



## 1.3 Project History

Along with the establishment of Commerce Corridors, the 1991 Indiana General Assembly directed INDOT to “undertake, as soon as possible, studies that will be required to improve the transportation corridor between St. Joseph and Marion counties. The department will conduct an origin-destination study and may address the following:

- any changes needed in the location of transportation facilities to improve the corridor, and
- the environmental impact of changes in the corridor.”

In response to Indiana’s Commerce Corridor legislation, INDOT initiated, in 1992 and 1993, three US 31 Major Investment Studies (MIS) in the US 31 Corridor from Indianapolis to South Bend. Pursuant to the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), major investment studies were required in urbanized areas to examine transportation improvement options in corridors, and were intended to determine the preferred course of action. Completed in 1995, 1997, and 1998, respectfully, these three studies focused on how best to improve US 31 through the urbanized areas along the corridor:

- Howard County, in the greater Kokomo area, from south of SR 26 to north of US 35 (north junction with US 31),
- Hamilton County between I-465 and SR 38, and
- Marshall and St. Joseph counties from US 30 to US 20.

In 1998, INDOT also completed a study examining the economic impacts of improving US 31 from Indianapolis to South Bend. Following further legislative action by the Indiana General Assembly, INDOT completed the Indianapolis to South Bend Toll Road Feasibility Study in 1999 assessing the viability of funding US 31 improvements as a toll facility. This study found a toll road to be infeasible.

In accordance with the public notification requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), INDOT initiated this EIS in 2002 with the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register to prepare an EIS, focusing on the urbanized area at the north end of the 122-mile US 31 corridor. This US 31 EIS will adhere to all applicable environmental laws, regulations, and guidelines including, but not limited to, the following:

- NEPA,
- FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A, “Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents” (1987),
- FHWA regulations,
- Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations,
- INDOT’s Procedural Manual for Preparing Environmental Studies (2003), and
- Indiana’s Streamlined EIS Procedures (July 2001)



The NOI to prepare an EIS for the US 31 Improvement Project was published in the Federal Register on March 26, 2002. An Early Coordination Letter was sent to resource agencies on August 6, 2002. Copies of agency correspondence are included in Appendix C. The DEIS was made available for review and comment on February 13, 2004. The formal comment period began March 5, 2004, with the Federal Register notice of the availability of the DEIS. The public comment period extended 52 days (regulations require a minimum 45 day comment period) and concluded on April 26, 2004. A Public Hearing to discuss the findings of the DEIS was held on March 18, 2004.

Environmental Impact Statements are also currently underway for US 31 improvement projects from I-465 to SR 38 in Hamilton County (US 31 Improvement Project), and from approximately two miles south of SR 26 to approximately one mile north of US 35 in the City of Kokomo in Howard County (US 31 Kokomo Corridor Project).



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