

House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure Member's Day Hearing Testimony

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you for the opportunity to come before this committee today and talk about one of the most critical ongoing infrastructure projects in the United States, Interstate 69. I-69 connects the Canadian and Mexican borders, running through Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, Arkansas, Michigan, and my home state of Indiana.

While the I-69 system will eventually span more than 2,400 miles, today it consists of multiple disjointed sections (see Image 1), which makes the corridor less safe and efficient. One of the most significant breaks in the interstate exists at the Ohio River Crossing on the border between Indiana and Kentucky. Once completed, this bridge would make I-69 contiguous for hundreds of miles between Port Huron on the Canadian border and Memphis, Tennessee.

In 2016, the governors of Indiana and Kentucky issued a Memorandum of Understanding to split the development and planning costs of the I-69 Ohio River Crossing project (see Image 2). Since then, the bridge has undergone a NEPA review that was subsequently published and is awaiting a Record of Decision from the Federal Highway Administration this summer. Indiana and Kentucky have agreed to share the bridge construction costs, which are expected to be approximately \$850 million for the bridge itself and is expected to increase to \$1.497 billion with financing and other planning costs. Subsequently, the project will be waiting for funding to become available, which is currently not expected until 2027, or even later. With an expected bridge construction time of three years, this means that the northern half of I-69 will not be contiguous for over another decade at the very earliest—a delay that will prove costly to health and safety and to the economy.

A contiguous I-69 is a goal that this committee must help achieve as quickly as possible. Currently, when an existing stretch of I-69 ends, traffic must redirect off the interstate onto roads that are not intended to handle the volume of traffic or types of vehicles that an interstate highway is capable of, often redirecting them through crowded urban areas. An environmental impact study for the Ohio River crossing found that in urban areas, interstates have average crash rates that are about 73 percent lower than divided four-lane highways. In rural areas, average interstate crash rates are about 58 percent lower than divided four-lane highways. A 2004 Environmental Impact Study of completing I-69 between Indianapolis and Evansville, Indiana, found that its construction alone would result in approximately 30,000 less serious crashes over a 20-year period. These staggering figures show the hidden costs that Americans along the unfinished interstate are paying for delays in construction today.

Another reason that I-69 and its Ohio River Crossing must be quickly completed is the substantial positive economic impact that will occur as a result of completion. I-69 is a critical route for trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as those countries are already the top export trading partners of six of the eight states that I-69 runs through. The interstate will also play a large role in fostering domestic travel by connecting to 22 other strategic interstate highways, and major manufacturing and agricultural centers (see Image 3). Now that USMCA is in effect, commercial traffic along the route is only expected to increase. This compounds with

national trends in shipping that show 70% of the nation's freight moves on the highway system today, and that freight is expected to increase by 50% by 2040.

The 2004 Environmental Impact Study estimated that just completing the route between Evansville and Indianapolis would translate into over 650,000 vehicle-hours saved per year, and bring over \$3.5 billion in additional personal income over 20 years to Southwest Indiana. These are benefits from completing a 170 mile stretch of the interstate, and are ones that I am confident would be replicated in your own states and districts along the length of the interstate across the nation as more and more of the corridor is interconnected. This expected growth bodes well for the American economy, but could be stunted, or even become dangerous, if there is not a reliable and efficient route that can handle the tremendous traffic volumes that are expected in upcoming years.

I am proud to continue working with relevant Departments of Transportation and other local stakeholders to ensure that any requests to speed the completion of I-69 are an efficient and responsible use of taxpayer dollars that conform to all relevant laws and authorities and requirements of the committee.

This committee should make completing Interstate 69, and more specifically completion of the Ohio River Crossing, a priority to facilitate safe and efficient trade and travel for years to come. Thank you.

Larry Bucshon
Member of Congress

Image 1:



Image 2:

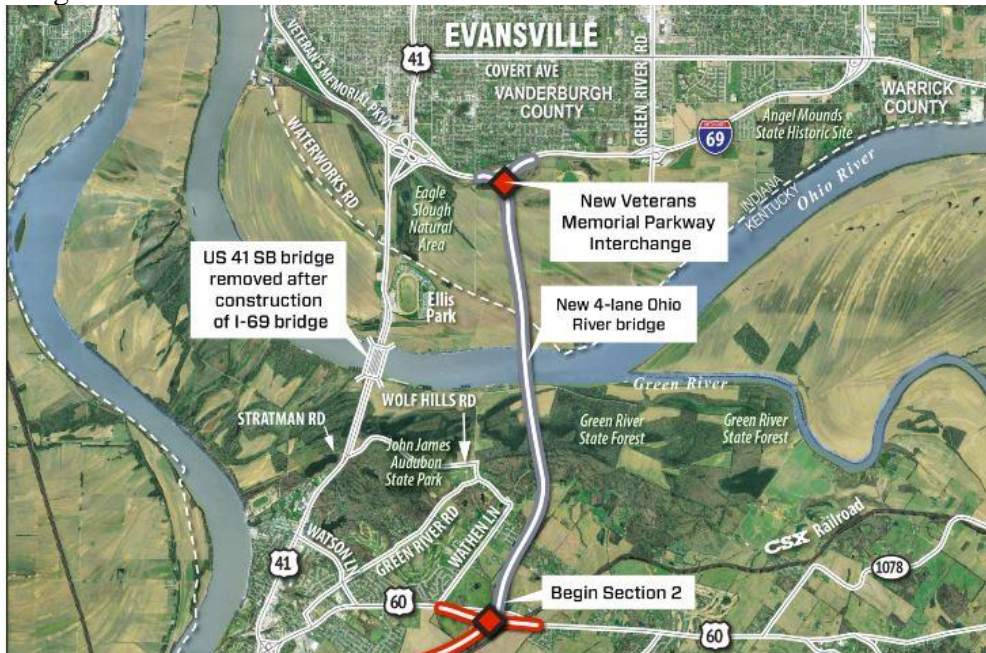


Image 3:

