

**Southwestern IL Connector Task Force Meeting Minutes**  
**August 23, 2019**  
**World Shooting and Recreational Complex, Sparta, IL**

Good Morning and welcome to our August 23rd meeting of the Southwestern IL Connector Task Force. The following members were in attendance:

Dr. Marc Kiehna, Randolph County Commissioner  
Ed Weilbacher, KRPD  
Deborah Barnett, Office of Innovation and Economic Development SIU- Carbondale  
Michael McConachie, Randolph County Farm Bureau  
Chad Goldschmidt, IUOE Local 520  
Paul Schimpf, IL Senator 58<sup>th</sup> District  
Kirk Brown, IDOT Program Development Engineer District 8  
Representative Nathan Reitz, District 116  
Bob Elmore, Monroe County Board Chairman  
Representative Terri Bryant, District 115  
John Rendleman, Jackson County Board Chairman

Also, in Attendance:

Chris Martin, Randolph County Economic Development Director  
Stephanie Martin, Purple Martin Media  
Cheryl Benn, Jackson County Growth Alliance  
Robert Spencer, Mayor of Pinckneyville  
Dan Zobel, Report, The County Journal  
Pete Spitler, Reporter, Pinckneyville Press/DuQuoin Weekly  
Linda Tragesser Southwestern Illinois Planning Commission  
Pam Poetker, City of Red Bud  
John Brittingham, City of Red Bud  
Dan Reitz, Former State Representative, District 116  
Corey Reinecker, City of Sparta  
Bobby Klausing, City of Sparta  
Karri Nichols, Office of Representative Terri Bryant  
Patsie Hopkins, Office of Representative Nathan Reitz

Chairman Kiehna thanked Senator Paul Schimpf for his work establishing the Connector Task Force.

Ed Weilbacher noted that in the most recent Waterloo newspaper an archived article stated that 50 years ago a discussion was held about a four-lane highway.

Chairman Kiehna, introduced former State Representative Dan Reitz to the group. He pointed out that Dan had been on the SWIFT group that had worked on a similar project in the 1990's. Dan is on the agenda to give his thoughts and recommendations.

Chairman Kiehna introduced Stephanie Martin to the group. He thanked the Randolph County Progress Committee for contracting with Stephanie to build a website and social media platform for the Connector. He stated that the dollars used to support the website have come from a fund that originated with the SWIFT group back 25 or 30 years ago. There is a direct nexus for the funding, as it was to be used for the creation of a four-lane expressway through the area.

The minutes of the July 19<sup>th</sup> meeting were sent out to task force members for review and Chairman Kiehna asked for a quick review and approval of the minutes for the July meeting. Bob Elmore motioned to approve the minutes and John Rendelman seconded. All in favor.

Stephanie Martin shared her thoughts about the creation of the website for the Connector. As she proposed a layout for the website, she also asked questions about a Facebook page. Senator Schimpf spoke again about the need to have someone monitor a Facebook page. He stated that he liked having a website more than a Facebook page. Bob Elmore said that a Facebook page in Monroe County had been very effecting in dealing with the Wind ordinance issue. The page titled, "Say No to Joe" had rallied people against a wind turbine development and helped the county put an 18-month moratorium for adopting a wind ordinance. John Rendleman suggested that the board give the chairman the ability to approve items for the website and social media pages.

Senator Schimpf expressed his opinion that the website/Facebook page needs to be a part of the Four County Highway Coalition. The Southwest Illinois Connector Task Force is charged with writing a report and when it is written they will cease to exist. The Coalition will continue to meet and work toward the goal of building the 4-lane rural expressway. Bob Elmore agreed.

Chairman Kiehna asked the group for their thoughts and it was agreed that Dr. Kiehna with the help of Chris Martin would work to monitor the sites. The group agreed that the Four County Coalition should have the website and social media pages.

Senator Schimpf expressed his opinion that he sees the value of having a webpage to disseminate our report and receive public comment from the web. When asked about a timeline for the website and Facebook page, Stephanie Martin felt that she could have it up and running in approximately eight weeks which would be at the end of October.

