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Let's get better connected through mass transit

Leaders in the excluded cities and town in Indianapolis' metro area are looking for ways to energize our communities. We've all been hit hard by suburban flight and, while we have initiatives aimed at redevelopment and neighborhood enhancement, improved transportation options into and out of our communities would be just the vitamin we need.

New and improved options would offer opportunities for economic development, as well as increase mobility for young people, seniors and anyone interested in relying less on a personal vehicle.

Anyone age 70 or older who lived in Central Indiana when the interurban was running remembers the freedom that it offered.

For those not familiar, interurbans were electric rail cars that ran between cities, essentially extensions of streetcar systems. The interurbans and streetcars connected at the Indianapolis Traction Terminal Downtown, which was the world's largest in-

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OUR VIEW

terurban station. At its peak around 1910, 500 trains a day and 7 million passengers annually passed through the terminal. Not only did the interurbans connect people within Marion County, they allowed people to travel throughout the state and Midwest as they connected with trains.

The interurban's death blow was due to the rising popularity of the automobile and the passage of the Public Utility Holding Act in 1935, which made it illegal for power companies and railway companies to be owned by the same holding company. The last interurban line — Indianapolis to Fort Wayne — closed in 1941.

Now, with our aging population and concerns about access and mobility, not to mention the rising cost of gas, congestion and the environmental impact of sin-



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gle-occupancy vehicles, there is increased interest in mass transit.

A new initiative called Indy Connect has unveiled a draft plan for mass transit. Indy Connect is a collaboration among three public transportation and planning agencies: the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), IndyGo and Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority (CIRTA). It is seeking feedback on its recently released draft plan.

We think the plan is a great start. It includes such things as an expanded bus service with more and quicker service beyond Marion County, cross-city routes and increased frequency; an in-street light rail train on or near Washington Street; and a

ground-level commuter rail train that could run from Indianapolis south to Greenwood and north to Fishers with multiple stops in Indianapolis; and expanded roadways and bike and pedestrian paths

that connect to bus and train stops. The plan also outlines how these modes of transportation could work together.

Many of us who have been advocating for improved transit for years see this announcement as an encouraging development that adds momentum to the progress made in recent years.

You'll find details of the plan, including a map, at www.IndyConnect.org. We encourage you to visit the Web site and review the document. Then let us know what you think by leaving your comments on the Web site or, even better, attending one of the next meetings planned for the next few months.

★ Thoman is the mayor of Southport; Lawrence is the town manager of Speedway; and Wright is the mayor of Beech Grove.