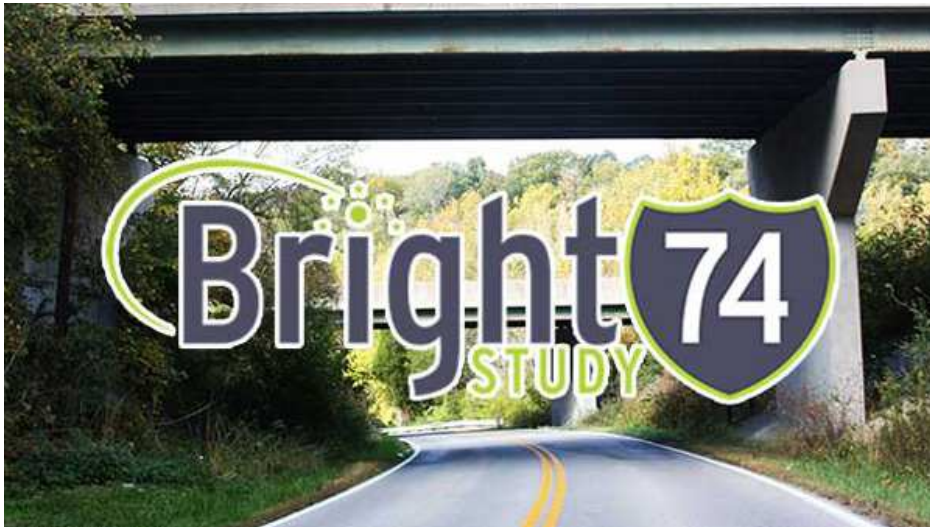


AUDIO: Commissioner, OKI Address Bright 74 Study Opponents' Qualms

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By Mike Perleberg



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(Dearborn County, Ind.) – Road infrastructure has become a polarizing issue in at least one part Dearborn County.

Eagle Country 99.3 sat down Wednesday with Dearborn County Commissioner and Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments president Kevin Lynch and OKI strategic planning manager Robyn Bancroft. A partial transcription of the interview is below, but you can listen to the full, unedited interview in the audio player.

10:57

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<https://eaglecountryonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Bright-74-Study-Interview-Bancroft-and-Lynch-09072016.mp3> to listen to the interview.

The Bright 74 Study has generated much discussion since OKI held the first open house last February. Although the study is only making recommendations on future transportation needs of the Bright area, many residents have voiced opposition to the possibility of a new, roughly two-mile connector road being built between Bright and the proximity of Interstate 74 exit 169 in West Harrison.

An online petition against the Bright 74 Study

(<http://eaglecountryonline.com/local-article/online-opposition-forming-to-bright-74-study/>) surpassed 1,000 supporters this week.

The petition was started about two months ago by resident Tony Luers. Lynch and Bancroft are each aware of the petition, but said they have not yet received a copy or formal notice of the petition.

Online discussion of the project has included allegations that the Bright 74 Study process has not been open, that any new road would only benefit a handful of property and business owners, and other fears.

Bancroft did share one new revelation in our conversation: the Bright 74 Study's final recommendation is not likely to include the construction of a new road. Updating existing roads – particularly North Dearborn Road and some intersections – is the concept attendees at the Bright 74 Study's third open house will see.

"Thank you to the public for taking the time to share your feedback, because that's now what has guided us from narrowing it down from four to Concept 1 and just the existing roadways," said Bancroft.

That final public open house **is scheduled for Wednesday, September 14** (<http://eaglecountryonline.com/local-article/final-bright-74-study-open-house-takes-place-sept-14/>) from 4:00 until 7:00 p.m. at the East Central High School Performing Arts Center. Another survey period will open up for 30 days following the open house. A final recommendation from OKI's study findings is slated to be issued later this year.

Q&A with Kevin Lynch and Robyn Bancroft

Mike Perleberg: Have there been OKI projects in Dearborn County in the past?

Kevin Lynch: There have been smaller projects. (The Bright 74 Study) is the first significant project. Actually, this one has been on the OKI 2040 Transportation Plan for probably 10 or 12 years. When I came on four years ago and going through that plan I saw this connector project and I thought "What is this about?" I never heard anything about it. So I looked into it and thought "Well, somebody put this in there for a reason." But we hadn't looked at it yet or evaluated it. So I thought "Let's get into it and see if it is viable."

MP: When the Bright 74 Study began, were there any preconceived notions as far as what might be the end-game of this study?

