



# INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

100 North Senate Avenue  
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**Michael R. Pence, Governor**  
**Brandye L. Hendrickson**  
**Commissioner**

SR 46 Bridge over Eel River in Clay County  
Public hearing transcript  
Wednesday, August 5, 2015  
Center Point United Methodist Church  
7:00 p.m.

**Nancy Lankford** – Hello.....I've been a lifelong resident of Bowling Green, my family's been here and settled in Bowling Green and were instrumental in developing Bowling Green. My grandfather helped build the highway through Bowling Green.....highway 46 and the bridge.....we've got the plans and things that he's collected and saved, and he's a huge historian here in the county. There's been six generations of us that have gone over that bridge and recognize that as part of being home.....this is where I live and so it's really important to us. So whenever you rip apart something, tear it down.....like oh gee it's ugly.....well it might not be a beautiful landmark but man it's important to a lot of people.....really, really important. I just hate to see something that significant that our ancestors worked so hard for and gave up our land.....you know, they rearranged their lives so that Bowling Green could prosper and things. Bowling Green has kind of gone downhill a little bit but hopefully with some new development here in Bowling Green, man we could do something. It would be wonderful to have an access port for canoes or small watercraft.....where is the closest place that we can actually access the river? Our river.....you can't get there unless you go down a big steep bank.....I have canoed down the Eel River and come up on Bowling Green Bridge and had to crawl out of the bank.....it's difficult and so there's a lot of people.....a lot of outdoors things that we can do.....if there was a park there, man wouldn't that be pretty and have access to that. You could canoe from places.....the guys that have been working to promote our historic bridges.....just in our local area, forty-two (42), Bowling Green, Feeder Dam.....it's amazing the history we have and nobody knows.....who knew. I didn't know all that history until somebody brought it to my attention, and to lose all that history.....when it's gone it's gone. When my grandpa died.....how much history did I lose? My dad.....whenever a piece is gone you cannot get it back. That bridge talks to us. It tells us about our lives.

**Tom Reberger** - My name is Tom Reberger, lifelong resident of Clay County and I am president of the Clay Community Parks Association. As was indicated earlier in the meeting, we have reached an agreement the Clay County Commissioners to handling the financing portion of any maintenance that would occur on this bridge after the Clay County Commissioners take possession of it. This bridge is on the national registry .....if the people at the federal level think it's important enough that we have something in Clay County of historical significance, we in Clay County and the people at INDOT need to also recognize that. The bridge is going to be rehabilitated according to the people at INDOT whether it stays where it is or whether they pick it up and move it. Why move it? It's a historic feature exactly where it is.....thank you.

**Tommy Kleckner** – Thank you.....I didn't see the pink sheet.....I'm Tommy Kleckner and I'm Director of the Western Regional Office of Indiana Landmarks.....Indiana Landmarks is a statewide non-profit historical preservation organization.....we're also a consulting party in the Section 106 review process for the S.R. 46 Bridge. We joined a local consulting party in December requesting the INDOT seek input from Clay County



