. I can barely keep up with her.

That being said, I was still taken aback by a question she posed to me recently on our way to a movie — a movie she chose after careful analysis of all the reviews, along with an online



Dick Wolfsie

purchase of tickets.

"Dick, do you want a surprise party for your 60th birthday?" "Excuse me?"

"Well, before I waste a lot of time finding a place to have a party, rounding up a few of your friends and spending a lot on food, I just want to be sure you really want a surprise party. Hypothetically, of course."

"I know this is really narrow-minded and ungrateful of me, but isn't a surprise party supposed to be ... you know ... what's the

word I'm looking for?"

"Well, how soon we forget," she said. "Do you remember what you said when I threw a surprise party for your 50th?"

"I seem to recall saying, 'Oh, you shouldn't have.'"

"That's exactly right, and I'm not going to make that mistake again."

"OK, who would you invite to my surprise party? Hypothetically, of course."

"Well, to make things easier for me, you could just jot down some names on a piece of paper. And include some folks you wouldn't expect to come to your party. Maybe even a few people who aren't really that crazy about you. That way it really will be a surprise."

"I can't tell you how exciting this sounds," I said. "Is there anything else I shouldn't know?"

"Well, I don't want you to know exactly where the party might

be, so come up with three places where you wouldn't expect people to jump out of nowhere, screaming 'Surprise!'"

"Make it easy on yourself, Mary Ellen. Why not just have it at our house and that way when I come home from work, everyone can just be hiding in the kitchen?"

"Well, how clever is that?" she said. "They'd have to think you were pretty darn stupid to walk into your own home on the day of your 60th birthday with 15 cars parked on our cul de sac and not know something was going on."

"OK, then, let's do it the day after my birthday."

"Hey, that's a great idea. I can't wait. This is going to be an even bigger surprise than you thought."

Television personality Dick Wolfsie writes this weekly humor column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.