South Shreveport residents have become accustomed to the “Finish 3132” billboards looming over Bert Kouns Industrial Loop and Louisiana Highway 3132. And in meeting halls, boardrooms and publications, there has been much speculation, controversy and debate over the future of the traffic corridor in this part of the city. Though the issue is complex and originated over 20 years ago, both businesses and individuals are finally starting to get some answers to their questions.

The confusion about the fate of LA 3132 dates back to around 1992, when the city of Shreveport explored the possibility of completing a traffic loop around Shreveport and Bossier. Charles Kirkland, director of the Shreveport Metropolitan Planning Commission of Caddo Parish said, “Back in ’92, there was a look by the city of Shreveport at finishing a loop around Shreveport-Bossier to tie back into I-20 out by Haughton, around the racetrack. Well, since that study, I-69 became a topic of great interest, and The Port became far more likely to become a reality, a development that was really growing by leaps and bounds, and so a lot of other issues came forward that said we need improved traffic corridors in this area. And The Port was one of the great promoters of that.”

The Port of the Shreveport-Bossier is an industrial park and inland port located on the Red River Waterway about four miles south of the Shreveport city limits. This 2,300-acre transportation and distribution center houses more than 13 corporations and is one of the reasons for increased traffic in the Ellerbe Road/Flournoy Lucas area and the drilling of the Haynesville Shale has resulted in a remarkable traffic increase in a very short period of time. This is of particular concern to the many senior citizens who call this part of Shreveport home. Margaret Elrod, executive director of The Oaks, said the heavy truck traffic speeding down Flournoy Lucas and the lack of shoulders on the road has made it treacherous for older drivers. “Our residents were becoming very concerned,” she said. “And some of them were afraid to go out and drive. When they widened it, it was supposed to become safer.”

Elrod and others, spurred by indications that plans for the completion of LA 3132 might be scrapped, formed a group called the 3132 Coalition. The chief concerns of those involved are what Elrod called the “unsafe situation on Flournoy Lucas” and endangerment of the further economic development of the entire area. “This is not a suitable solution, to just forget building this southern route on 3132,” she said.

Among the questions the 3132

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Coalition wants answered is why, when the city realized the land on the south side of Flournoy Lucas Road was the most likely corridor for the extension of LA 3132, they didn’t begin purchasing the land as early as 1999. The coalition’s de facto leader, Elliott Stonecipher, calls the Haynesville Shale “a unique pressure” because of its ability to drive up the price of that land. “If they’d gone ahead and bought the land starting in 1999 and just gone ahead and bought it as they could, we wouldn’t be worrying about the Haynesville Shale, and we could get it done faster,” he said.

However, Jambor argues that the city couldn’t start buying the land until an official corridor was designated. “There cannot be [a designated corridor], legally, unless you follow the process. State or federal money requires us to follow this process. There has to be a corridor,” he said. “Quite frankly, we’ve stretched the limits of what we can do to protect it already.” The city of Shreveport has acquired a right of way, a triangular-shaped piece of land on the south side of Flournoy Lucas.

Currently, the city is in the midst of a required feasibility study known as “Stage Zero,” during which they must study alternate routes and options. Currently, there are five: Shreveport Mayor Cedric Glover’s Plan A, three that are very similar (including one proposed by the 3132 Coalition that was approved for inclusion at the July 28 meeting of the North Louisiana Council of Governments) and a “no-build” option.

Part of the Stage Zero study includes public input and environmental studies, Jambor said. Its purpose is, in part, to determine the economic significance of building LA 3132 from several different perspectives, including traffic, economic and environmental. An environmental study could be finished by the end of the year. Also embroiled in the dispute is land developer and Bossier City councilman Tim Larkin, who wants access from Flournoy Lucas Road to the Bayou Pierre Bridge that leads into his newest subdivision, Esplanade. At one point, attorney John Settle, joined by Jim McMichael, attorney for Willis-Knighton Health System, filed a lawsuit against several involved parties, including Larkin’s company. However, he recently filed a motion to dismiss the suit. In a statement, Settle said, “I filed this suit as a private concerned citizen – I was not hired to file the litigation, and I have not been paid for my services. I filed the action in an effort to leave the possibility of completion of the 3132 as intended, i.e., utilizing the 16-acre tract purchased by the city of Shreveport on Flournoy Lucas in 1996.”

