

U.S. 31 upgrade around South Bend is a big step, but more needs to be done, road advocates say

Around 46 miles of U.S. 31 from South Bend to Indianapolis will be upgraded by 2015, but that leaves 70 miles of road untouched.

[Tim Vandennack](#)

Posted on Aug. 29, 2014 at 1:23 p.m.

There's smooth sailing on U.S. 31 between South Bend and Plymouth with the completion of the upgrade along the roadway.

Gov. Mike Pence and other leaders gathered this week to publicly unveil the new-and-improved section. Still, proponents of improving the roadway all the way to Indianapolis emphasize that the work is far from done.

Upgrades to another segment around Kokomo were completed last November and improvements to a third U.S. 31 section in Hamilton County north of Indianapolis are to be finished next year. But that leaves 70 miles of roadway in between untouched and in need of improvement, says John Letherman, president of the U.S. 31 Coalition and head of the Elkhart County Council.

Even with completion of the South Bend-Plymouth, Kokomo and Hamilton County segments — 46 miles of roadway — “we will still have 256 driveways, 105 intersections, seven stop lights and two rail crossings to deal with,” Letherman said in a press release.

The three new segments will eliminate 31 stop lights, 123 intersections, 668 driveways and two rail crossings along U.S. 31. That's a notable start, but the long-term goal of the U.S. 31 Coalition is to convert the highway to a freeway-grade arterial all the way to the state capital, without any impediments. U.S. 31 is the principal road link to Indianapolis from Elkhart and north central Indiana.

The U.S. 31 Coalition, a lobby group of leaders and organizations serving the communities on and around the highway, is assisting with planning in locales along

the 70 miles of untouched roadway. Thus upgrades to the final sections, when funding becomes available, “will be compatible with their local needs,” the U.S. 31 Coalition statement said.

The coalition is also working with the Indiana Department of Transportation, Indiana lawmakers and Pence to secure funding to complete the work.

The overall U.S. 31 project “will not be successful until we can set our cruise control in South Bend and not need to touch it until we get to ... Indianapolis,” Letherman said.