There will be a Salem by-pass!, There won't be a Salem by-pass!, has been a common back-and-forth that spanned the better part of four decades.

The see-saw was officially put to an end when officials broke ground on April 4, 2011. On Thursday of next week, the north part of the by-pass, a two-mile stretch of road connecting State Road 135 and Highway 60 opened.

The second section, the south side, which runs from Highway 60 to State Road 56, will open in the next week or so.

Lt. Governor Becky Skillman was among many local officials, patrons and business owners who were there to be part of the ribbon cutting celebration.

"I was in my first year in the state senate in 1992 when I first started hearing about the need for the by-pass," Skillman said in an interview. "The community has been thinking about this and planning for this for a long time, which was the first step, the second challenge was having a funding stream identified. With the major moves initiative did that, but the determining factor was the community. They participated in a big way from design work to actually purchasing the land necessary."

The bypass will be limited access with bridges over three roads, the CSX railroad and the west fork of Blue River.

Motorist will only be able to enter or to exit the bypass at S.R. 60 or at either end with S.R. 135 and S.R. 56.

Skillman was not the only official who has lived through the past of the bypass.

Salem Mayor David Bower, who was involved with discussion of the bypass with Skillman as both a county councilman and a local businessman, was beaming with pride as he stood on the new road.

"I had my doubts about whether or not we'd ever see it open, and I know the project has had it's share of ups and downs," he said. "It didn't fail because there have been so many good hands involved in this project, former mayor Newkirk, commissioners, city and county council members. I'd like to thank them all and have them all invited here today, but I didn't try because I know I would have left people out because this project has spanned generations and to see it finally become a reality – I am thankful that I am serving as mayor of the town I love and can be a part of it."

Bower wasn't the only one who was proud to see the by-pass open.

Merwyn Fisher, who did not seek re-election for the county council seat he has held for 28 years, said he was glad he was still in office when it opened.

"I was hoping they'd get it done before I left office and they did," he said. "I am glad to see it. I doubted it for a while. There was a time when everything was in limbo and two or three went to Indianapolis and got the money flowing and it finally happened. We were all pushing for it."

Besides the naysayers who doubted it, there were also folks who thought the by-pass would hurt the down-town businesses.

Bower said he never thought it would and still doesn't. In fact he thinks it will help the local economy.

“My journey started in the mid 1990s as a council person and before that as a merchant,” he said. “I know a lot of merchants were concerned about what a by-pass could do, but I’ve always seen it as a opportunity to increase jobs and opportunities.

“We’ve already been contacted by some business folks who wanted to come and see how the bypass was going to work in relation to the city of Salem. It has already generated interest.”

Commissioner John D. Fultz said he remembers the bypass being discussed as far back as the 1970s, but folks then didn’t really support the idea.

“I always thought it was a matter of when,” he said. “. . . If you stay positive, good things will happen.”

Fultz said the project would not have been possible without local units of government working together.

“Over the years the city and county have had a lot of good projects and I am proud of all the accomplishments I’ve been a part of and hope to be part of many more,” he said. “I am just glad to see the county and city working together so well.”

Kathy Eaton-McKalip, who is INDOT’s Director of Grants and Local Programs, agreed.

“This project would not have happened without the participation and partnership of local leaders,” she said. “Looking ahead, partnering with communities or the private sector is increasingly the model for getting big projects done.”

Washington County provided all of the development and engineering work, including design and land purchases. INDOT financed the construction and oversaw the contractor’s work.

Including the Salem Bypass, nearly 100 miles of new limited-access highway are opening to traffic by the end of this year as a result of Governor Mitch Daniels’ Major Moves highway program. Major Moves capitalizes on Indiana’s strategic location as the Crossroads of America by improving and expanding road infrastructure in support of a stronger economy and greater mobility.