

# New U.S. 31 around Kokomo opening today



Posted: Tuesday, November 26, 2013 6:12 am

By Jeff Rea

Today is an exciting day in the state of Indiana. If you hop in your car and drive south from South Bend, you'll be able to do something you haven't been able to do since, well, the last time they built a bypass around Kokomo. You'll be able to bypass Kokomo on the new U.S. 31.

No fear this time around, the road has been constructed in such a way that your travel shouldn't be delayed in future years by the influx of new stoplights and/or intersections.

The ultimate goal remains for you to be able to set your cruise control when you leave South Bend and slow down only when you arrive in Indianapolis.

Indiana Gov. Mike Pence will join officials from across Indiana this morning for the official ribbon cutting and opening of the Kokomo bypass, just in time for the holiday travel season.

Today's opening marks the first of three significant U.S. 31 openings over the next three years. Next year at the same time, we'll celebrate the completion of the Plymouth-South Bend stretch. In November of 2015, the Hamilton County stretch will wrap up. If you pay close attention on your drive, you'll see significant progress has already been made on those two segments.

**Funding** for improvements in the corridor has largely come from Major Moves. The lease of the Indiana Toll Road has helped Indiana move forward on long-needed transportation priorities like U.S. 31. Without the funding source, it might have remained just a dream for southbound travelers.

The completion of these portions will mean about 70 percent of the original goal has been accomplished. About 250 driveways, 100 intersections, seven stoplights, and two railroad crossings still need to be handled, but those issues aren't funded or part of any current project.

The completion of U.S. 31 to an interstate-quality road has **business** leaders in our community excited. They have long advocated for these improvements. The ability to move product more **easily** to the south opens new opportunities for distribution into markets previously hard to serve.

When complete, U.S. 31 gives Indiana another "crossroad" connecting the state to major destinations. Our geographic location and our developed transportation **network** make our state ideal for warehouse, logistics and distribution opportunities. Interstate 80-90, the U.S. 20 Bypass, and now U.S. 31 make our region a major player in similar opportunities.

Indiana continues to move forward with other major infrastructure improvements. An Interstate 69 connection to the south, new Ohio River bridges, the completion of U.S. 31, and now the Illiana Expressway all will compete for future attention, especially from funding sources. Recently, **business leaders** south of here began pushing for improvements to U.S. 30.

Projects like U.S. 31 often take decades to plan and build. They also cause a great deal of inconvenience during the construction phase. But in the end, those improvements in turn will help our area meet our transportation needs for many decades to come and certainly provide a needed boost to our local economy.

At the same time, we need to be thinking about what the next priority for our area should be: another road project, high-speed rail or other transit options. I would be interested in hearing your feedback. If we want to drive or ride on it, then we better start planning it now. We are able to try out the new Kokomo bypass today because of the foresight of our leaders many years ago pushing the project forward.

**Jeff Rea is president and CEO of the St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce. He can be reached at [jrea@sjchamber.org](mailto:jrea@sjchamber.org).**