

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Business 50 through the City of Washington

At its regular meeting Monday evening, the Washington Common Council considered and passed a resolution preliminarily approving a plan to address the condition and future of Business 50 through the City. The future of Business 50, also known as National Highway, has been the subject of much discussion for many years, and this action could very well result in a solution to the road's condition.

Ever since the State of Indiana constructed the US 50 By-pass south of the City, the State, working through the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), has wanted to relinquish the ownership and upkeep of Business 50 to the City. While final negotiations will continue, Monday's resolution sets things in motion toward an ultimate agreement with the State.

"I am the fourth consecutive Mayor who has told the State that the City would not accept the road in its condition unless the State either fixed it up or gave the City funds to do so," said Mayor Joe Wellman. "I never felt it was in the best interest of the citizens to be burdened with the full cost of reconstruction and that continues to be my position. The fact of the matter, though, is that the road has continued to deteriorate and it continues to be a major artery for city and county residents, as well as those businesses and homes located along its path."

While the discussions with INDOT have gone on periodically since 1989, Wellman and the Council began earnest negotiations last fall. "We have gone back and forth with a number of proposals," said Wellman, "keeping the Council informed along the way."

The City engaged VS Engineering in 2017 to generate ideas for what the road could look like and costs to reconstruct it. Midwestern Engineers was engaged to look at utility infrastructure under the road. Wellman and others also visited with State legislators and other State agencies in attempts to address the road. The City and VS Engineering also hosted a public forum last year to gather input into what residents and businesses may want.

Wellman and the Council have agreed that the current proposal is probably as close to a resolution as possible. Under the preliminary scenario, the State will, between 2019 and 2023, give the City around \$14.7 million for reconstruction and improvements plus another \$800,000 over the same period for operation and maintenance costs. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$24.5 million. This leaves \$9.8 million dollars shortfall for the local tab.

"It is important to note," Wellman explained, "of that total, \$7.8 million is the cost to replace City utilities under the road. INDOT does not pay for local utility infrastructure, so this represents the cost to replace water, wastewater & electric infrastructure. The Council has insisted that before any paving be done the old infrastructure be upgraded. The last thing we want to do is have a newly-paved surface only to be torn up to replace water or sewer lines." Indeed, the City experienced five water main breaks under Business 50 last winter alone.