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### CHANGE IN ROAD REPORT SMACKS OF TINKERING THAT CAN'T BE IGNORED

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**BY: DENISE FREITAG BURDETTE** During the first Bright 74 Study open house in February, I sat in the audience for about an hour documenting the answers flashing up on the screen from the nine multiple choice survey questions.

While some people took the survey later online, many took the survey during the open house.

I took a quick glance at most of the answers, mainly targeting where people taking the survey lived, when they traveled, and where they connected on to Interstate 74.

However, my interest focused on survey question No. 9: What potential outcomes from this study are most important to you? (please check your top THREE).

The potential answers were: Create more opportunities to bike and walk; Improve travel safety; Maintain current roads (paving, striping); Minimize public costs; Preserve the rural quality of the area; Protect environmental resources (streams, hillsides, forests, wildlife, etc.); Reduce emergency response times; Support new investment/economic development opportunities and Other (please explain).

During my hour of observation, I concluded that most people appeared concerned about maintaining current roads and preserving the rural quality of the area.

But this was just a snapshot. No one would really know until all the survey results were tallied after the 30-day comment period. So when I received the summary report on the surveys, I read the results with great interest.

Out of 453 surveys taken, the top three answer choices for question No. 9 were preserve the rural quality of the area, maintain current roads and protect environmental resources (streams, hillsides, forests, wildlife, etc.).

It appeared my initial observation had been correct.

I also had a feeling from the first open house that most people who took the survey do not favor building a new connector road from Bright to I-74.

Again, when the summary report was drafted, I took a look at what the OKI Regional Council of Governments had concluded.



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## Original Draft

### *Suggestions for Transportation Improvements*

- **Priority should be on maintaining existing roads.** Due to the lack of funding, many people spoke to investing scarce resources wisely.
- **Widen, straighten and improve existing roads to improve safety.** Due to the topography of the area, many existing roadways consist of winding curves, steep grades and narrow travel lanes. The public noted that these features can be difficult to navigate, especially in bad weather.
- **Lack of support for new roads.** Due to the public's strong support to preserve the rural quality of the Bright Area in its natural resources and small town atmosphere, stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway. People shared that they do not want to see increased traffic, speeding and noise.

## Final Version

### *Suggestions for Transportation Improvements*

- **Preserve rural, small town feel.** Overall, the largest outcome stakeholders want to see from the Study is the preservation of the rural quality, natural resources and small town atmosphere of the Bright Area. Approximately 10% of survey respondents voiced opposition to construction of a new road. Some people shared concerns about the potential for increased traffic, speeding and noise.
- **Priority should be on maintaining existing roads.** The survey showed that people recognize that improvements are needed to maintain current roads in the Bright Area. To this end, interest was voiced in improving travel safety and shortening travel time. At the same time Due to the lack of funding, many people spoke to minimizing public costs and investing scarce resources wisely. Some also see value in supporting new investments and economic development opportunities.
- **Widen, straighten and improve existing roads to improve safety.** Due to the topography of the area, many existing roadways consist of winding curves, steep grades and narrow travel lanes. The public noted that these features can be difficult to navigate, especially in bad weather.

One particular sentence caught my eye. It stated, "Due to the public's strong support to preserve the rural quality of the Bright Area in its natural resources and small town atmosphere, stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway. People shared that they do not want to see increased traffic, speeding and noise."

That sounded right to me, that "stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway."

Then I followed up by reading all the comments people left on question No. 10: Please use the space below to share any other issues or opportunities we should be mindful of during the Bright 74 Study?

Of course this is not a multiple choice question, so it is not as easy to tally. But I felt that overall the comments expressed a desire for the road NOT to be built.

Then a few weeks ago, people started asking me why they were hearing only 10 percent of the survey takers opposed the road. I was stumped. I was not sure how that number materialized. It did not seem correct based on the report and comments I read.

At first I did not think a lot about it. Facts and figures can get twisted around in people's minds sometimes when discussing these issues. I figured it was a misunderstanding.

Then last week, before I attended the second open house, I went to the <http://bright74.oki.org> Web site to take another look at the summary report. But as I looked through the conclusion, something seemed to be missing. I did not see the sentence that mentioned "stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway."

I started questioning my sanity. It did say that, right? That phrase really stuck out in my mind. Yet, it was not there.

What I did see was the following sentence: "Approximately 10% of survey respondents voiced opposition to construction of a new road."

Well that solved the mystery of the 10 percent number. But what happened to that other sentence?

I looked at the summary report online and realized it was called "final version." I started to realize what likely happened.

Then I looked deep within my archives, that on some days, could label me as an information hoarder. There it was- the original summary report.

Turns out, I am not out of my mind. That sentence about "stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway" did exist- in the draft form of the report. When the final draft was completed, "stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway" was out and "approximately 10% of survey respondents voiced opposition to construction of a new road" was in. But not in the exact same order, a few other changes had been made as well in the conclusion.

Now, it is not unusual for a report to be released in draft form, then later revised. But this revision appeared

quite extreme to me.

How do you go from “stakeholders voiced strong opposition to the construction of a new roadway” to “approximately 10% of survey respondents voiced opposition to construction of a new road.” The words seem to contradict each other- almost changing how the conclusion was presented.

Then I started thinking- how could anyone conclude only 10 percent of survey takers opposed the construction of a new roadway?

I read all those comments. I heard people talking about the study. I could not imagine only 10 percent objected.

So I crunched a few numbers. Now I will warn you, math is not my strong point overall, but I do love percentages. That is how I know the best deals during sales.

From what I saw, none of the first nine questions ask if people specifically wanted or did not want a new road built. If that is the case, the percent must be based on the comments given in question No. 10. After a quick tally, about 122 people out of the 453 total surveys answered question No. 10. Of those who did answer No. 10, most of the comments focused on keeping the rural atmosphere and maintaining current roads. And there were some comments about government waste.

Not every one of them specifically said they did not want a new road, but quite a few implied it. Then there were some comments that I consider neutral.

On the other hand, I identified that only 10 answers to No. 10 showed support for building a new road.

If you did not know much about the study, you might assume, even if that is not a good idea, that 90 percent of survey takers want or are indifferent to a new road being built- if you saw the 10 percent number.

Yet, if I take those 10 positive comments, up against a total of 453 surveys, that indicates only 2 percent want a new road built. If I take that 10 and compare it only to the approximately 122 people who answered question No. 10, the percentage in favor of building a new road boosts up to 8 percent.

While I understand why reports go through drafts, this particular change is unsettling. I am not sure why or how it happened, but it seems misleading.

I am not the only person who feels this way, as evidenced with the people approaching me asking about the 10 percent and the chatter I overheard during the second open house. Disdain about that 10 percent number came up more than once in conversations.

If the public wants the new connector road, then please carry on. But I think there are more people who do not, and that 10 percent number is misleading and the people are not happy.

But do not take my word for it. Click on links that will take you to the [draft summary](#), [final version summary](#), and [all 453 comments](#) from the first open house.

Then you decide if that 10 percent number is correct.

*Denise Freitag Burdette is assistant editor for The Journal-Press and The Dearborn County Register.*

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