

Midstate Corridor

White Paper

Recommendations to
Governor Eric Holcomb and INDOT Commissioner Joseph McGuinness

August 2017



1 Introduction

The Midstate Corridor project was **highly rated** by the 2014 Blue Ribbon Panel Report as a project of statewide significance. It also has a great deal of broad support (business leaders and public officials), more so than any other southern Indiana project in the Blue Ribbon Panel Report. This White Paper suggests an approach forward to **respond to and acknowledge this support**, while giving it appropriate emphasis **among Indiana's statewide transportation priorities**.

This project is a new/upgraded four-lane road from the Ohio River at Rockport to I-69. It begins at the existing four-lane US 231 Ohio River Bridge in Spencer County (Rockport). About 26 miles (between the Ohio River and I-64) is an upgrade of the existing four-lane US 231 in Spencer County. At least 30 miles of it (north of I-64) connects with I-69. Possible connection points are at Petersburg, Washington, Crane or Bloomington (via a connection to SR 37 south of Bedford or Mitchell).

2 Background – Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations

The Midstate Corridor was identified as a significant priority in the final report of the *Blue Ribbon Panel on Transportation Infrastructure* (July 2014). The Panel both prioritized shorter-term transportation projects and provided a vision for long-term transportation projects. It evaluated priorities for Indiana's entire transportation system. These included highways, intermodal facilities, inland waterways, air travel/regional airports, air freight, passenger rail and freight rail.

Projects were evaluated using five metrics to arrange them among “tiers” to indicate their relative significance. These five performance metrics are:

- **Economic Impact.** Increases in economic activity, labor force earnings, and employment.
- **Capacity to Meet Demand.** Reductions in congestion and delays.
- **Multimodal Integration and Synergy.** Improved accessibility to other modes.
- **National/International Market Access.** Decreased transportation costs for out-of-state freight.

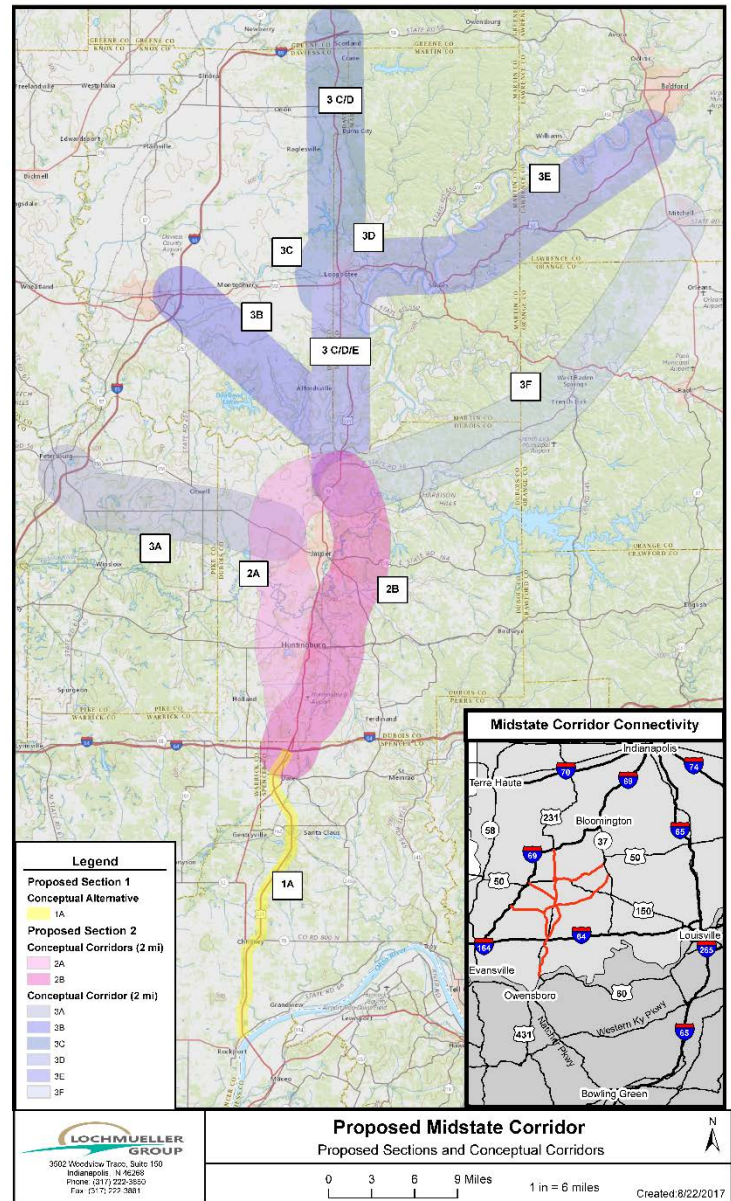


Figure 1

- **Quality of Life.** Improvements to environment, safety, energy use, congestion, emissions and highway maintenance.