Settle continued, “Tim Larkin’s request to the MPC to build the next phase of his road, extending from Railsback and that was eventually to connect to Flournoy Lucas, was to terminate at the city-owned tract. Assuming this had been approved and then constructed, it was only logical that Larkin would have next sought to cross the city property to complete his road, and, in fact, Larkin had cleared a portion of this property. In that event, an extension of 3132 would have almost certainly been doomed.”

Settle went on, “The litigation had the intended effect – bringing public...
attention to Larkin's plans, the lack of governmental planning to complete 3132 and the need to make this goal a higher public priority. And, of course, the fact that Larkin has changed his road route to not end at the city property is a testament to the success of the litigation.”

Larkin sees it differently. “I really think that lawsuit was filed because, like so many of these other things, it was difficult for the litigants, Willis-Knighton, to really understand what was going on,” Larkin said. “You see, the lawsuit they filed is unlike lawsuits normally are where they want money. What they asked in their lawsuit was one thing and one thing only: They wanted a judge to rule that the City Council of Shreveport had authority over the use and the granting of rights-of-ways and the platting of this land around here, and looking back now, it seems as though that was just a misunderstanding because we knew they did.”

The Larkin limb of the controversy also branches into allegations that state Rep. Jane Smith used undue influence to obtain a meeting for Larkin with DOTD Secretary Sherri LeBas. Stonecipher said, “Jane needed deniability on going too far. She took Tim Larkin over to Sherry LaBas’ office, [DOTD Deputy Secretary Dr. Eric] Kalivoda was there. Jane went in, made the introductions and then went into the anteroom and waited so she could say she wasn’t in the meeting. Everything Tim wanted got done. That’s what happens when the chief of staff calls a cabinet secretary and says, ‘Do this.’ Kalivoda was livid. But regardless of all that, it worked.”

Smith denies that her actions were improper. “My only involvement was to get my constituent a meeting with DOTD,” she said. She said she didn’t even know Larkin’s issue had anything to do with LA 3132, and she maintains that she arranges meetings such as this one for constituents on a regular basis. She said she has spoken with Willis-Knighton President and Chief Executive Officer James “Jim” Elrod and that he has no problem with anything she did. She added, “In the course of all of this, the good thing about it is that 3132 is on the forefront.”

Much of the controversy surrounding LA 3132 stems from a pivotal meeting held by NLCOG on April 7. According
to the official minutes from this meeting, which was open to the public, Larkin began a discussion about ways to connect The Port and I-69, including using Flournoy Lucas and Louisiana Highway 1 since the expansion of Flournoy Lucas to five lanes was nearly complete and LA 1 is a four-lane highway. Glover made four motions:

1. The Metropolitan Planning Organization rescinds the approved corridor alignment for the southerly extension of the Inner Loop (LA 3132) from Flournoy Lucas Road (LA 523) to LA 1.

2. The MPO requests the removal of the roadway “control of access” along Flournoy Lucas Road at its intersection with the Inner Loop, thus allowing access to community development in the area.

3. The MPO requests access approval to the future community development as shown as Option 1 on the Traffic Impact Study prepared by Neel-Schaffer dated March 4.

4. A study be undertaken to investigate the feasibility of an alternative Inner Loop extension corridor northwest and east of the existing Inner Loop terminus through undeveloped property north of Bayou Pierre from Flournoy Lucas Road to LA 1.

Stonecipher and the 3132 Coalition said what this means for LA 3132 is that Larkin and Glover attempted to either kill the extension of LA 3132 outright or do so by making it a nonviable option.

Now Glover said the extension of LA 3132 to the south will definitely occur; the only question is the route it will take. “This is about facilitating the extension of 3132 while fostering the residential expansion I want to see in Shreveport,” he said. “Neither is mutually exclusive. We can and we will have both.”

Glover said the controversy stems from misunderstandings on every side. “Part of what we do as elected officials is listen to the concerns of our constituents. Now, with the completion of the full funding for I-49 North, the question we have to answer is where are we going to put our focus now?”

The one thing it seems everyone can agree on is this controversy has made it clear how important it is for private citizens to stay abreast of local political happenings. Stonecipher said, “It is a cautionary tale. After 3132, we’re on notice. It’s up to us from now on.”