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Tipton officials worry single U.S. 31 interchange is insufficient

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Kokomo — The intent of the new U.S. 31 corridor is to get Indiana motorists from points north to points south, and vice versa, as quickly as possible.

But that convenience may come at a cost for residents of Tipton County.

Current plans call for the new U.S. 31 bypass around Kokomo to include just one interchange in Tipton County.

The Kokomo bypass which is expected to be complete in 2013 will veer east at 600 North in Tipton County, with business U.S. 31 following the current route.

When complete, the road will include 13 miles of asphalt through Tipton County. However, the lone Tipton County interchange on the interstate-quality U.S. 31 is currently planned at the intersection with Ind. 28.

Depending on how many overpasses the Indiana Department of Transportation plans to construct over U.S. 31 for Tipton County roads, the west side of the county could be cut off from the city of Tipton.

“There is one known interchange in Tipton County,” Tipton Mayor Don Havens said. “Any others are unknown.”

Havens said at some point Tipton County officials have to join with Hamilton County about an interchange at the Tipton-Hamilton county line.

City and county officials would like to see an interchange at Division Road, which carries a lot of industrial traffic west from the Northgate Industrial Park.

“We need to demonstrate the need,” Havens said.

With new comprehensive plans being developed for both the city and county, Havens said those plans are based on the need for an interchange at Division Road.

“Once our comprehensive plans are completed, we will engage the state about an interchange at Division Road,” he said.

If no interchange is constructed at Division Road, it will require traffic to divert south at the planned 560 West project and flow onto Ind. 28.

“There will be a lot of traffic on Ind. 28 at that intersection,” Havens said. “There will be the traffic from the Abound Solar building and our westside traffic at that point.”

Mike Cline, president of the Tipton County Board of Commissioners, agreed that an interchange is needed at Division Road to accommodate traffic from the industrial park.

“I don’t think we would be lucky enough to get two more interchanges,” he said. “But another one at the south end of the county would be helpful.

“I think Tipton County has been overlooked when it comes to the need for at least one more interchange at Division Road,” Cline said. “With all the truck traffic it makes sense to have an interchange there.”

An added benefit of a Division Road interchange would be to provide access to the Tri-Central schools, he said.

Harry Maginity, with the Indiana Department of Transportation, said there is very little activity planned for Tipton County and currently no funding for the project in the county.

“There has been a redesign of the south terminus,” he said of the Tipton-Hamilton county line.

“The big project was to get U.S. 31 around South Bend, Kokomo and in Hamilton County,” Maginity said. “Our biggest projects for the Greenfield District are in Howard and Hamilton counties.”

Havens has discussed the U.S. 31 project through Tipton County with Westfield Mayor Andy Cook. He said Cook believes if the Tipton County portion of the U.S. 31 corridor is not completed, it will impact development in Westfield.

“The Tipton County portion is not funded presently,” Havens said. “The Major Moves money ends in 2014, which means INDOT will have to fund the project from its normal funding.”

The U.S. 31 coalition supports finishing the new bypass as conceived, Havens said.

If not completed in Tipton County, there is also a safety concern, he said.

“People will be coming from Howard County at 65 or 70 miles per hour and not realize the road is no longer a limited-access highway,” Havens said. “Depending on the number of overpasses, motorists will be crossing U.S. 31 on county roads.”