Senator Schimpf felt the timing would be good to receive public comment for about a month as the task force is charged with putting pen to paper by December 1<sup>st</sup> and completing the report by the end of the year. Rep Reitz said he felt we should get the Facebook page up and running.

Deb Barnett asked if we should consider the work of and report from the Connector Task Force as part of the ongoing efforts of the Four County Highway Coalition. Dr. Kiehna agreed with the statement.

Dr. Kiehna introduced Kirk Brown from IDOT District 8 Collinsville.

Good Morning everyone. Thank you for inviting me to attend. I am Kirk Brown program development engineer for District 8 in Collinsville. I essentially work with projects to get them

ready for construction. I work to complete Phase I and Phase II, the earliest planning and getting plans ready to build and hand off for construction. Our acting engineer is Keith Roberts who has been here before. I appreciate all the work you have done to move this project forward. I think you are starting to see all the work that it takes to get your project to construction. You may look at an obvious need and want to connect the two dots and put a road from here to there and start laying asphalt down. You are seeing what is required in the NEPA process, working with the organizations, the historical, and the environment processes, all the things that must be completed. Sometimes people are surprised at how long it takes from start to finish. It can take anywhere from 6 to 8 to 10 years from start to finish in getting a road built depending on the complexities of the site and the issues that need to be addressed.

It looks like you are becoming knowledgeable in the process and you have obviously put the leg work in and that there is a Phase I study that has been done in the Southern end of the proposed route in District 9. I think that is all relevant information and as you go forward to build on it. Our challenges that we run into are to work with those outside organizations and we run through the same hurdles. We must determine the purpose and need for the proposed route and what problems we are trying to solve. Also, to evaluate and determine the best route to design with the least amount of impact on others.

It is an interesting time in Illinois. It is huge for IDOT to have a new administration and to have a Capitol Bill passed and let us put some money into projects that have been on the books for some time which are similar in nature to this.

However, we have been given demands by FHWA to keep up our current roads up and it is a challenge. How are we spending our dollars effectively? So, in some cases you will see that a road that has been paved 3 to 5 years ago is being painted black or micro surfaced to extend the life so that we can get 20 years instead of 10 or 15 years.

So that's it, there is a shift toward maintenance and there is greater scrutiny on expansion projects. That's been our trajectory as we have moved forward. It is a long and arduous process and it is not quick and easy. The things that you will run up against engineering wise are not insurmountable. I don't want anyone to think that this is a quick and easy process. It causes my staff many frustrations and difficulties. For instance, we have interstates that were built over Native American cemeteries and now that we have some money and would like to improve a shoulder, we must clear those areas and make plans to treat the bodies with respect as we move them.

I think you guys have done some good work and the department has asked us to give you assistance and lend you support. So, thank you for inviting me to attend today and with that I would be glad to answer any questions you have.

I'm sure we have a lot of questions and your counterpart Carrie who has the same position in District 8 has been very helpful to us as we have looked at studies and information from the past 50 years.

So as we have identified reasons for why this road should exist, what are some of the main pieces from District 8's perspective that IDOT has looked at as they decide to include projects like ours in their 6-year plan for a Phase I from Route 4 to Waterloo including an entrance to the World Shooting and Recreation Complex, the KRPD Dock Number 2 and the industrial park and business district in Red Bud, then swing back up to the 3 mile curve and on to Waterloo. What can we do to get on your radar?

In our past we have had a lot of the wag the dog projects. As a matter of fact, that's the way it was when I first joined the department. It is not that way now. I would say the following: What is the need for the road and what are the problems you are trying to solve? If you can identify the key problems, you are trying to remediate. Those are the things that will register in our eyes and in the FHWA's eyes.

Things that are common issues are mobility or how are you connecting people and products and where they need to go? Safety is another key issue. Are there a lot of accidents happening? Is there something that building this road will change or make better.

Looking at the overall alignment, we have gotten some negative comments from FHWA when the proposed route is broken up into segments. The FHWA wants to look at the entire project. Like going from Waterloo to Murphysboro.