KL: My original thought process was that as we were seeing development in the West Harrison TIF area along Route 52, I thought that as those businesses come in, those people are going to need someplace to live. If we can provide better connectivity to housing stock in the county, then maybe we'll draw those folks into Dearborn County instead of them saying "I'm going to live in Harrison, Ohio." Part of that was let's provide some better connectivity because, as you know, the roads out there were not really constructed for the type of traffic and size

of trucks and whatnot that are coming into the Bright area today than were coming in there 30 years ago back when Bright saw some real development going on. We've had a number of slips along White's Hill, where there has been development and still slips there. North Dearborn. Jamison. Those roads were not constructed for the type of traffic that they're seeing today.

MP: Although there is a study, could that mean that a new road isn't necessarily going to be built?

KL: Right. The consultant that was hired for the project, AE Con, is independent. It really has no interest and they're completely independent. In looking at the project and evaluating current codes and roads, just going through and taking the information that's been given to them as well as their experience in road projects to determine what are the options. Really, there is no preconceived determination that we are building a new road, but what really are the options from A to Z. They brought it down to four options that were put together.

MP: There is a contingent of residents who would like to see the Bright 74 Study stopped and nothing be done. What would you say to them?

KL: I'm not going to act like I know everything. I mean, I'm only one person. The whole idea of going through this process is to listen to the public as far as what their wants are, but also looking at, again, state codes for road improvements and all that goes along with that. We certainly are very sensitive to the public's needs and what their opinions have been through the whole study process... We probably hear most from the people that don't want it. Anything that comes up as a change, the people that are maybe against it are maybe a little more vocal than the people who say "Oh, that might not be a bad idea." We encourage everybody to come to the open house next week and get the facts as to what the consultant is proposing and what we're looking at... We're trying to look 20 to 30 years down the road to the future.

MP: The anti-Bright 74 Study online petition has received over 1,000 signatures. Have you been paying attention to that effort?

KL: I've looked at the (Bright Indiana – I 74 Road Project) Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nobright74group/>) and spoken with those folks. I've not received anything official through the county from them at this point, but they were going to send some petition to us – all the commissioners – to again make their thoughts and opinions known. And certainly at the last advisory committee board meeting the number of public that did show up at that event shared what their thoughts and feelings are towards the project. Again, I feel that in order for us to continue along our path, there needs to be some improvements. We

can't continue to spend the money that we are spending on an almost annual basis for repairs and those type of things for the roads out there, because they weren't constructed for that type of traffic and loads.

MP: One of the opponents' arguments is that the public's input isn't being considered here, that their feelings are being rejected or not listened to whether it is through the surveys or through the petition. Based on what was presented at the last advisory committee meeting (improving existing roads), it looks like OKI has listened and is going away from any new road ideas.

Robyn Bancroft: This is a formal planning study that OKI is conducting. We have done a number of these prior. Now each study is unique to the area where we are addressing transportation needs... It is not a construction study, it is a planning study. I think that's really something to keep on the forefront of peoples' minds. It's hard and I totally understand. Believe me, I'm hearing people saying "What are you people looking at this?" My best example I can share of the "why" is the current construction that is happening on Stateline Road right now. That project is covering only 1,800 feet of roadway – very straightforward in the heart of the Bright business area. That project was first conceived and thought of 17 years ago by the county. So the county's stewards to the citizenry have to do this long-range... They county is doing that now so that it can be prepared. So that as the needs arise and as the volumes increase... The fact is that it does look like population growth continuing in this part of the county to a small degree. That's what we're planning for... I thank everyone who has taken the survey. We value and I read every single comment. We have read, we've considered, and used everyone's comments as we move this study forward and I think it will be reflected... Nothing's been decided. We put (the surveys) out there to get public feedback. Again, thank you to the public for taking the time to share your feedback, because that's now what has guided us from narrowing it down from four to Concept 1 and just the existing roadways.

MP: Another point from folks who are not fans of the Bright 74 Study is that they believe it has been a secretive process. Can you address the concern that the county is trying to slip something through without the public being aware of it?

KL: We have been very open. We've included all the local media with information and providing data to them, welcoming them to all the meetings, providing and being available to them. *The Bright Beacon* has had at least one article in every paper that has come out for months and months... I would wonder if they are not reading the paper, seeing the paper, or listening to your radio or going online... OKI has a website (bright74.oki.org (<http://bright74.oki.org>)) and pages for the Bright project. All the information is put out there. Every one of the surveys that has been completed is on the website. Every document that has been produced for this project has been put on that website. The information is out there and I would welcome people to contact me and if you're having trouble finding information we can point you in the right direction.