The Panel's report identified the Midstate Corridor as a "top priority" of "statewide significance."¹ It is one of only four projects identified in Tier 2 of the top statewide priorities. Its benefits extend to all of Indiana.

Section 3 summarizes the significant benefits of this project. **Section 5** recommends an *appropriate strategy* to take this project into environmental studies. This strategy (a *Tiered Environmental Impact Statement*) allows the project to be *moved forward in manageable stages*. The Lochmueller Group led the tiered environmental process for I-69 in Indiana. We understand the legal, regulatory and procedural implications of this approach.

3 Benefits

Major benefits of the Midstate Corridor, as documented in the *Blue Ribbon Report*, include:

3.1 Economic Benefits

The Midstate Corridor provides better access to goods from manufacturing centers, especially between Indianapolis and Nashville TN. Dubois County alone has a rich collection of some of Indiana's most prominent manufacturing employers, including three of the largest private and public companies in the State. It will be especially beneficial to the communities of Jasper, Huntingburg, as well as Petersburg and Washington. It further strengthens Indiana's position as the "crossroads of America." Indiana benefits include:

- Over 3,900 new jobs.
- Added \$350 million in annual personal income.

This highway taps into Southwest Indiana's existing major assets.

- A highly skilled labor force.
- Available land for development.
- Strong local manufacturing base.
- Inexpensive electrical power.
- Existing intermodal transportation.
- Affordable housing.

3.2 Transportation Benefits

This project will produce significant travel time savings. Nearly **3,600 hours of daily travel delay** will be eliminated, with an **annual savings of \$250 million in travel time costs** alone. Much of this travel time benefit results in increases in jobs and personal income.

3.3 Multimodal Benefits

The highway provides river barge and rail connections. The Midstate Corridor provides improved freight access to port facilities near Rockport. It also accesses the Norfolk Southern freight terminal at Huntingburg, and the Dubois County Railroad yard in Jasper.

3.4 Market Access Improvements

Manufacturing and distribution facilities in Pike/Daviess, Dubois and Spencer counties will enjoy greater access to Central Indiana and the Great Lakes region. Connections via the Natcher Parkway and I-65 provide improved connections to markets and suppliers throughout the Southeastern United States.

¹ Recommendation 1-1: Address top priority projects, p. 12.

3.5 Quality of Life Benefits

This project will alleviate significant anticipated congestion on US 231 within Jasper and Huntingburg, as well as the entire length of US 231 between Jasper and Huntingburg. The March, 2004 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for an upgrade of US 231 between Huntingburg and Jasper showed the **entirety** of US 231 between Sunset Drive in Huntingburg to 31st Street in Jasper (a distance of approximately 10.5 miles) would operate at Level of Service (LOS) F by the year 2030.²

LOS F is the most congested state at which traffic can operate. It is regarded as “forced or breakdown flow”³, or having “exceeded a specific service measure value (or combination of service measure values) that most users would consider unsatisfactory.”⁴ These extremely congested, stop-and-go conditions would be totally unacceptable for the significant freight flows which use this vital highway. It would lead to significant reductions in business activity. The entirety of US 231 between Rockport and the Crane Naval Surface Warfare Center is part of the National Highway System (NHS). The NHS includes the most important highways in the United States. The Federal Highway Administration states “The National Highway System (NHS) includes the Interstate Highway System as well as other roads important to the nation’s economy, defense, and mobility.”⁵

In addition to significant congestion reductions, this project will reduce crash costs throughout Indiana by over \$180 million annually.

