

From the Mayor...

July 1, 2022

Last year, locally elected officials from the city and county hosted multiple stakeholder and public meetings to understand the local preferences for US 30 freeway safety improvements. The public discourse involved three options and, after several years of meetings, yielded a preliminary local preference. That preference was to make freeway safety improvements along the existing US 30 route. That local process was critically important. It was the preliminary step of very comprehensive federal process that is required to authorize the project for design and construction. Our planning ensured that our preferences will be included in the process.

In August, we will be moving into the very important first step of the federal process, the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study. You may remember last year, the PEL was initiated by the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) at the urging of the US 30 Coalition, which included state and local elected officials, as well as a strong voice from the business community of northeast Indiana.

A PEL is a high level, early planning study that is designed to identify transportation issues and environmental concerns in a corridor. It will evaluate environmental, community, and economic goals that will give guidance to the design and prioritization of individual projects.

The consultants will interview local officials and schedule multiple stakeholder and public listening sessions to understand and evaluate the needs and wants of the community. Community input will be crucial.

The PEL is also a high-level engineering study that will help establish the purpose and need for the project. Traffic volume, conflicts, and safety issues will be evaluated. How much traffic on US 30 is local traffic as opposed to pass-through traffic? What percentage of vehicles are trucks? Changes and improvements to specific intersections that improve safety, access, and traffic flow will be preliminarily evaluated. Alternative routes will also be evaluated. In addition, the PEL will look at other impacts the freeway could have on the community as well - for example, the need for frontage roads and their impact on the project.

From the environmental perspective, the focus of the PEL will consider the impact of a new freeway on the natural environment. Environmental “red flags” will be identified.

Community input and environmental results from the PEL study can be “linked” to the very stringent environmental study that will then be required by the Federal Highway Administration as the next step. With that approval and one more final detailed preliminary engineering study, the project can be recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

That final FHWA approval will allow federal and state project funds to be identified. The project then goes to final design and right of way acquisition. Once that is complete, the project can finally go to construction.

With the PEL set to start locally this August, we are now embarking on the first step of the lengthy aforementioned process for a permanent solution of safe, improved traffic flow through our community. As a community we have a responsibility to engage in the PEL and share our local vision of how we want US 30 to look in ten or fifteen years as it passes through Kosciusko County.

Your voice at the INDOT listening sessions in the coming months will never be more important.