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and give Clay County the same consideration that was given to Brown County some two years before we were aware that INDOT intended to replace the S.R. 46 Bridge. We do not object to the new bridge, the new bridge is needed, everyone here would agree..... the new bridge is needed. What we object to is the dismal of any interest in Clay County.....to see the bridge remain in its existing historical location. It was built and designed as a double-span Parker Through Truss Bridge, the preliminary preferred alternative to see spans split apart, it would lose its integrity, of its original design.....PARSONS did present what INDOT brought forward to the Indiana State Historic Preservation Review Board, information and documentation that supported that the bridge have significance in design under Criterion C. That would be negated by the splitting of the spans. Criterion A is what it is listed for and that is for its significance to Clay County.....Clay County transportation history and the heritage of that area.....that obviously would be eliminated and negated if it were moved to Brown County. Tax dollars are what supports and pays for transportation projects like this.....Indiana Landmarks advocates for alternative four (4) which would see those tax dollars go towards construction of a needed new bridge, but also in the full rehabilitation of the historic bridge right here in Clay County, for the citizens of Clay County and anyone visiting this area. A rehabilitated S.R. 46 Bridge, Bowling Green Bridge, in that location with recreational development .....recreational opportunities.....would be the catalyst for the development of a recreational system for Clay County. This would be the first in a string of public access points along the Eel River opening up the development of a water trail that could connect to a land trail.....I hope those plans continued to be developed. Indiana Landmarks began from the beginning, wanting to ensure that Clay County had an opportunity to participate from the State, in terms of the historic landmark located right here in Clay County. So again, we continue to advocate for alternative four (4), we support the partnership of the Clay County Board of Commissioners and the Clay Community Parks Association.....two viable entities that are willing to take on in a partnership, the ownership and maintenance of this bridge for the citizens of Clay County and the citizens of Indiana.....thank you.

**Robert Hostetler** – Thank you.....my name is Robert Hostetler.....the first thing is.....and I know that there are different opinions about history, that I'd like to share a little bit of history, but I was also sort of surprised with the presentation.....that INDOT did a better job of fighting about the history of it in Indianapolis than they have here locally telling you about the history. There's thirteen bridges built by the Vincennes Bridge Corporation on the National Register in the United States.....five of them in Indiana, four of them in Clay County. We sort of have a unique opportunity.....and when we studied history we realize the treasures that we have.....it's sort of hard not to get excited about it. But.....December eighth 1931 (12/8/31).....I've got a newspaper clipping that's talk about the committee that was selecting the road where the commissioners signed over county roads so that they could build S.R. 46.....and Mrs. Buell, your family is one of those members that helped bring S.R. 46 to Clay County.....it was supposed to be the road that connected Illinois to Ohio. It was in the heart of the Depression, at the time that people were having trouble finding work..... it was through a federal project, the PWA that engineered the bridge with Indiana. With an Indiana built bridge, with the Indiana Bridge Company, most likely with Indiana steel.....very unique. Out of the 5,600 bridges in the State of Indiana that the State owns, 435 are of "select status".....is that correct? So somebody else, besides Clay County people, found this bridge to be a "select" status and couldn't be destroyed. So if there are 92 counties in the State of Indiana, we've got a rare bridge. One other comment..... if we're putting money into the bridge like we described.....the Poland Bridge is the same built bridge, we're spending 1.6 million dollars to rehab it right now.....and we're going to spend 3 million dollars to rehab the current Bowling Green Bridge.....I think it will last a little bit longer than 25 years. When we were at the hearing in Indianapolis, about trying to keep

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the bridge on the National Register and INDOT was arguing it should be on the National Register because of its architectural significance.....a person in the audience spoke up and said that the real important thing is not the bridge itself, it's the people on both sides of the bridge. The bottom line is.....whether you're for or against.....we have an opportunity now with INDOT to partnership, and make Bowling Green a community. With the river access, with maybe a trail up to Bowling Green.....the way the new right-of-way will be used.....we feel like it could be a community with Bowling Green, Clay County.....we feel like we could attract other communities. One of the negative comments that they used in trying to decide where to locate it was that there was only going to be a few people that would use the bridge. With INDOT current numbers they mentioned tonight, they would still be over a million people driving past that bridge a year. If one car stops out of a hundred, that would still be eleven thousand (11,000) people, not including the people that would use it for recreation.....canoeing, kayaking or whatever. So I think that we would have a draw and I think there is a lot of opportunity and I believe that the people that are working on this project like Wilmadean Schepper and things like that.....I don't know if you saw the Terre Haute paper where she was featured in there.....the called her the grant lady.....she is so inspirational about doing things for the community. If you look at the Poland Chapel.....you know if you look at the courthouse, if you at the post office in the community, if you look at the state park, Shakamak State Park.....that lady right there is one of my heroes in the community. She's the one that puts those items on the National Register.....she's the one that put this bridge on the National Register in 1999 because of its significance to the community.....Wilmadean's my hero and I cannot stand by and not fight for the bridge whenever we have these things that are so endearing .....and she's done this for the community, not for herself.....thank you.

