

From the Desk of Jeff Banning ~



This is shaping up to be a great week for Banning Engineering! As a company we have been blessed through these turbulent times. With every perceived pitfall, there is a mountaintop. With every skinned knee, there is a lesson to be learned. Please take these times of uncertainty and awkwardness and turn them into a time of growth and appreciation.

Our great week is culminating with a grand celebration today, a day in which we get to spend time with our friends and partners at the Town of Plainfield celebrating a very strategic project commemorating the East Gateway into Town on The National Road. A design and construction project completed. A project to be admired and celebrated.

An expanded concept and idea that started seven years ago based on the Town Comprehensive Plan, the planning and discussion stage has now become complete and constructed and reality. A new Gateway into Plainfield at the Raceway Road intersection with Main Street, National Road, US 40, Cumberland Road, Washington Street, Vandalia Road, etc. This magnificent roadway has several names across its 2000 plus miles from Utah to New Jersey. The highway crosses 12 states and aligns with I-70 and I-80 at different points with changes that have occurred over the years.

Banning Engineering sat down with Plainfield Staff and discussed what a new Gateway should look like for the eastern leg of Town. Discussions centered around standard intersections to unique options such as roundabouts and creative channelized lane configurations. Several options were discussed amongst the team and with INDOT to determine what would be acceptable, what would make sense and what was feasible. These preliminary designs not only contemplated the geometry of the intersection but also the amenities for the area. Ideas continued to marinate amongst the team members and the design became really focused after I took a trip out west and saw a potential opportunity.

Provo, Utah was part of a trip I took in 2014. While traveling not far off US40, I discovered an intersection that resembled a great opportunity for a safe and maneuverable intersection that had excellent landscaping and amenities with pedestrian access. With this idea at hand, with a few photos and with Google Map aerial shots and a little research with the designer of the Utah intersection, we worked away towards our ultimate goal. By keeping your options open, eyes aware of your surroundings and having great partners that are willing to be creative, we came up with a plan. Although only the north, east and west legs of the intersection are completed, the design has been set up to move quickly with the south leg and eventual extension of Raceway Road.

History played a very important role in this project. I have lived along US40 my entire life (except for my college stay in Evansville). US 40/National Road has a very rich history. Centerville/Richmond is where I call home originally. Richmond is home to Earlham College, the Ivy League School of the Midwest and Quaker based institution. Oliver P. Morton is from Centerville and has his statue prominently displayed on the east side of the State Capitol in downtown Indy. He was governor during the Civil War and was a contemporary of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln followed the National Road many times, via rail, throughout his political career.

In 1864 a Marion County court case, “Central Plank Road Company vs. Ingram Little”, reads, “The Central Plank Road Company ... extending from Plainfield in Hendricks County along Old National Road through Indianapolis to Sugar Creek in Hancock County in the State of Indiana are authorized to erect and maintain Toll Houses and Toll Gates along said road at proper and convenient places ... and fix the rates of toll therein.” Ingram Little lost the court case was found guilty and fined \$24.65. The court case would set the toll rates and rules and would regulate the road from that point on. No person shall either ride or drive over any bridge faster than a walk, no person shall horse race on said road, nor shoot craps on or along said road, or any bridge thereof.

Interesting history that we can learn from. Central Plank Road Company mentioned above is referring to wood planks that were once placed across the road for travel. This way you would not get bogged down in mud and ruts. Toll Houses mentioned also ring true to this area. Where relocated Raceway Road connects to Main Street, the roadway crosses what once was the Hobbs Nursery. When I first moved to Plainfield, the office for the Nursery was in a house and a small portion of the house was purported to be an old Toll House. There have been differing stories over the years regarding that Toll House and its authenticity, but it was dismantled and was stored somewhere for future re-erecting.

The Vandalia Trail has become a great amenity for Plainfield and Hendricks County. Several miles of the trail have been constructed from the Putnam County Line through Coatesville and Amo. The trail also has been a part of the Plainfield trail system for several years. This new Gateway has been set up with a trailhead and opportunities for future expansion and connection to the east leg of the trail near Smith Road, as well as, future construction to downtown Indianapolis and hopefully connecting up completely across the state. Vandalia is a small town in Illinois, once the former state capitol, and is one reason for the name. Vandalia, Ohio is also along the National Road.

Cumberland Road gets its name from Cumberland, Maryland. There are many historical markers, features and places to visit along this magnificent corridor. My short dissertation has not done justice for this awesome historical roadway. I always look forward to traveling The National Road, whether that is an afternoon ride in the car to Terre Haute via Putnamville, Seeleyville or Brazil; or a reminiscing ride to Centerville via towns such as Cumberland, Philadelphia, Charlottesville, Dunrieth, Straughn, Lewisville or Cambridge City. The road is such history in motion. Cannot wait for our fall trip heading east taking in Columbus and Zanesville, Ohio or Washington and Uniontown, Pennsylvania, or Cumberland and Hagerstown, Maryland. I look forward to following the route of so many pioneers and explorers of the “west” and looking for historical markers or Madonna’s of the Trail.

Wow! And I did not even mention The Oasis Diner or Martin Van Buren. There is just so much. Enjoy reading, researching, and putting yourself in the shoes of our previous generations and what they have experienced.