

HELLO, BLOOMINGTON

New I-69 section opens today

Wednesday, sometime in the afternoon or evening, Indiana highway workers are going to pull down the barricades on 27 miles of road from Crane to Bloomington.

Officially, it is known as Section 4 of the Interstate 69 project between Evansville and Indianapolis, with a price tag of \$471 million and a card attached that reads, “Finally, Southwestern Indiana: You can get directly to and from Indianapolis on multilane highway.”

Today doesn’t mark the end of the I-69 journey. The state’s still working on Section 5 that runs along Indiana 37 from Bloomington to Martinsville. And Section 6 — the grand finale — is still in its infancy, as Hoosiers discuss and decide where, exactly, they want the highway to link to Indianapolis.

Say farewell to the days of two lanes of traffic, creeping up and down hills at 25 mph behind log trucks and coal haulers. The tight curves between the naval base at Crane and the little towns south of Bloomington will be a distant memory for most. Perhaps the white-knuckle trips between counties, from Monroe to Vanderburgh, will feel a little easier now.

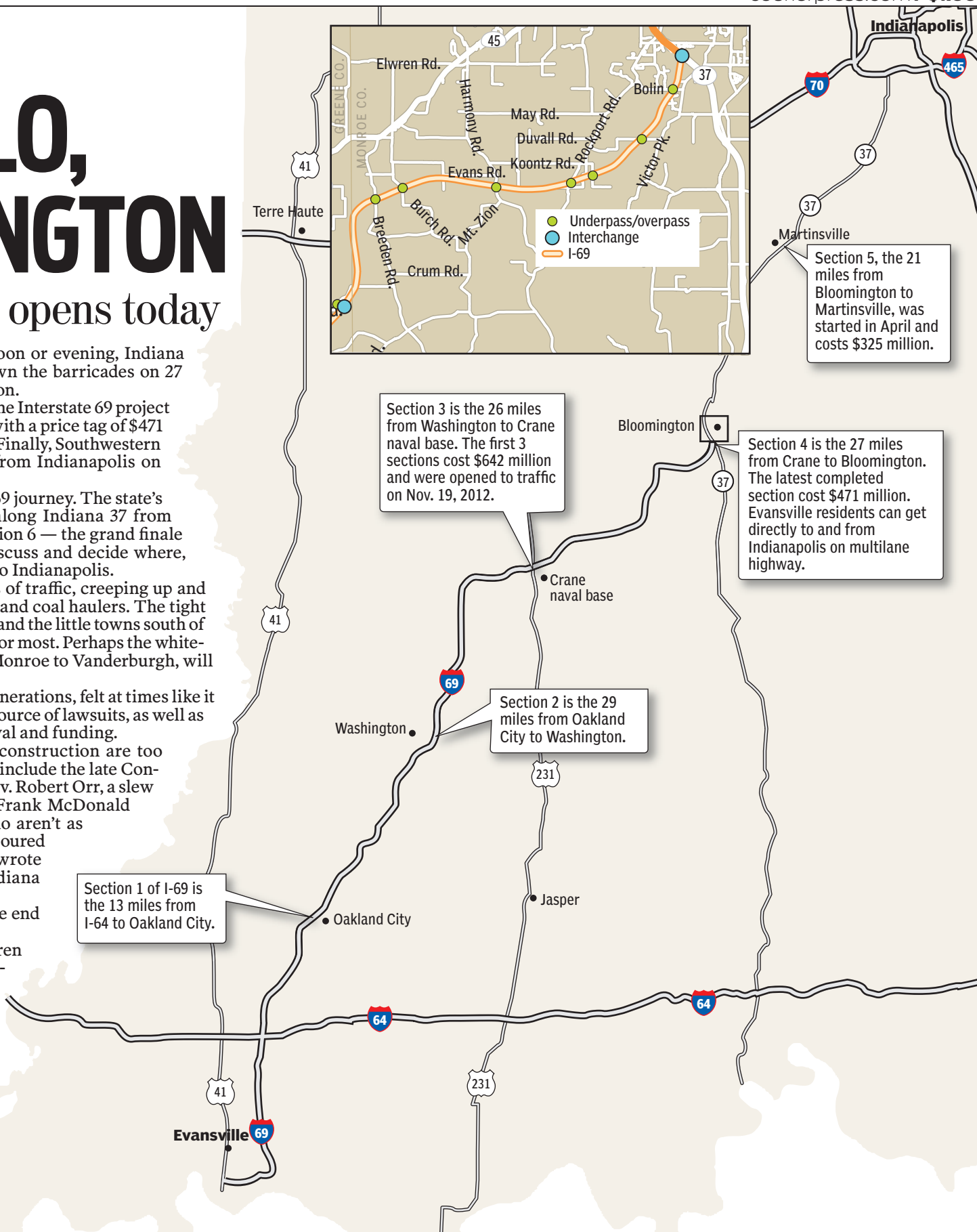
It is work that has spanned several generations, felt at times like it was being talked to death, and was the source of lawsuits, as well as constant battles for recognition, approval and funding.

