

Salem Mayor says e-mail he received is first step in making State Road 60 safer

Written by George Browning
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Salem Mayor David Bower held a celebratory meeting on July 12 in the council chambers of city hall.

The celebration was for the fact that his lobbying the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) has finally been heard.

He said he has bent the ear of every state official over the past few years regarding making State Road 60 from Salem to Bennettsville a safer road.

Bower has dubbed the project "Safe 60."

The reason for celebration was an e-mail he recently received from Kathy L. Eaton-McKalip, who is a deputy commissioner with INDOT.

In the e-mail Eaton-McKalip admits to assembling a team to conduct a SR 60 field check in July, with a final report out some time in August.

McKalip said in the e-mail that "INDOT need to conduct significant amounts of data analysis first in order to brief the team and make the field check as productive as possible."

Bower said the fact that an INDOT official is on the record stating at least some movement regarding the project is a positive sign.

"The fact that she has put in print that she is going to start the study on 60 is one of the biggest steps you can take," he said. "I was a young councilman involved in the bypass for years and to get the state to come in and even talk about anything is a hurdle.

"This is proof that there is a study that will be done and I am confident will prove there is work that needs to be some action taken on 60."

Bower said the last traffic survey indicated that more than 5,000 cars a day travel State Road 60 from John Jones toward Sellersburg and he expects that number now is near 6,000.

"There is a huge amount of traffic that leaves our community every morning and returns at night," he said.

Bower said at one time he thought the "Safe 60" project was similar to the Salem Truck Route – it would eventually get done, but a lot of folks alive today wouldn't be here when it is finished.

Bower and city officials met with town officials from Pekin.

"This is a viable project," he said. ". . . I don't think this will be a two-year project. "It could be four or five years before you even get into land acquisition.

"It does seem though that the stars are coming in line at the state level and I think if I am blessed with a longer life, I could see this project in my lifetime."

Eaton-McKalip said the study will determine which steps are taken moving forward.

"From the study, we hope to identify those areas along SR 60 that could benefit from safety improvements," Eaton-McKalip told Bower in the e-mail. "The corridor study that we will conduct will be on DR 60 from Sellersburg to Salem. INDOT will also work with state and local police departments and the federal highway administration to seek all input that we need in order to get a good assessment of any needs for the section of the road."

Bower said his goal now is to build a consensus of all parties who will be involved, it will help move the state forward faster.

"If we could get letters of support – not a petition – but letters from leaders and have them come together in support of the project," Bower said.

He said he has plans to meet with Congressman Todd Young and get him on-board in supporting the project.