

We will never let them build this road:

Update on the struggle against I-69

It is 2007, and after more than a decade of resistance to I-69, INDOT is boasting that construction will begin next year. In preparation for this, they have begun pressuring landowners in Section 1 to sell their farms and are attempting to finalize the planning process for the first miles of the route. Yet the I-69 project as a whole is on shakier ground than ever, following two years of budget problems, financing failures, and growing opposition.

Most predictably, INDOT has seen its lowball cost estimates shot down again and again. A new federal impact study has refuted INDOT's claim that the first sections will only cost the \$119 million that is currently set aside for the first two years of construction. Instead, as a best-case scenario, this phase will cost nearly twice as much, \$230 million. A number of citizens' groups (including Citizens for Appropriate Rural Roads) have more recently reworked INDOT's math, leading to the conclusion that instead of being a \$2 billion road, I-69 will cost at least \$3.4 billion. (Indianapolis Star, April 1)

Unsurprisingly, those who hope to profit from this road's construction continue to repeat INDOT's distortions. The Evansville Courier-Press has cited the old numbers as recently as May 11, as well as consistently pushing the lie that I-69 is a done deal, that all the necessary money is on hand, and that opposition is useless. The only thing that the Courier-Press has proved, however, is that they cannot be trusted.

Even the support of the Courier-Press and other road-boosters could not save Gov. Daniels and INDOT from the political fall-out from their failed bid to build the Indiana Commerce Connector. The project would have linked new-terrain I-69 in Martinsville to the pre-existing highway networks around Indianapolis and was planned to be sold off as a toll road in order to fund I-69. It was the failure of previous funding schemes (e.g. the direct privatization of I-69) that drove them to the insane plan to build one road simply to fund another one. And after the ICC's cancellation, no one could deny that it was public opposition that stopped this madness.

Clearly, in spite of INDOT's rhetoric, there is nothing definite about I-69. What is definite is that the vast majority of people in Indiana still oppose I-69. We can't let INDOT sneak past us to complete this road. INDOT is currently buying up land in the first two miles north of I-64, at the beginning of the route. Families are being forced to leave their land this spring, regardless of whether the road will even be able to be finished.

The I-69 project may or may not collapse on its own, but either way many more families will lose their land, unless we all get together to stop this project. I-69 can still be stopped and, following all of the financing missteps, it is more vulnerable to public opposition than ever before. It's important that we communicate with each other, and make sure that INDOT does not succeed in isolating anyone who is being affected by this project. We need to continue to speak out, and make sure that INDOT knows: We will never let them build this road.