The people who contributed to its construction are too numerous to count, though they surely include the late Congressman Frank McCloskey, the late Gov. Robert Orr, a slew of former Evansville mayors such as Frank McDonald II and Mike Vandiveer, and others who aren’t as well known, but who surveyed ground, poured concrete, organized public hearings, wrote letters to newspapers and lobbied Indiana lawmakers.

If this were a movie, the credits at the end would roll on for hours.

There’s now a safer way for our children to venture to and from Indiana University. There’s now a quicker path for Bloomington’s youngsters to come to UE and USI. We’re two-thirds of the way to having an interstate highway linking the state’s third-largest city to its capital.

There will come a day when Interstate 69 will feel like it’s always been here. But the people of Southwestern Indiana should remember it as a hard-fought victory, won an inch at a time for 142 miles.



Northbound Interstate 69 ends at Indiana 37, with northbound traffic moving into the construction zones for Section 5 of I-69. The 27-mile stretch of I-69 between Bloomington and U.S. 231 near Crane is expected to open Wednesday afternoon.

I-69 will benefit region — and beyond

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Greg Wathen isn’t one to waste time. The CEO of the Economic Development Coalition of Southwest Indiana will get word out immediately that the new leg of Interstate 69, from Crane to Bloomington, is ready for traffic.

Transportation alternatives are paramount for companies looking to invest and expand, Wathen said, “and part of what we are doing next week is sending information out to site selection firms all over the country, letting them know it’s open, and this time next year it will be open from Bloomington to Martinsville.”

As Wathen spoke, he was in his car driving the winding, woodsy two-lane stretch of Indiana 45 from Crane to Bloomington, headed for Indianapolis. It’s a 36-mile path those who travel between Evansville and the state capital have gotten to know well since November 2012, when former Gov. Mitch Daniels, on his motorcycle, zoomed up the newly completed 67-mile path from Evansville to Crane.

Finally, I-69 no longer dead-ends at Crane. Maps since 2012 have shown a dotted line from there to Bloomington, signifying a highway under construction. Wathen said the new, unbroken line will show Southwest Indiana is open for business.

“This has moved at a pretty rapid clip for infrastructure,” Wathen said of I-69

construction. “It sends a really positive message to companies that Indiana does pretty well in facing great infrastructure challenges — a very positive can-do message.”

University of Southern Indiana President Linda Bennett agreed, saying I-69 is about more than easing the drive from Evansville to Indianapolis — although that certainly is one key benefit.

She likes to think about the impact “beyond Indiana.”

“It puts Evansville on a major thoroughfare from Michigan down to Texas,” Bennett said. “It creates a new artery, and for the region in general this is a good step forward. If you

See **IMPACT**, 12A

See **HISTORY**, 11A

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