I think the key things you want to focus on are: What is the purpose and what is the need and what are the major problems you are trying to solve. Safety and mobility issues and any access issues that exist. How does it impact the emergency community? How are first responders affected by the network that currently exists? How could this road improve that situation?

You mention historic business districts and frankly we must deal with that. For instance, we have a 40-year old Dairy Queen in Collinsville that we are having to deal with. Are you impacting an historical area in your planning? We also must consider equal access for the disabled as we look at projects in historic districts. The Americans with Disabilities Act is important to take into consideration.

Dr. Kiehna spoke to the groundwork that has been accomplished by gathering resolutions in support from the Counties, cities, and villages. Letters of support have been gathered from retail businesses, manufacturing businesses, hospitals, the port district, educational institutions, unions etc. Comments were made about the cost of flying a patient from an area hospital to a St. Louis Trauma Center for Heart or Stroke issues and how a rural 4 lane expressway would save money and lives.

Dr. Kiehna spoke to the importance of the route going by Pyramid State Park on the South side of Pinckneyville. He also spoke to the importance for the Sparta community as the study route would head north of Eden by the Sparta Community Airport and turn west on County road 18, creating a new entrance for the World Shooting and Recreation Complex. By traveling West on County Road 18 the route would go between the Baldwin Power Plant and the city of Baldwin on its North. Then moving across the Kaskaskia river, the four-lane would engage with the Kaskaskia Regional Port District dock number 2.

Ed Weilbacher talked about being in the middle of a long-range planning grant received from IDOT for the movement of freight at KRPD dock number 2 outside of Baldwin. The consultant is aware of the possible four-lane expansion and multi modal possibilities the expressway would bring. That really puts you on the map for freight expansion. We also have one of the largest cranes in the metropolitan area and have acquired property for a possible 3<sup>rd</sup> dock. We move quite a bit of freight at this time but adding the 4-lane would enhance that greatly. Kirk Brown added that mobility of freight is a good reason for a four-lane, and we should add that to our report as it checks off boxes. Ed spoke to the possibility of a build grant. They should hear about their application in November. The port is experiencing an increase in tonnage and expects that to continue. He said this would be an excellent time for a corridor study to be conducted from Waterloo over to Sparta.

Deb Barnett spoke about SIU and the huge impact that would be experienced by opening a new artery to the Carbondale Campus. Current and prospective students and families as well as high school students would benefit from a safer and easier commute. Also, faculty, alumni, and sports fans would benefit from a rural four-lane expressway to the campus.

John Rendelman asked the question about economic development and to what extent does projected economic growth influence IDOT to agree to fund planning or building projects. Kirk Brown stated that in his experience projected growth has not been a significant factor in the approval of projects to proceed with funding. The if you build it, we will come philosophy is no longer viable with IDOT.

Bob Elmore stated that Columbia is against the connector because of the increased traffic it may bring to the community. He said traffic is bumper to bumper at 8 in the morning and 5 in the afternoon. He wanted to know how that would affect this possible project. Kirk said that they gather all their thoughts and file their opinions and take them into consideration. Can we address their negative comments, and can we fix their problem issues?

Senator Schimpf said that he understands that the increased traffic is their concern. He believes those thoughts could be alleviated by looking at building an exchange out in the Fish Lake area close to the JB Bridge. He felt that would be a good problem to have in that it would mean increased economic development. They are concerned but I don't believe you are going to see an increase in traffic right away.

Dr. Kiehna commented on the traffic density between Red Bud and Waterloo and the problem with cars not being able to safely pass on that stretch of road. Kirk Brown mentioned that there are solutions to those problems that could be incorporated into the design of the road.

Chad Goldschmidt of the Operating Engineers Local commented that he serves on two transportation boards and has seen studies that have proven increased job growth with the building of four-lane highways. He felt that the building of this connector would benefit everyone with increased job growth and economic activity.

