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[Toll road lease was good idea](#)

CNHI

— **THE ISSUE:**U.S. 31 bypass construction.

OUR VIEW:Let's not forget traffic safety is the primary reason for this project.

As construction of a new U.S. 31 bypass east of Kokomo continues, there are likely many area residents who believe the project is a bad idea.

Some Indiana House Democrats still might tell you leasing the Indiana Toll Road was a worse one. Not a single one voted for the \$3.8 billion lease that was approved five years ago.

The former U.S. 31 Coalition disagreed with those Democrats. The group of residents and officers from nine cities, six counties and more than 20 companies along the U.S. 31 corridor said upgrading the current highway to a freeway would add jobs, improve safety and enhance drive times.

Without any improvements, it said speed along the length of the route would drop to an average of 36.1 mph. At that rate, traffic safety would suffer.

It was that issue – safety – that first caught the attention of the Indiana Department of Transportation. An INDOT study at the time found the fatal crash rate was more than twice the state average between U.S. 35 and Tipton County Road 600 North. There was at least one fatal crash along that portion of U.S. 31 each year during INDOT's six-year study period.

The highway's intersection at Markland Avenue, Lincoln Road and Southway Boulevard annually make Kokomo's most-dangerous-intersections list.

What does the future hold for the U.S. 31 corridor? According to the coalition and INDOT:

- Expansion and attraction of businesses, and changes in tourist activity, will produce an economic benefit of \$1.3 billion over 30 years.
- Prevention of 2,600 accidents and 12 fatalities each year.
- Generation of \$5.3 billion in savings from reduced travel times.
- Creation of 5,010 jobs.

But none of this would be possible without the leasing of the toll road, which has funded highway projects such as the U.S. 31 bypass and seeded a \$500 million investment fund for future road construction.

A new Kokomo bypass and the toll road lease were good ideas. They might just be the catalysts of a new wave of growth in Howard County.