

Accelerated time frame equals accelerated county desires

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

After Gov. Mitch Daniels' conference call last week to announce his plan to accelerate the time table for the completion of the Hoosier Heartland Highway between Lafayette and Fort Wayne, locals realized Daniels' plan would also accelerate their efforts to influence the Indiana Department of Transportation to recognize the community's design vision of one of eight county access points to the highway.

Delphi Mayor Randy Strasser and Carroll County Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Daryl Smith said Monday that out of the eight county highway access points planned, only one is grade-separated. And if the community is to think of the importance of future development on Delphi's East Main Street near the old The Anderson's plant, the highway interchange design needs to be changed at that location. Smith called the design "problematic to future economic development."

Smith and Strasser explained there are two kinds of access points planned for Carroll County. One is called "at-grade" which means the approaching road will intersect the highway on the same level or on the same geometric plane in space.

Those county roads will utilize stop signs. Traffic intending to turn onto the new highway will do so from a stand still. An example of an "at-grade" access point is the intersection of SR25 and Grant Road in Americus. Traffic on Grant Road must enter the traffic pattern on SR25 from a stand still.

The second kind of access point planned is "grade-separated" which means the new highway will be on a different ground or elevation level from approaching traffic. This allows local traffic to

blend into the flow of highway traffic, which is considered a safer method to bring together two streams of traffic traveling at different rates of speed. An example of "grade-separated" interchange is at SR25 and I-65, which uti-

lizes access lanes for merging traffic.

"Right now, the "at-grade" interchange may seem like it would work," Smith said. "But if we look to the future with anticipated growth in that area, we would want an interchange on the out-

skirts of Delphi that would be safe for tractors, combines, semi-trucks and other industry-related vehicles to use to access the highway."

"It's all about safety of those traveling the highway and those needing to get into the traffic flow," he added.

Strasser said it was important for the county and the city to direct with zoning ordinances protection of the areas around the interchanges. He said INDOT will be asked to purchase extra land at those sites to allow the county to develop them

commercially. Strasser said "grade-separation" interchanges need approximately 40 to 50 additional acres for design and implementation.

Smith and Strasser are members of the Hoosier Heartland Coalition, which is the group designated to work with INDOT about highway issues. Strasser said the commission was established 30 to 40 years ago and is focused on getting the last leg of the highway built. He said the coalition has urged all concerned entities and groups along the route from Lafayette to Logansport to work together to expedite the completion of the highway project.

"The time to act is now, given that the time line has been accelerated," Strasser said. "But all county and local parties agree that we need to get it built and in a timely manner."

"We do not want to slow down the completion of the corridor," he concluded.

"Anything we recommend will be within the timeline for construction with the highway," Smith agreed.



CCEDC Director Daryl Smith & Delphi Mayor Randy Strasser

Short (but costly) crime spree detected

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

Due to quick thinking and some fast action on the parts of the Carroll County Clerk Laura Sterrett and First Financial Bank in Delphi, a short but costly crime spree was detected last week.

According to Sterrett, the bank notified



Sterrett

irregular activity in the child support and clerk accounts. Sterrett and her staff began checking all cashed and returned checks. It was found some of the returned checks were not written by the office but were cashed at various Walmarts in the Indianapolis area in late January.

After affirming no internal mistakes occurred on the part of the office or the bank, Sterrett said she knew the routing and account numbers for the two accounts had been stolen because the check numbers were not from the office accounts. Appropriate steps were immediately implemented by the bank to secure the clerk's funds and the sheriff's department was notified. An investigation was ini-

tiated immediately.

Sterrett told the *Comet* Monday the money was put back into the county's account.

"This cost the county nothing," she said.



Burns

Florida addresses. He said about 15 checks for approximately \$13,000 were cashed.

"It looks like Walmart will be out the money," he said.

Burns said the Walmart Corporation is cooperating in the investigation. The sheriff's department will review videos of check cashers at the stores in an attempt to identify suspects.

"I thought the clerk's office caught this very fast and reported it in a timely manner," Burns said. "In any investigation, the colder the evidence, the harder the crime is to solve."

Burns encouraged anyone with information about the theft or the cashing of the checks to contact him at (765) 564-2413.

Sheriff Tony Burns said the checks appeared to be drawn on the Hamilton County, Ohio Clerk of the Circuit and Superior Courts account to individuals with

Delphi couple buys SMART car



Driving SMARTer

Delphi couple Brian and Judy Stirm stand in front of their new SMART car. Stirm said he learned about the car several years ago and kept track of its entry into the U.S. market. Three weeks ago he went to the SMART Center in Indianapolis to drive home his very own. He said the car averaged 40.7 miles per gallon during his commute to and from Purdue via SR25. After 1,000 miles behind the wheel of the technological wonder-mobile, Stirm said the car was comfortable, handled well and he felt safe driving it. "It grows on you really," Stirm said. "And it has more leg-room than a Cadillac Escalade." Comet photo by Kevin Schnepf

By Kevin Schnepf
Staff writer

Delphi resident Brian Stirm said he wanted a smaller vehicle to help save on fuel costs during his daily commute – and he found one. He and his wife Judy recently bought a comparatively small three-cylinder car which averages around 40 miles per gallon called the "smartfortwo pure."

Stirm said the mid-engine fuel-saver was designed by Swatch Watch Company and built by Mercedes-Benz. He first saw it in person three years ago at a Chicago auto show.

"I like smaller cars," Stirm told the *Comet*. "The 'smart'

was a small, safe car that appealed to me."

