

Office of the Common Council
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Bloomington, IN 47402

July 20, 2010

Ray LaHood, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood,

We three members of the City of Bloomington Common Council send this letter to you regarding the Indiana State Road 45/46 Bypass.

Since your appointment, you have accelerated adoption of urban road and street design policies that are both progressive and inclusive. Your concern for livability, walkability, sustainability, and environmental justice shows in your support of concepts such as Context Sensitive Solutions, Transit Oriented Design, and Travel Demand Management. Coupled with an improvement in public participation processes, you have encouraged communities like Bloomington, Indiana, the one we represent, to become full partners in projects and plans which involve federal and state tax dollars.

We applaud your efforts. But we write to ask you to intercede on our behalf, against a road project that is antithetical to all the progressive policies you are promulgating: **the impending over-expansion of the Indiana State Road 45/46 Bypass**, recently let by our own Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT).

The 45/46 Bypass was built decades ago to circumnavigate the northeast side of Bloomington. More than 20 years ago INDOT decided that its two lanes should become at least four lanes throughout, with some intersections as wide as eight lanes. Their decision reflected the conventional wisdom of the 1980s which included assumptions of rural speeds, eternal motor-vehicle traffic growth, and roads concerned only with cars. INDOT justified an expansion by predicting in 1997 that traffic would double from 26,000 to 50,000 vehicles per day by 2023.

Bloomington in the interim has become increasingly urban. The “Bypass” is now a misnomer; the road no longer goes around town, but through it. **Vehicle counts on this road have declined or at most held steady; transit ridership has increased many-fold, and pedestrian traffic is high.** A local study of delays for motor vehicles on the Bypass shows at worst “a minimal westbound delay affecting fewer than one percent of daily travelers.” Meanwhile, the collective passengers of Bloomington’s two bus systems represent two-thirds of the ridership of the bus system of Indianapolis, a city ten times larger. Seven percent of all trips on the 10th Street corridor alone are made by public transit.

Through private meetings, local officials like Bloomington Mayor Mark Krusan and State Representative Matt Pierce have persuaded INDOT to incorporate a few pedestrian amenities, but INDOT has otherwise been insensitive to local concerns, having held **no public hearings on the project for 10 years**. The geometry of this over-designed project is virtually unchanged from its conception 20 years ago. It will result in a far less livable city, as we struggle with engineering design that is dangerous to pedestrians and counter to community goals.

Attached is a report showing that **both federal and local transportation policies have been violated or ignored in the preparation of this project**. The report lays out the multiple failures of INDOT to incorporate the context of Bloomington in its expansion plans by not: reconsidering current traffic and pedestrian issues, engaging the public, or incorporating community goals and policies into the community's road. The report was recently compiled by Bloomington Transportation Options for People (B-TOP), an independent organization of local citizens pushing for more enlightened transportation policies. We urge you to consider their findings seriously.

We also call your attention in the report to **the worrisome acquiescence of the Indiana Division of FHWA** to this thoroughly context-insensitive project. The Indiana Division seems not to be aware of this paragraph from <http://www.dot.gov/livability/agencyroles.html> giving explicit guidance on the proper roles of FHWA agencies (*boldface ours*):

"FHWA headquarters is providing direction to the Division Offices on working collaboratively with the other members of the Sustainable Partnership (HUD, EPA, and FTA). A task has been added to FHWA's Strategic Implementation Plan requiring the Division Offices to measure the number of Long Range Plan Updates that include a Livability Section. The Livability section must show how the MPO or state DOT will improve transportation options and foster a collaborative approach in using federal dollars to build and re-build America's communities."

The Bypass expansion was let at the end of May. If destructive work has not yet begun, it is to begin any day now to turn a road that has become a completely intra-city street into an inter-city-style highway. This state road seems to be being expanded for the sake of building something; in doing so with such insensitivity, INDOT will cause irreparable harm to our community. We want to see this road improved, but along the lines of the recommendations made by B-TOP in this report.

We ask you to take action before the bulldozers come. Please use whatever means are at your disposal to delay this expansion of the Bypass. We ask specifically that you require INDOT to **reduce the proposed width of expansion of the road and intersections, to better cultivate the multiple modes of traffic we have and are trying to cultivate**, and to better match long-standing city policies that de-emphasize cars and emphasize all other forms of transportation.

We also ask you to require an immediate change, as a condition of investing federal dollars, in the processes that INDOT uses to develop all projects, so that such insensitivity does not again threaten the livability of our or other Hoosier communities.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our problem. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Steve Volan,
District VI Representative



Isabel Piedmont-Smith, President
District V Representative



Andy Ruff, Vice President
At-Large Representative

cc: Victor Mendez,
Federal Highway Administrator

Robert Tally, Indiana Division,
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Marisol Simon, Region 5 Administrator,
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Vi Simpson, Senate District 40,
Indiana General Assembly

Peggy Welch, House District 60,
Indiana General Assembly

Matt Pierce, House District 61,
Indiana General Assembly

Mark Kruzan, Mayor,
City of Bloomington

Lew May, Director,
Bloomington Transit

enc: Bypassing Good Judgment, INDOT and Its Over-expansion of the State Road 45/46 Bypass through Bloomington, *Presented by Bloomington Transportation Options for People (B-TOP), Bloomington, Indiana • info@b-top.org*