**L.T. Clark:** John Hancock.....no it's not.....it's L.T. Clark. This isn't my first time....in fact I've been through this several times and I don't think people really realize the significance of the history of the bridge. I've walked these rivers and streams for almost eighty years. Wilmadean Schepper together represent one hundred and seventy years.....we're not old, we're ancient, almost prehistoric. But most people don't think like we do, they don't think it's important except for the lady who was up hear a few minutes ago, she almost brought tears to my eyes. But they don't pay any significance in the Delaware, the Miami Indians that hovered on the southeast shore .....and both made Bowling Green significant, not only historical but historical enough, and special enough to be remembered by a bridge that stands there over a river that has pounded it since 1937. But not gallons.....its eight pounds to the gallon.....a gallon of water....I'm talking trillions, billions of water.....you haven't seen Eel River on the rage, you're missing the boat. It pounds against those pilasters and pillars over and over again and it's not suitable for traffic? I can't believe that.....a trucker that drives a tri-axle has said that he's passed going either way, east or west on the bridge....exhibiting sixty tons.....it never quivered. Water piled up against that bridge.....look at it now.....those pilasters never budged. That bridge was ignored, let go to rust and ruin, the upper part of that bridge hasn't been completely sandblasted and painted in seventy years. It wasn't the bridge that collapsed, it was INDOT that collapsed. They had a beautiful, beautiful structure.....I walked in and I talked to a man, he was about my age and I thought he'll be one of the proponents of the bridge, he said no.....don't make no difference to me.....don't make any difference to me if that that bridge is there or not. I talked to merchants both on forty-two (42) and forty-six (46) that went out of business.....thirty five hundred (3,500) vehicles pass over that bridge every day.....every twenty-four (24) hours and over the Poland Bridge, twenty-five hundred (2,500) yet INDOT has seen fit and necessary to close those bridges for thirty (30), sixty (60), ninety (90) days to make the inconvenience and collateral damage of the public that live as far away as Bloomington,

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Ellettsville, that come and cross that bridge from Brown County and they're not suitable to save? That bridge ought to be saved.....whatever it costs and I know it's going to be a lot less than to move it. Go ahead and build the new bridge but retain the personality and the integrity of the bridge that has been there and connected Terre Haute to Bloomington for many, many years, probably seventy-five (75). David Thomas built the first barge across that bridge, he ferried people across so they could make their way to Terre Haute. We owe something to the ancestry of Bowling Green, to the Indians that perished, the ones that we traded corn for to get the ground, they talk about the Taliban and Al-Quida.....us....white people ran the Indians away.....they were the original owners and caretakers, we eradicated them, we're embarrassed, we're ashamed of that.....those that think the way I think. I know you need to take a good long look at that bridge and think deep.....I know every tributary and stream that enters from the west and every one that enters from the east, from Jerdin Creek all the way to State Road 40. My dad used to pick me up there, at 10 years old.....the head waters of Eel River and fish for suckers.....where are those fish now.....another victim of circumstance caused by white involvement.....there gone, the rivers are absent from game fish, they're not there anymore.....they're gone, it's a sore. Farm chemicals have eradicated everything that lives, from organisms living underneath the rocks, to aquatic vegetation that grows along the banks....it's not there any longer. Let's save the bridge and the river.....Rickie, I've probably run over my time haven't I? Well....friends, I think we're making a big mistake. I did the dedication of the Bowling Green billboard eight years ago.....there was two people out of the whole community that helped paved the way for the restoration of the billboard.....and one way or the other, some way we'll pay for that bridge because of that., but don't let the bridge leave Clay and Owen County.....it has a legacy here. It is a monumental tribute to people down the road.....young people.....thanks Rick and thanks to all of you people showing up out there in the listening audience. By the way, I have a brief here that I started in 2010, its complete to 2015, photographs, pictures and believe or not it even lists the bridge construction over Mckentire Creek on forty-two (42). If you look at this picture, the Woods Forest that starts at the Eel River Bridge, goes in to the Owen-Putnam State Forest and then it dissolves and goes into the Hoosier National Forest.....from here west is farmland all the way to Kansas and beyond.....it doesn't have trees.....it doesn't have any personality in relationship to what those early settlers did and fought for, that is the start of the greatest woods in Indiana, the Hoosier National Forest.....anybody wants to view this, I can prove it.