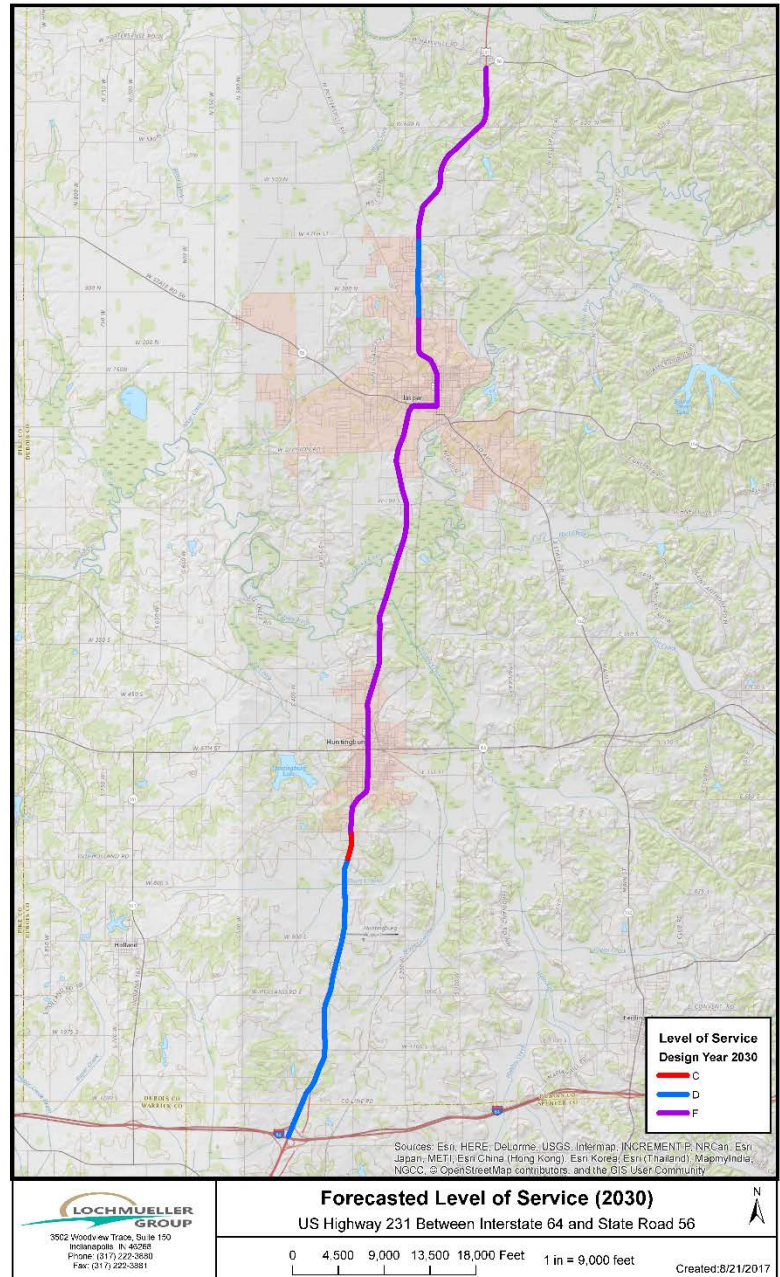


Figure 2

² Table 2.2.1.2-2, U.S. 231 Existing and Forecasted Level of Service, p. 2-6.

³ *A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets 6th Edition (2011)*, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, Table 2-4, p. 2-66.

⁴ *Highway Capacity Manual (2010)*, Transportation Research Board, p. 5-5 (Beyond LOS F).

⁵ https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/indiv/in_nhs.cfm

4 Widespread Business and Public Official Support

This project has a significant constituency. The Board of Directors of the I-67 Development Corporation (<http://i67developmentcorporation.com/>), which is now referred to as the Midstate Corridor Coalition includes business leaders and elected officials from throughout Southwest Indiana. It enjoys more broad regional support than perhaps any other top priority southern Indiana project evaluated by the Blue Ribbon Panel.

This group demonstrated its support in a top-drawer technical study of the merits of this project. This study, which cost in the many tens of thousands of dollars, was provided by Cambridge Systematics (<https://www.camsys.com/>), and published in late 2012.

The Conexus Southwest Regional Logistics Council identified this project as a Tier 1 priority in *A Plan for Growing Southwest Indiana's Logistics Sector (2015)* (pp. 5 – 7). This Council includes over three dozen business and economic development leaders from throughout Southwest Indiana.

It is prudent to acknowledge and be responsive to this support. At the same time, it is important to respond in a way which gives this project appropriate emphasis among Indiana's transportation priorities. We recommend a "Tiered" Environmental Study as the appropriate vehicle to bring the project forward.

5 WHY a "Tiered Study?"

The following text is quoted from page 3 of *Guidelines on the Use of Tiered Environmental Impact Statements for Transportation Projects*⁶, prepared at the request of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The text underlined for emphasis is added by the authors of this document.

"The basic concept of tiering is straightforward. Rather than preparing a single environmental impact statement (EIS) as the basis for approving the entire project, the agency conducts two or more rounds – or "tiers" – of environmental review. In Tier 1, the agency typically prepares an EIS that analyzes a program or large project on a broad scale. In Tier 2, the agency prepares one or more additional NEPA documents, which examine individual projects or sections in greater detail.

