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## Transit task force plans hearings in Boone County

BY ROD ROSE  
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Two meetings will be held in Boone County for input on a mass transit system that could - eventually - help local residents get to work, shopping, school and other destinations more economically.

The Central Indiana Transit Task Force last week unveiled its "Indy Connect: Central Indiana's Transportation Initiative." Based on a year-long study of transportation needs in the region, the draft plan will be polished after public feedback and suggestions.

The first meeting will be 6:30 p.m. Feb. 25 at the Hussey-Mayfield Memorial Library, 250 N. 5th St., Zionsville. The second session is 6 p.m. March 18, Lebanon Public Library, 104 E. Washington St., Lebanon.

Commuter and light rail service; expanded bus routes; walking and biking trails and improved roads are among recommendations the study suggests.

"An enhanced transit system is long overdue for Central Indiana. Our current transportation system has put us at a competitive disadvantage for attracting jobs, investment and talent, and has failed to meet the economic and social needs of our citizens," said Mark Miles, president & CEO of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership and one of the founders of the Central Indiana Transit Task Force.

Initial plans don't include Boone County - but that's no reason to ignore the project, said Sue Ritz, executive director of Boone County Senior Services, Inc., which operates the Boone Area Transit System.

"People need to go to these meetings and voice their opinions," Ritz said. Without that participation, "then (Indy Connect will) say everything is OK and we don't need to change a darn thing in Boone County."

"We need to look at all sorts of things: Car pooling, walking, bicy-

cling, using public transportation," Ritz said.

"Sometimes I don't think we're thinking far enough ahead," Ritz said.

An example is the pending widening of Interstate 65 in Boone County to six lanes, although that construction doesn't include dedicated car-pool lanes, she said.

Ray Cortopassi, executive director for the Greater Zionsville Chamber of Commerce, says the transportation initiative can be a good thing for Zionsville.

"Any time we can bring people from the middle of the state to surrounding communities, the better served we will be," he said. "I am interested in hearing about how they will expand the bus service and what they propose to do farther into Boone County."

Cortopassi said new means of transportation will create new economic opportunity.

Taking the next step in transportation is something in which Zionsville residents should become involved, Cortopassi said.

"I encourage everyone to get involved in the process because this is just a draft plan but it could take a different direction to what transportation leaders are thinking and any input that citizens can provide will keep them literally moving forward."

There are two active rail lines in Boone County, both operated by CSX. One is a branch line that runs from Avon through Lebanon to Frankfort; it is used exclusively for freight.

The other line, which bisects Jamestown, runs from Indianapolis to Crawfordsville, Lafayette and Chicago. It carries CSX freight and the Hoosier State and Cardinal Amtrak passenger trains. The Hoosier State runs daily between Chicago and Indianapolis; the Cardinal runs New York and Chicago via Cincinnati.

— Andrea Hirsch contributed to this story.