

# The importance of public input

By Ehren Bingaman

**O**n Wednesday, a group of Central Indiana business and community leaders put forth a bold recommendation for our region's transportation future. Those of us who have been advocating for improved transit saw the announcement from the Central Indiana Transit Task Force as an encouraging development that adds momentum to the progress made in recent years.

Few people can question the need for improved transit in Central Indiana. For decades, the region has focused virtually all of its transportation-infrastructure dollars on road and highway construction. This put us well behind our national peers in transportation options. It left us without the convenience, connectivity, cleaner air, improved mobility, accessibility and economic development that accompany transit improvements.

We need to act now just to catch up; we need to be ambitious and visionary if we want to gain an advantage in the competition for jobs and workers. The stakes are high, and getting higher.

That's why we're excited to have corporate and community leaders such as the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Central Indiana Community Foundation create the task force and put their weight behind trans-



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sit. In other cities, such a move from the private sector has been instrumental in encouraging political leaders to make needed investments. We hope it has the same effect here.

The task force wisely recommended a multimodal (bus, rail, roads and pedestrian paths) regional system. We at the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority (CIRTA) agree on the need for a close evaluation of the business model for delivering transit. That's why we'll be working with key stakeholders to study the best practices from across the nation.

In addition, we applaud the task force's cost-benefit analysis and investigation of potential funding options. This work differentiates the task force's recommendations from prior studies led by private-sector groups. It demonstrates that these community leaders plan to remain engaged in bringing better mobility and economic development to our region.

These civic-minded leaders have pre-

## WHERE, WHEN TO MEET

Plan to attend one of several public meetings to learn about and respond to the task force's proposals. Find a time and location by going to [www.indyconnect.org](http://www.indyconnect.org).

sented a vision for a cost-effective transit system, but we need the public's input to determine whether this vision offers the best solution for our region. To gather that input, CIRTA is partnering with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corp. (IndyGo) to bring you IndyConnect: Central Indiana's Transportation Initiative.

A planning process that gives you the chance to provide feedback, IndyConnect will allow you to help guide our region's transportation future.

During the next few months, IndyConnect will host a series of public meetings throughout the region designed to give people a voice and a sense of the public's needs and wants. We will engage, listen, evaluate and respond, with the goal of having a final plan by the end of 2010.

Bringing improved transit to Central Indiana has been a long, challenging process, but we are making progress. We look forward to answering difficult questions, refining long-term visions, responding to community needs and making the vision a reality.