



**Mid-States Corridor “O” option forecast to generate up to \$150 million,
potentially generate up to 700 jobs and create growth**

Independent objective analysis conducted by Ginovus and the IU Public Policy Institute outlines wide-ranging benefits of the “O” option. Report finds that building the U.S. 231 option could “exacerbate the business, employment and housing struggles facing Lawrence and Orange counties.”

FRENCH LICK – Direct revenue, tax and indirect income totaling up to \$150 million represents the projected forecast from an independent analysis of the Mid-States Corridor Option “O”, according to a study sponsored by the French Lick Parkway Coalition and COOK Group. The research analyzing the potential of a new interstate in the Orange and Lawrence County region was conducted by Ginovus and the Indiana University Public Policy Institute.

According to the analysis, between 500-700 jobs are expected to be created during and after construction in and around Orange and Lawrence counties. Economic development professionals noted the added strong potential for commercial defense growth associated with NSWC and NSA Crane as an expected result of the new interstate.

“Interstate access to the region has long been an impediment to economic growth and further development of the quality of place in southeast Indiana,” said Shance Sizemore, chief executive officer of the Lawrence County Growth Council and the Bedford Chamber. “As the research conducted by Ginovus and the IU Public Policy Institute shows, a significant amount of untapped potential – including refreshed commercial defense and agribusiness growth – could be realized through the construction of a new interstate through the region.”

The formal French Lick Parkway Coalition report noted that businesses in Lawrence and Orange counties currently have “limited access to labor,” and that “friction in the market show up in disparities between metrics like housing vacancy, unemployment and distribution of business output.”

While numerous economic, cost and safety benefits exist with construction of the “O” route through French Lick, Mitchell and Bedford (connecting to I-69 south of Bloomington), construction of other options could actually diminish or accelerate economic decline in the Bedford region.

Based on empirical data, the report concluded that building the U.S. 231 option may “exacerbate the business, employment and housing struggles facing Lawrence and Orange counties.”

Prior Battelle research conducted in 2014 for the region showed only a possible 1.5% increase in multi-county area population (minus Monroe County) and modest corresponding possible economic gains. Current trends show an actual population decline in Orange and Lawrence counties, due in part to critical issues related to workers not having ready access to open positions or career advancements.

Zach Brown, executive director of the Orange County Economic Development Partnership (OCEDP), pointed out that current declining population trends have already created issues for workforce attraction and development for the region. “This region holds much potential for economic transformation, but access and infrastructure issues represent key limiting factors.”

“Over the past two decades, the Orange County region has been quietly diversifying and growing,” said Jerry Fuhs, a long-time Jasper Indiana entrepreneur and co-owner of the Wilstem Ranch, an innovative animal engagement facility near French Lick. “We anticipate 500,000 visitors to our Wilstem Ranch annually when fully developed – this highway is key to that growth,” he emphasized.

“Lack of infrastructure represents a key limitation that can cap long-term growth potential for the region – both of these issues can be aided by the commitment of new interstate connectivity,” Fuhs added.

Comparative isolation hinders tourism, supply chain and manufacturing growth. “The main comment from our annual 1.1 million visitors to French Lick is that the resort is hard to get to,” said Steve Ferguson, chairman of COOK Group. “It is also an issue for the one million visitors to Patoka Reservoir.”

Beginning with the late Bill Cook, the COOK organization has invested more than \$500 million into restoring and expanding the French Lick Resort, the West Baden Hotel, area PGA-level golf courses and other infrastructure in the region, including workforce housing.

The research was sponsored by the COOK Group and released through the French Lick Parkway Coalition, a group of area businesses, civic organizations, elected officials, tourism administrators and economic development executives.

The possible Route “O” of the Mid-States Corridor project would run northeast from Jasper through southern Indiana to French Lick, Mitchell and Bedford, connecting to I-69 south of Bloomington.

Downloadable copies of the French Lick Parkway Coalition research conducted by Ginovus and IU Public Policy analysis and other relevant materials are available at <http://frenchlickparkwaycoalition.com/> Information is also available at:

<https://lawrencecountygrowth.com/news> and <https://themekgroup.com/client-news/>

About the French Lick Parkway Coalition – The French Lick Parkway Coalition is comprised of businesses, civic organizations, elected officials and economic development professionals dedicated to creating new opportunities, releasing untapped potential and fostering regional transformation. For more information, please visit <http://frenchlickparkwaycoalition.com/>

About the COOK Group -- Headquartered in Indiana, with locations worldwide, COOK Group values of integrity, quality, respect, and transparency all help guide our work and our relationships with our employees, customers, and communities. We innovate by listening first, then looking for the best solutions based on the needs expressed. We believe that when employers, employees, and communities collaborate, everyone is able to achieve more. For more information, please visit <https://www.cookgroup.com/>

About the French Lick Resort – Regarding as a top classic American destination, the French Lick Resort is home to two nationally historic hotels, three nationally ranked golf courses, two major spas, impressive meeting and convention venues and a single-level casino. The resort is family-friendly, business-competent and highly regarded as a perfect convention or vacation facility. For more information, please visit <https://www.frenchlick.com/>

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