**Gary Francis:** A lot of you people know me.....my name is Gary Francis, I live right east of the park , right on the Eel River.....when I stand out on my porch I can see the river.....but what I want to know.....I mean, the river means a lot to me, the bridge means a lot to me, the history of the bridge and everything means a lot to me, but who's going to pay for it?

**Adrian Taylor:** Hi, my name is Adrian Taylor and I just want to say that I've lived in Clay County for most of my life and I would like to raise my family here as well, it is disappointing that there are not many opportunities for family attractions and this would definitely be a great opportunity to get a recreational area and at the same time promote exercise and that seems to be something we really need to promote with our youth and this would provide an opportunity with that as well.....so thank you.

**Yates Clark:** Yates Clark.....I'm a lifelong resident of Clay County, fortunate to have lived forty (40) of my forty-eight (48) years within a mile of the Eel River and just wanted to say that it is a tremendous resource.....to my knowledge there is not any public access.....I've grown up on the river.....Dad taught

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me how to fish and hunt on the Eel River and it is a great resource and I'd like to see not only public access.....and hopefully that leads to additional public access points which would make it even more beneficial but also I support the retaining of the bridge in Clay County.

Additional speakers who wished to record their comments privately.

**Speaker did not give name:** I have nothing against historical things but I do think that time changes things.....now I've lived here for fifty (50) years and my husband's family goes back about one hundred (100) years.....about maybe one hundred and sixty (160) years I guess.....back to the 1840s, but I know that times have to change and we have to accept it.....and then it comes back to other things.....and I can understand some of these people thinking that the historical thing is to keep the bridge.....but we have some problems with that because we have at least one small park in this county where there is a lot of vandalism and things.....Bowling Green would see the same things because it's away from law enforcement.....it's far away.....it's going to be hard to control things.....we have a lot of teenagers around.....how are you going to keep them off the bridge if it's for pedestrians? I can see a bunch of teenage kids getting down there and having problems.....and this bothers me too. So in terms of practical matters.....I was very upset when I read in the paper.....I had no idea that they were discussing this Monday and Tuesday at the commissioner's meeting.....no information was given out publicly before that.....and I've also found out that there was a Clay County Parks Board years ago.....it was disbanded.....I'm going to say fifteen (15) to twenty (20) years ago.....they got rid of all the county parks and turned them back to local people. Bowling Green.....since I've been here the last fifty (50) years.....Bowling Green community has gone downhill as far as participation and helping things.....we have people coming in here and maybe they've lived here ten (10) or twenty (20) years but they do not participate in anything and it's going to take local participation to keep anything viable and usable.....thank you.

**Tommy Kleckner:** Tommy Kleckner.....Director of the Western Regional Office of Indiana Landmarks, I want to encourage INDOT to look at alternative rail design for the new bridge to ensure that the visual connection for vehicles and passer-bys over that bridge is retained. I encourage them to look at the bridge rail that provides the tube rail along the top.....since the modified Texas T-rail.... I believe is not an option.

SR 46 Clay County Bridge verbal public comment transcribed by Rickie Clark, INDOT Office of Public Involvement