Senator Schimpf stated that he had one more question or concern he would like to ask. What would be IDOT's stance should there be earmarks made at the federal level to fund the connector project? Kirk Brown said, of course, if there is an earmark for this project, it would be spent on the project. That does change things. Those discussions would be held well above my District 8 office. If that happens, we will work with it. One challenge with earmarks is to get a good estimate on what it would take to build the project. If not enough money is funded, then it can cause problems with the construction. The Phase I planning would help to establish appropriate timelines and dollars that need to be spent to complete the project from start to finish. A Phase I planning grant would help you get on IDOT's 6-year plan and help the project compete with other projects across the state.

Dr. Kiehna asked for clarification about the recommendation for a Phase I planning project. Former Representative Dan Reitz recommended that the task force work toward funding of a Phase I planning project from Waterloo to Pinckneyville. With the understanding that a Phase I plan already exists from Pinckneyville to Murphysboro.

Kirk Brown was asked if he felt that a comprehensive Connector Task Force report with all the issues and problems would be key to getting IDOT to fund a Phase I planning project. He said yes.

Dan Reitz said he believes the road will be built incrementally anyway and when he worked on the four-lane around Waterloo it seemed like there was more paper produced than concrete to build the road because of all the studies you had to do. I think it's a good time both administratively and politically to do this because the capital bill is providing money to fix maintenance issues with the road system and will allow IDOT to start on projects that have been in the Q waiting for funding. Now is the time to work with the legislators to get funding for a Phase I Planning Grant to get this project on the 6-year plan and moving forward.

Michael McConachie asked whether about historical farms and Centennial Farms and their status when it comes to protection and accommodation with road projects. Kirk Brown replied that in his experience they have worked with farmers but there have been no special protections given to Centennial Farms.

Representative Bryant said that she knew of a legislator by the name of Charlie Meyer who owned a Centennial Farm and that IDOT made a special accommodation to him and put a box culvert in a road to allow him to move his cattle under it

Ed Weilbacher brought up protected conservation farm easements and that IDOT works with farmers to deal with issues. Kirk agreed saying there are some protections afforded to farmers who have this type of easement.

Senator Schimpf gave a warning that the Governor is giving a press conference at the complex and there would be the need for us to finish up in about 20-minutes

Dan Reitz was asked to come and give his thoughts on where we are at.

I think you are going in the right direction and have the correct people at the table. You are drawing attention to SIU Carbondale and the needs of the campus along with the Kaskaskia Port District and their possible expansion. I think you are on the right track and now we have the World Shooting and Recreation Complex and I think you can expand it. Things have changed and people are more mobile. Our forefathers used to go to St. Louis once a year, now people go every night. It's just not that far away. But I think that getting the studies done is the key. IDOT can't move and legislators can't work to appropriate money until the studies have been done.

Senator Schimpf has done a nice job of getting the Task Force passed and formed. I remember when Ralph Dunn worked to get a toll way study done for this road. Unfortunately, we found out that it would take about two thousand years-worth of tolls to fund the building of the highway.

I think its an opportune time that we haven't had. And now IDOT, with the passage of the Capitol Bill, can maintain their current roads and consider expansion for the future. With the passage of the gas tax it provides us with a stream of revenue for the future. As you put your report together just include everything you can, with the history and the tourism you have in this area, the road will open it up even more. It will allow people a new route to get down to the Shawnee National Forest instead of going over to 64 to get there.

Dr. Kiehna asked the members of the task force to volunteer as a member of the writing team for the task force report. He asked them to contact him.

During final comments Kirk Brown talked about acquiring the ADT or Average Daily Traffic figures for the study area. He felt that would be important to include in the report.

Pam Poetker of Red Bud asked if there would be a chance for individual communities to be contacted about the road plans. She was told that as a part of the Phase I planning process there must be hearings held in the communities and input solicited from the citizens.

As last comment from Representative Nathan Reitz is that he sees this as the time to get funding for planning.

Chris Martin commented, it just happened again. We were recently contacted with a business lead and the fact that we had no four-lane highway shut the conversation down. We need this rural four-lane expressway.

Dr. Kiehna thanked Dan Reitz, Kirk Brown and Stephanie Martin for joining the meeting and asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Bob Elmore and seconded by Chad Goldschmidt. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.