

The Solution: Balance

All forms of life depend on an organism's ability to transport itself from place to place. An organism may need to move to locate new sources of food, to avoid predators, or to find a mate. Man too has a need to travel. Our societies rely on our ability to transport ourselves from place to place. Each Hoosier stimulates the economy when he or she travels to find food, whether their hunting grounds are the local Kroger or the Olive Garden in a near by town. In the years past, Hoosiers have created an infrastructure system which relies heavily on automobiles and petroleum fuels. This system has served well thus far. However, there loom new transportation challenges which this system cannot solve. Indiana now necessitates a new transportation system.

It is common knowledge that the Earth has a limited supply of fossil fuels, which includes petroleum. Due to this those areas which have depended solely on petroleum derived fuels to fuel their modes of transportation must adjust their infrastructures to accommodate for a changing future. Indiana must create a transportation system which can effectively move people long distances and through their day-to-day commutes while utilizing fuel supplies efficiently.

Indiana has built an extensive highway system. The state is crisscrossed by major highways linking various eastern and western states. In the past this automobile-centered transportation system has served the state well, but now efficiency is important for the future. There are currently 800 million cars and trucks on the road, but this number is projected to increase to 1.6 billion by 2050 (gizmag.com). This not only means a greater rate of fuel consumption, but a need for more highways and expansions of existing roads to accommodate the greater number of vehicles. This would be expensive. The Michigan Department of Transportation reports that it would cost 39 million dollars to build one mile of freeway through urban areas and eight million dollars through rural areas (michigan.gov/mdot). For all the money that would be spend in the expansion process Indiana would still not have the system it needs. Instead the state would have an elaboration of the current system. It is now a time for Indiana to balance all major forms of transportation.

There is no perfect mode of transportation. Airplanes, trains, buses, and cars all have flaws. These flaws are maximized when one form is utilized more heavily than all the others. In the same way, these flaws can be minimized if all these forms are used together in an efficient manner. For example, some states have found it more economical to build highways and railways simultaneously, such as with the Colorado T-Rex Project, in which the state of Colorado reconstructed Denver's I-25 and I-225 southeast corridor while simultaneously extending the regions light rail system (fhwa.dot.gov).

One of the greatest flaws of cars is the large consumption of gas per person. A car, which carries only five to eight people (though more often only one person) consumes more gas per person than via public transportation, such as, buses and trains, which carry 60 to more than 100 people per trip. With the states current transportation system, if one wishes to travel from Crawfordsville to Lafayette or Indianapolis, one must take a car. However, if Indiana established railway or bus routes connecting these cities with trains or buses running on an efficient schedule, one traveling from Crawfordsville would have more options in how to reach a destination. If public transportation is available and efficient people are more likely to use it in their day to day travels; thus each person would be using less fossil fuels for commutes. Chicago exemplifies this. People wishing to travel in Chicago have a choice between cars, inner city trains, buses, and the Metra trains, which travel from the suburbs to the heart of the city.

Along with creating new travel options via public transportation, Indiana must also research innovative ways to fuel forms of transportation. The state has already invested in ethanol, but it needs to continue searching for different fuel options. While a system which utilizes petroleum based fuels efficiently will decrease the amount of these fuels used, it does not change the fact that fossil fuel supplies are not unlimited. As with forms of transportation, Indiana must not rely solely on one fuel source but on a balance of all possible fuel sources.

When Hoosiers can travel from small towns to cities, they stimulate the economy by patronizing the businesses not available in their own towns. If the travel of Hoosiers were to be impeded by rising gas prices and a highway driven infrastructure, the economy would suffer. By ensuring that an efficient transportation system is available for Hoosiers, Indiana helps secure its prosperous future in a changing world. The only answer to the need for such a transportation system is to find a balance between all modes of transportation and different fuel sources.

Works Cited

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