Complete the construction of I-49 South and accelerate planning of regional transportation projects

The completion of I-49 South is within reach. The good news is that more than 100 of the planned 160 miles of I-49 South are complete or currently under construction.

— David Mann, Chairman of I-49 South Coalition

Why I-49 South?

- Economic Development: Top executives continue to rank a good highway system as the No. 1 or No. 2 most important factor when expanding, relocating, or starting a new business.
- Safety: Widening lanes and shoulders compensate for driver error. Eliminating 90-degree intersections drastically reduces the risk of collision.
- Evacuation: Completing I-49 South will enhance evacuation routes in times of emergency.
- Traffic congestion relief: The constant stop and go is costing drivers and businesses millions in lost time, productivity, and fuel.

Benefits of a regional transportation loop

Looking beyond the completion of I-49 South, there is an opportunity for Acadiana to begin aggressively planning for additional connectivity that complements the region’s interstates.

A regional project planning effort will establish a shared transportation vision for Acadiana that encourages collaboration among parishes. Coordinated regional planning will help maximize the growth and development of Acadiana, and ensure that local and state resources achieve optimal impact.

Increase funding for transportation infrastructure:
State gas tax revenues declined 40 percent in real terms since 1994. Louisiana will need $500 million to $1 billion per year in net additional funding for infrastructure over the next decade in order to reduce the $12 billion backlog of infrastructure projects. I-49 South must be the top priority within the state’s transportation program.

Advance and prioritize completion of I-49 South at the federal level:
Increased federal funding is critical to the completion of I-49 South. Congress has not passed a six-year transportation funding bill since 1998. Without a long-term federal funding bill, the lengthy design and approval process required for transportation projects prohibits efficient planning and implementation.

Accelerate planning for a regional transportation loop:
In addition to the construction of I-49 South, Acadiana must take a regional approach to infrastructure planning that leverages existing corridors. By laying the groundwork for a regional beltway or “Smart Loops” the region can plan for future growth and save money that would otherwise be used for right of way acquisition.

To learn more, go to OneAcadiana.org.
Completing I-49 South is Acadiana’s top priority. Bringing the current U.S. 90 up to interstate standards will greatly improve a vital national link to “America’s Energy Corridor” and enhance connectivity for over one third of Louisianans.

Many sections of the project are designed and shovel ready. The major challenge to completing the route is funding. Limited infrastructure funding is available for investments in roads and bridges. The President’s Council of Economic Advisors reports that total U.S. spending on surface transportation has declined as a share of GDP from about 3 percent in 1962 to 1.4 percent in 2011.

Louisiana faces a $12 billion backlog of infrastructure projects. Revenue generated by the 16-cent state gas tax is the largest source of infrastructure funding Louisiana directly controls. Yet, since 1994 revenue generated from this gas tax has declined 40 percent (adjusting for inflation), while miles traveled on Louisiana roads have increased 28 percent over the same period. The relative purchasing power of 16 cents in 1984 (when the rate was set) has declined to 7 cents today. Every year, less money is available for roads and bridges.

Thriving communities start infrastructure planning early and think much bigger than just one parish, one city, or one project – they focus on enhancing regional interconnectivity. Looking beyond I-49 South, Acadiana needs a long-term infrastructure vision, including planning a new regional beltway, and perhaps other major connections, in order to better connect our parishes and leverage existing corridors.

As we continue to improve Acadiana’s infrastructure, there is an opportunity to plan for additional connectivity that complements I-49 and I-10.