Stirm said he studied the car's list of standard features, which were advertised as "more likely to be found in luxury vehicles" according to www.smartusa.com, the official U.S. Web site. He attended a test drive program in July 2007 and was able to make the physical connection.

Stirm said the car was assembled in France about 10 miles from the German border. Its design was ideal for two people and offered many appealing safety and technological features.

"It's sophisticated," he said. "The car is built around an integral roll cage. It can crash

head-on into a brick wall at over 60 miles per hour without affecting the passenger area."

Stirm said in an accident the front wheels would fold in to protect occupants' feet, the engine would slide forward and down and four airbags could inflate. He explained the seats were raised so most bumpers would go under the passenger compartment, which also made entering and exiting the vehicle easier.

Stirm said the online order he placed for the couple's "fortwo pure" was simple and offered several options for the car. They paid approximately \$12,500 for theirs. Other versions such as the "cabriolet" and "passion"

cost \$1,000 to \$2,000 more.

Stirm said he chose one without some standard features, such as a radio, so he could install a custom option.

"That won't be difficult," Stirm said. "If you don't order a radio they still install the speakers and wiring so it's ready for you."

Stirm's only negative feedback was the car created more wind noise than he was use to hearing. That did not keep him from endorsing the vehicle, which is currently on back order in the U.S.

"I'm impressed with the quality," he concluded. "It doesn't look like a \$13,000 car, but it's worth it, even with the six to nine month wait."

Local resident receives National Friend of Conservation Award

Comet staff report

Janet Ayres, one of Indiana's experts in leadership development, received the Friend of Conservation Award from the National Association of Conservation District (NACD) annual conference last week in a ceremony in Reno, Nev. The event was attended by over 1,000 conservation enthusiasts from across the United States.

The award recognizes an individual, business, organization or agency outside NACD for outstanding contributions to the conservation of the nation's natural resources. Ayres was nomi-

nated by the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation

Districts for her work with the Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP). She worked with the ICP in developing a statewide leadership development program series specifically designed to enhance the skills of Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors.

A professor and Extension specialist in leadership development at Purdue University's College of Agriculture, Ayres dedicated herself professionally and personally to helping Indiana develop conservation leadership. She has played an integral part in the creation, development and implementation of the Natural Resource Leadership Development Institute. She served as a representative from the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service through much of her work in Indiana.

As part of her work with the ICP, Ayres committed two years to launch the curriculum of the newly-formed SWCD Leadership Institute. She was instrumental in developing the core content for the institute which consists of a series of leadership training opportunities for district board members and key support staff.

"It was a humbling experience to receive this award," said Ayres. "I love working with people in the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Their concern and dedication to helping our communities have clean



Ayres

Preachin' to the choir

Residents urge commissioners to fund Tioga Bridge Project

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

There is an element of the local population who want the county to fully fund its portion of the restoration of the Tioga Bridge. They want the bridge to become a pedestrian bridge after it is raised so that those standing in boats traveling on the water below will not hit their heads. They want people in Monticello to walk across the bridge and come to Carroll County. The Carroll County Commissioners were in agreement with them at their Monday night meeting.

However, the commissioners' do not hold the county purse strings. That job belongs to the county council, who at their last meeting tabled a request to transfer funds from another bridge account to pay for the Tioga Bridge.

Calling the Tioga Bridge a "great historic aspect," Carroll County Parks Board member David McCain urged commissioners to find a way to fund the rehabilitation and raising project begun several years ago in

conjunction with White County. "It's a good asset," he told commissioners. "It will cost more to take it down than to destroy it."

Speaking on behalf of Delphi Historic Trails, Dan McCain agreed with his brother's recommendation. He said the bridge was "a historic resource that needs to be saved." He compared the Tioga Bridge between Monticello and the area south of Lake Freeman to the Main St. Bridge between Lafayette and West Lafayette. He encouraged commissioners to "do all you can to make it happen."

Monticello Mayor Jason Thompson described his city's 19-year master plan which included the renovation of the pedestrian bridge. He said the bridge project would help to "regionalize" the area for recreational activities in support of the project.

Commissioners' president Loren Hylton said he thought Carroll County "dropped the ball" by not funding the county-portion of the project in 2008.

Highway superintendent Ron Francis said it was better to spend money now to renovate the structure rather than spend more money later to remove it.

Commissioner Bill Brown said he was embarrassed the county has not "lived up to their agreement" with White County.

Commissioner George Mears estimated approximately 14 people would cross the bridge daily from Monticello and each one of those individuals would spend \$10 in Carroll County, which would pay the county approximately \$50,000 each year.

But council member Steve Ashby disagreed with Mears about the amount of money the county would realize from the tourist trade. He tried to debunk the notion that the county would see a financial windfall from tourist traffic as described by Mears. He estimated money reaped into county general would be significantly less than Mears' prediction and it would come primarily from county residents' income taxes employed in Carroll County businesses.

According to Francis, more than \$100,000 has been spent for flood-related clean-up activities by his department. He said the work is not yet finished.

Francis provided a breakdown of expenses. He said as of Friday, \$11,773.11 was spent on landfill costs, \$1,978 for transfer station fees, \$12,867.26 for fuel and \$10,519.95 for 1,631 tons of material to repair 30 damaged roads. In addition, the cost to repair seven damaged hard-surfaced roads was \$7,500 and one culvert repair not yet fully calculated but \$24,100 has been spent on it to date. Labor costs equal \$34,588.54, which is not FEMA reimbursable. He reported the grand total cost of flood-related expenses to the county is \$103,326.86. He said the highway department will continue to remove debris from roadways for two more weeks before taking requests on a case-by-case basis.

"This is not a rosey picture," he said.

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