"Tiering is typically adopted for three main reasons: (1) complexity of managing the NEPA process for lengthy corridors; (2) desire to authorize corridor preservation, where construction is not anticipated for many years; and (3) lack of funding to complete a traditional EIS which require more detailed studies than is typically required for a Tier 1 EIS. Another reason for tiering, which usually coincides with a lack of funding, is to prevent the numerous studies associated with a traditional EIS from becoming outdated because the funding shortage prevents the project from moving forward."

Following the Tier 1 study, independent Tier 2 studies would proceed on portions of the project. Potential portions of the project are described below.

6 Questions Addressed by a Tier 1 Study

A Tiered Study must identify at its outset the key Tier 1 decisions. Following are the key issues to be addressed in a Tier 1 project for the Midstate Corridor.

6.1 What Kind of Road Will This Highway Be?

Advocates for this highway had designated their organization as the "I-67 Development Corporation," expressing their desire to build this project as an Interstate Highway. A study conducted under the

⁶ NCHRP Project 25-25, Task 38 National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Transportation Research Board.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) must consider a reasonable range of alternatives. For this project, a reasonable range of alternatives includes:

- **A fully accessed-controlled Interstate Highway.** Such a road would provide access only at grade-separated interchanges. Other design features (such as design speeds and cross-section elements) also would conform to Interstate design standards.
- **A multi-lane highway with partial access control.** Such a road would be a multi-lane highway with a center median separating the two directions of traffic. Access is provided by a combination of interchanges and at-grade access points. The recently-completed Hoosier Heartland Highway from Lafayette to Fort Wayne is an example of such a highway.
- **A “Super 2” rural arterial.** Such a road is constructed to be able to serve as one direction of a future multi-lane, divided highway. Initially, it serves two way traffic in adjacent, opposing lanes. As funds become available, the second, parallel roadway is constructed, and the initial roadway serves two lanes of traffic operating in the same direction.

6.2 Where Will This Road Connect with I-69?

The Midstate Corridor has been proposed to follow the existing multi-lane US 231 from Rockport to I-64. North of I-64, the routing connecting Huntingburg and Jasper has been consistently advanced. A draft EIS was prepared in 2004 which proposed two alternatives for a four-lane rural divided highway with at-grade intersections in the I-64 – Huntingburg – Jasper corridor. A final EIS was never issued for this project. Given the need to serve these centers of major business activity, it is likely that resource agencies would concur during the project scoping phase to confine alternatives to this corridor.

North of Jasper, there are several alternatives to connect the road to I-69. The 2012 Cambridge Systematics study described earlier assumed a connection to I-69 at Washington. The 2014 Blue Ribbon Panel report assumed a connection to I-69 at Petersburg. In 2015, the Southwest Regional Logistics Council of Conexus Indiana⁷ proposed connecting to I-69 either near Crane in Greene County or at Washington.

These, and possibly another northern terminus at I-69 (via Bedford or Mitchell and SR 37 to Bloomington) would be evaluated in a Tier 1 study. The Tier 1 study would determine a single, preferred route to connect to I-69.

6.3 How Would the Project Be Staged?

The Tier 1 EIS would determine the project route from Rockport to I-69. It also would determine sections for independent Tier 2 studies. These Tier 2 sections could proceed independently to determine a final alignment, before continuing to design and construction. Potential sections for independent Tier 2 studies could include:

- Rockport to I-64.
- I-64 to Jasper
- Jasper to I-69

7 Recommendation

We recommend advancing the Midstate Corridor using a Tiered Environmental Impact Statement. A Tier 1 project could be completed in approximately 30 months after it is formally initiated (via a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register). The critical path for the project schedule is the time required to determine alternative routes and identify a single selected route between Jasper and I-69. This Tier 1 EIS will accomplish the following:

⁷ A Plan for Growing Southwest Indiana's Logistics Sector, June 2015.

- **It will establish a single route for the entire project.** In so doing, there would not be a commitment to proceed with the entire project immediately.
- **It will determine what type of highway will be built.** While the decision may be made to build an Interstate Highway, the decision also may be made to build another kind of high-capacity rural arterial roadway.
- **It will identify higher-priority portions of the entire highway.** Tier 2 environmental studies, design and construction could proceed independently on portions of the highway.
- **It will allow higher-priority portions of the highway to be built more quickly.** Lower-priority portions of the project, while identified and approved, could be deferred.

Proceeding quickly with a Tier 1 EIS for the Midstate Corridor would address the keen regional interest in the project. It also is a well-accepted approach which recognizes that the entire project need not be built in the near term.

As of July 1, Indiana motorists are paying increased motor fuel taxes to support an expanded transportation program. The Midstate Corridor is one of the key elements already identified for this transportation plan. This is an opportune time to show progress is putting these added revenues to work.