

Southwest Illinois Connector Task Force Meeting Minutes

October 25, 2019

World Shooting & Recreation Complex, Sparta, IL

Good Morning and welcome to our October 25th meeting of the Southwest 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.
Kathy Wills, Office of IL Senator Paul Schimpf 58th District
Nathan Reitz, Office of Representative Nathan Reitz
Bob Elmore, Monroe County Board Chairman
John Rendleman, Jackson County Board Chairman

Also, in Attendance:

Shane Watson, CEO Red Bud Regional Hospital
Joann Emge, CEO Sparta Community Hospital
Randy Dauby, CEO Pinckneyville Community Hospital
Charles Kelley, Administrator, MedStar Ambulance
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
Cheryl Benn, Jackson Growth Alliance
Jim Kirkpatrick, Office of Senator Tammy Duckworth
Lauren Bonner, Office of Senator Dick Durbin
Dan Zobel, The County Journal

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

Chairman Kiehna asked for the members to approve the minutes of our previous meeting held on May 10, 2019. Ed Weilbacher made a motion and Bob Davenport seconded. All in Favor.

Stephanie Martin of Purple Martin Media began the meeting by giving a status report on the new Connector web page and Facebook page. She told the group that a variety of items are included on the pages: the focus study route, the members of the task force, ordinances and resolutions that have been passed. Dr. Kiehna asked if the deadline that was previously agreed to will be met and if the sites would be up by Halloween. The answer was yes, the website is ready to go live. Deb Barnett asked about the status of the Facebook page and Chris Martin addressed the question by stating that as of October 2nd over 900 individuals had been on the page. He is

monitoring the site and has seen very positive comments. He also commented that a post he had made on behalf of the progress committee had been getting some comments. He commented that prospective businesses have asked for leads in our area but under the condition that there was a four-lane highway. Those leads have just shut down because of the lack of a four-lane highway.

At the invitation of the Connector Task Force, a group of health care leaders from the area came to talk about transportation issues. The members of the panel included, Randy Dauby of Pinckneyville Community Hospital, Shane Watson, of Red Bud Regional Hospital, Joann Emge of Sparta Community Hospital, and Charles Kelley of MedStar Ambulance.

Dr. Kiehna introduced the panel and asked them to begin by informing the Task Force about their healthcare agency. Each responded with a short description. Shane Watson began with a comment about basic transportation and psychiatric care. He said, "There is not a lot of public transportation available to get to doctors' appointments and follow-ups. Other challenges include that there are limited resources for psych patients in Illinois. Transportation takes time and the distance patients have to travel is pretty amazing."

Chuck Kelley of MedStar Ambulance said, "a four-lane highway from the Murphysboro area to Waterloo would make access easier. We take almost all of our stroke patients to St. Louis. Once we hit Waterloo we can open up, and that four-lane makes a huge difference, as well as helping us get back quicker." Kelley also noted that people are starting to go outside the region to get to specialists, especially in St. Louis, and a four-lane highway would help alleviate traffic. MedStar has only three ambulances in Randolph County, according to Kelley, and one truck that is available during peak hours. "The longer it takes to transport patients, it takes resources away from Randolph County. It leaves us unprotected from EMS service."

Joann Emge of Sparta Community Hospital said, "There is a shortage with health care providers. If we can shorten the time on the road for physicians, our recruitment options will get much broader."

Kelley also pointed out that no area hospitals offer obstetrics. "If someone calls us who is in labor, it takes 45 minutes to get to the nearest facility that can serve them. We have more than once delivered babies in the ambulance." Kelley also said that recruitment is an extreme problem, "It has almost hit critical levels in Illinois, and it is a nationwide problem. We currently have 16 full-time open positions, and nobody is coming to us."

The panel agreed that a four-lane highway would help make some of the positions more attractive, with Emge noting that if a commute can be cut from 90 minutes to 45, it would help keep employees. Chairman Kiehna commented, "There is a real opportunity here for someone if they want to get into health care."

Dr. Kiehna reported on the writing team which included Chris Martin, Deb Barnett, Carrie Nelsen, and himself. They recently met in Carbondale at the District 9 IDOT office where they created an outline for the beginning of the Connector Task Force report. The outline of the table of contents was projected for the group and the individual components of the table were talked about and presented.

The members of the Task Force were asked for feedback on the look of the table of contents and plan for the report. Will Stephens commented that he felt that if the report follows the table presented that it would be well done and benefit the creation of the highway. Ed Weilbacher commented that he thought it was good. Representative Reitz also thought it looked good.

As the meeting began to end, Dr. Kiehna asked the members of the Task Force to recap and verbalize what was talked about during health care panel. The members talked about the availability for patients to access psychiatric

care, healthcare, the recruitment of physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals, the bottleneck that exists as ambulances drive to St. Louis Trauma Centers, the extreme cost involved with helicopter transports, and the problem with pregnant mothers delivering babies out of the area.

Ed Weilbacher spoke to the comments made by the healthcare panel who felt the four-lane would help with Economic Development and raise the median income while lowering unemployment for the citizens of the area. Providing dollars for families to afford healthcare.

Mayor Will Stephens commented that the Task Force should continue to solicit letters of Support for the project. Dr. Kiehna spoke to the letters currently on hand from Sparta, Chester, and Red Bud Hospitals. Bob Davenport said he spoke to CEO Rex Budde about a letter of support from the hospitals in Murphysboro and Carbondale.

John Rendleman asked if the Capital plan that was introduced on Monday included our project. Dr. Kiehna said he didn't see it listed and reminded the group that until the project is listed on IDOT's 6-year plan it may not happen. When the Connector Task Force report is completed it will give our Representative Nathan Reitz ammunition to influence IDOT leadership to include the Connector in their plans. John commented that he hoped the project was not losing the advocacy of our elected officials. Will Stephens commented that he was pleased that representatives from Senator Duckworth and Senator Durbin's offices were attending today's meetings. Jim Kirkpatrick who works for Senator Duckworth introduced himself and said that they have a grant specialist named Dan McManus who works out of their Chicago office and they would be pleased to work with us on available federal or state dollars. Lauren Bonner who works with Senator Durbin also said that when the report is finished, they could work with us on strategies and letters of support to help secure dollars for the project. Jim Kirkpatrick also suggested that Dan Mc Manis may make a trip to Southern Illinois and meet with us once the report is complete and speak to our group.

Eddie Koch talked about Mary Lange and how Freightways and East/West Gateway are studying the movement of freight on rural non-interstate roads. They are interested in our work and look forward to helping. She suggested telling the story of Sun Basket and the loss of 300 employees in Monroe County.

Cheryl Benn made comment about the need for new roadways in Southern Illinois to serve tourism with the new casino development at Walkers Bluff

Bob Elmore made motion to adjourn. Bob Davenport seconded the motion. All in favor.