MP: Concerning the advisory committee meetings, those have not been advertised to the public. Can you explain how those work and what their purpose is?

RB: When the website went live, we shared who was on the advisory committee, that we had five meetings planned, and what we do. It explains the purpose. They are not paid. It's a sounding board – a mini version of the public. They are basically a small group of the community at-large that I can sit down with and try to consider all of the interests. We've got commissioners, the public schools, the farm bureau, soil and water conservation district. A very broad group of folks that are there for me and my consultant team to bounce off the data, the public input, here's our thoughts, here's what we're thinking. They are a sounding board and we get their guidance and input before we go to the public. So they help, these folks who work, serve and live in the area.

MP: One of the arguments has been that the advisory board is just business owners and people who stand to potentially benefit from a new road. Why are there no “normal” residents on the committee?

RB: The group has to be manageable. We can have a conversation. We can have a meeting where everyone can gather around the table and have an opportunity to share and feel like a part of the group. This can't be a 50 member group. I've had the benefit in some prior studies in other parts of our region where there's been a citizens group, an organized group, that has leaders and representatives that can represent the citizens' voice at the table of the advisory committee... That's a huge asset. We lacked that in Bright. We didn't have an organized citizens group, but what I see happening from the dialogue, from the (Bright Indiana – I-74 Road Project) Facebook page, is that we've got citizens coming together. I would like to hope that in the future this group can work together it's an opportunity for the county as improvements move forward, that now representatives from that group can sit on such advisory committees in the future and be part of the table. What you need is people not just people bringing their own personal opinions. We're looking for people who represent a larger group. That's what every member of the advisory committee does.

KL: (For the Bright 74 Study) we did include people with public safety, fire, EMS, sheriff's department, and businesses, small business owners and residents, and the (Bright Area Business Association). There was a lot of great input.

MP: There appears to be the concern that a select few might benefit from the Bright 74 Study or anything that might come out of it. Does that exist?

RB: Following my name are four letters: AICP. It's the American Institute of Certified Planners. I take it very seriously – I'm not bragging about it – I have a code of ethics that as a planner I have to follow. I don't just have to. Deep down inside, there is a reason I went into this profession. I want to serve my community to the best of my ability and use my talents. I want to hear from the public and use their input to really come up with solutions that we can put into action that benefits quality of life. If that weren't the case, we wouldn't have even started this study... As people participate and see this study, I'm hoping that becomes transparent. We're focused on the data and improving access for the Bright area to I-74... I can't stress enough how wrong that is as any sort of reason for doing this study.

MP: Opponents have criticized OKI as being an out-of-town agency coming into the county and telling people how it's going to be and what needs to be done.

RB: I've been hearing that my whole life as a planner. Dearborn County is one of our member counties and we're here to serve the entire region in any way, shape or form that we can. The county doesn't have the staff and time to do this level of study.

MP: Is there any business or agency in the county qualified to do this kind of work?

KL: That's the reason for organizations like OKI, because no county, especially Dearborn County, has the expertise or resources on-staff with the county to evaluate these type of projects. We're very fortunate to be part of this organization throughout the greater Cincinnati metropolitan community. We can look at projects that Hamilton County is doing or Boone County is doing and say "Boy, that's a really neat project. How did you do that? Who was involved in that? How can we learn by what you've done and how can we bring that over into our community to help our community and residents?"... Day one walking into OKI I thought "Wow! What a great networking opportunity that I can learn from others around our region as far as what they have done and how we can bring some of those positives to Dearborn County." That's what I see as a great advantage and opportunity that we have as being a part of the OKI organization.

MP: Will the study recommendations include cost estimates?

RB: In this type of study in this phase, the third phase, when we've narrowed down the options before coming up with cost estimates. In one of my first meetings with Kevin before we even looked at interviewing consultants and going through that process, I knew what an issue funding was and cost and we needed to be cognizant of that as we moved through this process... This is a planning-level study. It's not a construction-ready study. The planning level we have these estimate

ranges... Now that we've gone from four concepts to one, we're able to go into a little more detail. Citizens will see that the numbers have been slightly changed.

KL: Every project comes back to funding. What we are doing right now at the county with the courthouse expansion, two years ago we completed the expansion of the jail. But again, the jail project and courthouse project, those were projects that were considered and studied 10 or 15 years back as far as when those discussions were started. These are processes. Just putting a funding package together can take years. This isn't something that is going to happen right away... We're just at the very preliminary planning stage of this. We may get to the point and say people don't want it or other priorities come up in the county.

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