

Southwest Illinois Connector Task Force Meeting Minutes

December 13, 2019

World Shooting & Recreation Complex, Sparta, IL

Good afternoon and welcome to our December 13th meeting of the Southwestern IL Connector Task Force. The following members were in attendance:

Dr. Marc Kiehna, Randolph County Commissioner
Ed Weilbacher, KRPD
Deb Barnett, SIU Carbondale
Will Stephens, Mayor of Murphysboro
Bob Davenport, Realty Central, Inc.
Paul Schimpf, Office of IL Senator Paul Schimpf 58th District
Nathan Reitz, Office of Representative Nathan Reitz
Bob Elmore, Monroe County Board Chairman
Brian Otten, Perry County
John Rendleman, Jackson County Board Chairman
Karri Nichols, Office of Representative Terri Bryant
Michael McConnachie, Farm Bureau
Carrie Nelsen, IDOT District 9
Kirk Brown, IDOT District 8

Also, in Attendance:

Ronnie White, Randolph County Commissioner
Stephanie Martin, Purple Martin Media
Chris Martin, Randolph County Economic Development Director
Cory Reinecker, City of Sparta
Eddie Koch, Monroe County Economic Development Director
Robert Spencer, Mayor of Pinckneyville
Tim Lowry, City of Red Bud
Lauren Bonner, Office of Senator Dick Durbin
Dan Zobel, The County Journal
Pete Spitler, Pinckneyville Press
James Moll, Waterloo Republic Times
Jesse Johnson, Staff of Senator Paul Schimpf
Renee Trappe, Randolph County Herald Tribune

Seeing that a quorum of the Task Force was in attendance, Chairman Kiehna started the meeting.

Dr. Kiehna began by thanking the members of the Connector Writing Team: Deborah Barnett, Christopher Martin, and Carrie Nelsen for their work in the past month. He also thanked IDOT District 9 for the use of their offices and staff as the report was prepared.

Senator Schimpf was given the floor and he thanked the members of the Task Force for their participation. He stated that the members served without compensation because they have a desire to see the area grow and prosper. Representative Reitz also gave his appreciation to the Task Force and said he was pleased to serve and be a member.

Chairman Kiehna asked for the members to approve the minutes of our previous meeting held on October 25th, 2019. Bob Elmore made a motion and John Rendleman seconded. All in Favor.

Next, the Chairman began by speaking about the cover to the document and the map highlighting the number of fatal crashes and serious injury crashes along the proposed corridor. He stated that Carrie Nelsen of IDOT would be speaking about the accident history during the safety portion of the report. It was also pointed out that the writing team worked with Purple Martin Media to create a logo for the connector report. Appreciation was given to Stephanie Martin for her work on the logo.

The chairman asked the audience to read along as he presented the report and highlighted important information found within. He began with the Executive Summary, written as a short page and a half highlight of the information found within.

After the reading of the Executive Summary, Senator Schimpf commented that the Connector Task Force was charged with looking at the funding of the highway including the possibility of creating a tollway to fund the road. It was stated that a tollway was not feasible for the funding of the Connector but that through the expanding of a current two-lane road to a four-lane rural expressway it becomes affordable and more usable for the area. Carrie Nelsen of IDOT District 9 stated that a rural expressway instead of an interstate highway provides for access by farmers and cities along the route.

Dr. Kiehna then went section by section and highlighted information contained in the report. He asked members of the writing team to join him in highlighting portions of the report. Carrie Nelsen of IDOT spoke about the Safety section of the report. In her remarks, Ms. Nelsen showed the serious accident history of the roads making up the Corridor. She spoke to the ways that a four-lane rural expressway would increase safety and preserve the lives of those who travel on it. Christopher Martin spoke about the Economic Development section of the report and the effect a four-lane highway would have to create a multi-modal transportation portal for Southwestern Illinois. Deborah Barnett spoke about the importance of SIU Carbondale to the region with their world class departments and high-ranking research reputation.

Chairman Kiehna moved on to highlight the sections of the report dealing with Project History and Regional Connectivity, Partnership and Public Involvement, and finally, Project Costs. Estimates were given by IDOT for the costs of the Phase I, II, and III portions of the road. It was made very clear that public input would be gathered in each of the proposed areas. Senator Schimpf commented that he would like to see additional comments added to the report stating that the estimates were made by trained IDOT engineers and that the public would be asked for their input.

At the completion of the review of the Connector Report, Dr. Kiehna asked those in the Task Force and audience if they had any questions or comments about the report.

Will Stephens and Senator Schimpf expressed their appreciation to Dr. Kiehna for his work in chairing the Connector Task Force. Ed Weilbacher also stated that Chairman Kiehna has been an ambassador for the project.

Ed also suggested that a change be made in the exhibit (photo) showing the outline of the Kaskaskia Regional Port District and that percentages be placed on the chart showing the types of accidents occurring.

John Rendleman thanked Senator Schimpf for his work.

Eddie Koch stated that she liked the report but asked that additional private sector employers be added. Employers like The Material Works, Spartan Light Metals and Roeslein Industries.

Senator Schimpf moved that the Task Force approve the report as presented with the understanding that there could be a few changes. Representative Reitz seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Kiehna asked Kirk Brown about the report and how it may help us get on the IDOT 6-year plan. Kirk congratulated the Task Force on their work and said he looked forward to the completion of the report and discussions that would happen with the data from the report. He said that the crash data was especially compelling.

Senator Schimpf said one of the next steps should be to reach out to the St. Louis Regional Groups. He stated that the members of the Four County Highway Coalition should reach out and have discussions with the St. Louis groups like East-West Gateway to get this project on their radar.

Also, Schimpf recommend that the Four County Highway Coalition make presentations to our congressional delegations including Representative Bost, and Senators Duckworth and Durbin. With possible funding in the rural areas being included in the federal transportation budget the timing couldn't be better to visit with our delegations.

Carrie Nelsen and Kirk Brown stated that having this Connector report finished would make it easier for the Four County Highway Coalition to compete for BUILD grant applications at the federal level. Rounds of funding are offered periodically, and this allows us to be ready for submittal.

Dr. Kiehna asked about spreading the word locally to convince our people that the time is right to build this four-lane expressway.

Will Stephens commented that we needed to get a copy of this report in the hands of Eddie Smith and the Laborers Union and ask them to become champions for this cause. There is a data aspect and a political aspect for this project and those people have a lot a sway. If we can convince the union leadership to become disciples for this project, it could go a long way especially in this political climate.

Dr. Kiehna asked Senator Schimpf what was needed to get copies into the appropriate hands at the state level. He said he would anticipate the need for 50 bound copies of the report, and he would work to get private funding for those copies.

Carrie and Kirk were asked what needed to happen to get an endorsement from IDOT for the Connector. Carrie stated that we needed to ask for a meeting with Secretary Osman to ask for not only funding, but an endorsement should a federal BUILD grant be a possibility.

Chairman Kiehna asked for a motion to adjourn and disband the Task Force. Motion was made by John Rendleman and seconded by Bob Elmore. All in Favor. Picture taken.