

# Kokomo Tribune; Kokomo, Indiana

*April 10, 2012*

## Coalition planners look to remaining U.S. 31 areas

### State on pace to finish Kokomo corridor in 2013

By *SCOTT SMITH*  
Tribune staff writer

— U.S. 31 will be a freeway around Kokomo and through southern St. Joseph County and Carmel by the end of 2015.

With the completion date looming, the project's backers are already turning their efforts toward areas as yet untouched by construction.

“The problem is, what’s going to happen in between?” U.S. 31 Coalition executive director Dennis Faulkenberg told a group gathered at a Kokomo business breakfast Tuesday.

“It’s wonderful to do the hard parts, but the parts in between — in Tipton, Miami, Fulton and Marshall counties — those parts have to be done to make U.S. 31 a true freeway.”

Large stretches of U.S. 31 travel through largely rural areas of Tipton, Miami, Fulton and Marshall counties, and design work and funding to upgrade those areas remain question marks.

And if planning isn’t done to control growth in those rural areas, “the development will just migrate into the counties, and we’ll have more driveways and stoplights,” he said.

The good news for advocates like Faulkenberg is that two weeks ago, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels announced a new public/private partnership would allow the estimated \$436 million cost of upgrading U.S. 31 in Hamilton County to be raised from private capital.

The state will repay that cost over the next 8 to 10 years, allowing the work to move be completed by 2015. Original estimates had the Hamilton County portion being completed in 2018.

Indiana Department of Transportation officials now envision the following timeline:

- In 2013, the 13-mile bypass around Kokomo will open to traffic, at a total cost of about \$160 million. Originally, the cost of building the Kokomo Corridor was estimated at \$340 million.
- In 2014, the 20-mile upgrade of U.S. 31 through St. Joseph and Marshall counties will open, at a total cost of about \$220 million. The road, 15 miles of which is on new terrain, runs from the junction with U.S. 30 to the Indiana Toll Road.

- In 2015, the most expensive portion of the project will be finished, between Ind. 38 and I-465 through Hamilton County.

In Kokomo, the public will be invited to a public meeting, probably in May, to see the final zoning overlay proposals for the new U.S. 31 corridor in Howard County.

Beyond simply making sure stoplights and driveways aren't allowed on the new freeway, planners are also trying to ensure, through zoning, that new growth along the corridor doesn't adversely affect existing Kokomo businesses.

Tuesday, Kokomo-Howard County Plan Commission director Greg Sheline and Chris Hamm, a principal planner with American Structurepoint Inc., Indianapolis, discussed the overlays.

Due for a vote by city and county elected officials this year, the overlays will provide a set of rules for new development along the new corridor.

The ideal, said Hamm, is to phase in development along the new route, in order to prevent a mass exodus of business from the current U.S. 31 to the new bypass.

“Everyone loves something new,” Hamm said. “What you wouldn't want is 15 new hotels and 12 new restaurants along the new corridor. You don't win in that situation. That would be a net ‘push’ for the community, and in a lot of ways, it's a negative impact.”

Plans are in place to immediately allow corporate office space and light industrial development along the corridor, and to take a lengthy look at any proposed retail development.

“What you want to avoid is allowing one guy to build one gas station on an acre of property out there, and for the local taxpayers to pay to extend water and sewers out to him,” Hamm said.

“But if someone came along and wanted to develop 25 acres into a commercial and retail hub, and pay for utilities and access roads themselves, that might be something you'd want to look at.”

Sheline said he expects there will be three meetings on the new overlay proposals, including one joint vote by the Howard County Council, the Howard County Commissioners, and the Howard County Plan Commission, and a second joint vote by the Kokomo Common Council and the Kokomo Plan Commission.

The third meeting would be to gather public comments on the plans. Sheline said he anticipates having the plans ready by next month, but added that officials want to be sure of the plans before making a public presentation.

- Scott Smith is a Kokomo Tribune staff writer. He may be reached at 765-454-8569 or via email at [scott.smith@kokomotribune.com](mailto:scott.smith@kokomotribune.com)