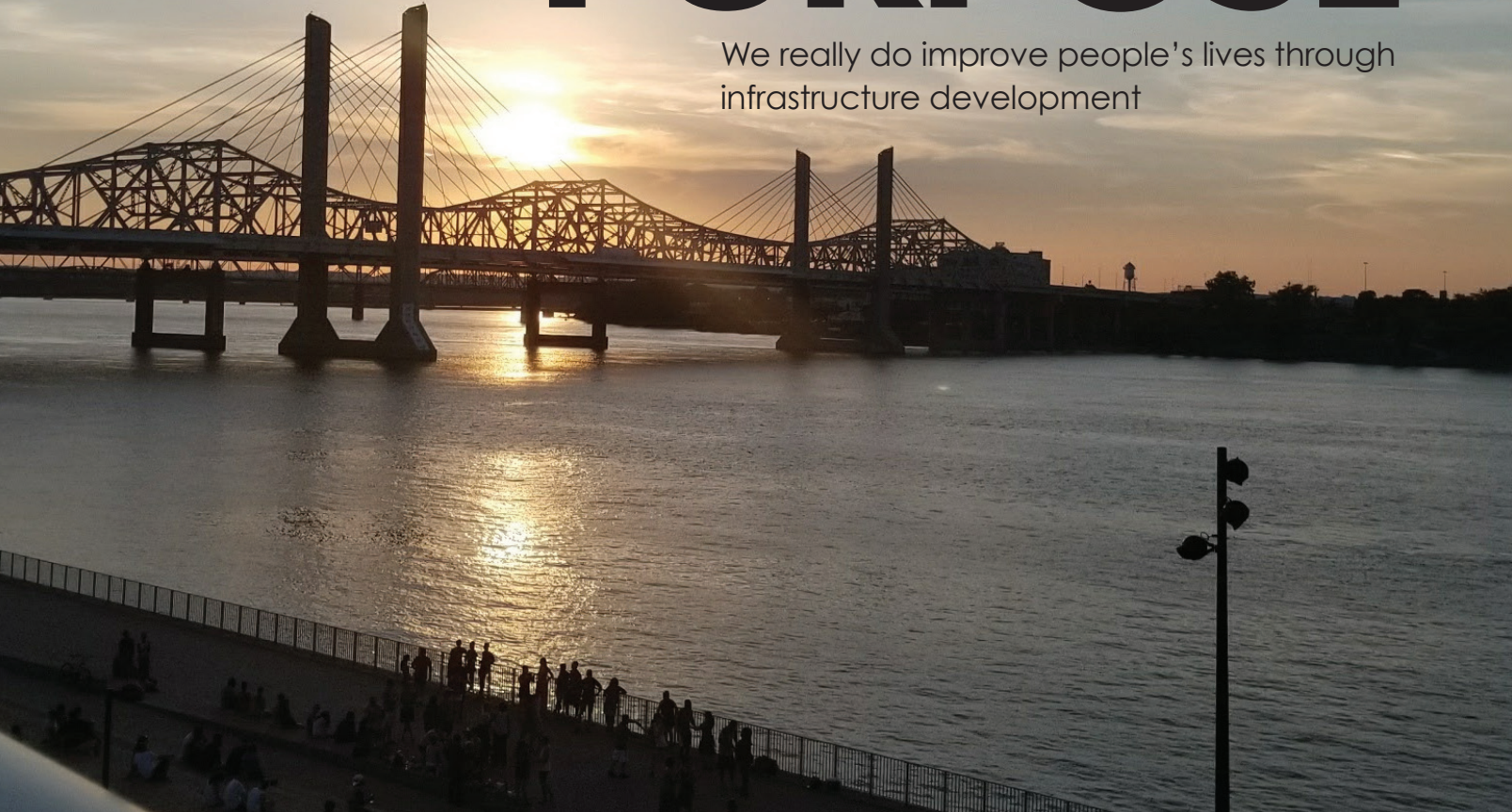




# AN ENDURING PURPOSE

We really do improve people's lives through  
infrastructure development



**BY YASMIN L. STUMP, ESQ.**

It's prominently displayed on the first page of the IRWA website. It's mentioned intermittently at International, Region and sometimes Chapter meetings. International President Judy Jones, SR/WA, discussed its importance in an interview in the last edition of Right of Way Magazine. It's the IRWA purpose. "We improve people's quality of life through infrastructure development."

The IRWA purpose was established when the Association was first created as the Southern California Right of Way Agents Association ("SCRWAA") (and later would become the American Right of Way Association ("ARWA") in September 1935) by 14 men, including Frank C. Balfour, during their first meeting at a Los Angeles Italian restaurant in 1934, and it has endured for almost 88 years. But how often do we really ponder the significance and impact of the right of way industry on people's lives? It's easy to get so engrossed in the minutiae of day-to-day professional responsibilities that little, if no, time is left to consider the greater impact of our industry's efforts on people's lives. Our focus is absorbed by the challenging landowner who refuses to negotiate, a title and encumbrance report quagmire, a seemingly impossible appraisal problem or an unforeseen impediment to a project design.



I admit that I have been too consumed by the daily demands of my law practice to deeply contemplate the larger view of the right of way industry's effect on people's lives. But then, recently, I had an epiphanic moment. It was a clear, unseasonably warm May day. I was traveling from Indianapolis south on I-65 to Louisville for the Region 5 Spring Forum for the first road trip in my new car. Just south of Jeffersonville, I crossed the southbound bridge over the Ohio River toward Louisville. This bridge, along with two others, were part of the Ohio River Bridges ("ORB") Project, an interstate bridge improvement project with Indiana and Kentucky.

**A Monumental Crossing — A Project Vision Becomes a Reality**

To others, my crossing over the southbound Ohio River bridge that sunny spring day may not seem monumental, but it was to me. Almost 10 years ago, my firm, with me as the lead attorney, served as outside counsel for the eminent domain cases and some other legal matters on the ORB Project. The Indiana part of the ORB Project was distinguished with two awards — the 2013 IRWA Project of the Year Award and the Quality of Life/Community Development Award at the 10th Annual America's Transportation Awards competition in 2017. Although earlier I previously viewed the completed bridge project from the Indiana side, I never crossed over any of the bridges until that May day.

The ORB Project involved the rehabilitation of two existing bridges connecting Indiana and Kentucky on I-65, one carrying northbound traffic and one carrying southbound traffic, and the construction of a completely new bridge transporting vehicles into Louisville. Prior to the completion of the ORB Project, the problems with the two existing Ohio River bridges were legendary. Traffic in the area was congested, not just at rush hour, but almost all the time. You did not drive across the Ohio River bridges, you crawled. The existing bridges and ramps no longer conformed to current standards and were in need of updating. The ORB Project solved the problems that travelers had endured for years and addressed safety due to the previous condition of the bridges. Traffic now runs smoothly and quickly on I-65 across the bridges, and travelers save significant time traveling back and forth between southwest Indiana and northeast Kentucky. Most importantly, the bridges have been modernized, and safety has been enhanced.



**THE INFRASTRUCTURE  
THAT WE HELP  
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The day that I made my first crossing on one of the ORB bridges, the highway unfolded quickly before me, and cars and trucks whirled past me. I heard the clanging sound of tires when they repeatedly hit the metal joints of the bridge. The drivers and vehicle occupants were all intently headed somewhere — home from their jobs, to pick up their children, to visit their friends, to stores to shop or somewhere else. I wondered, do these people crossing the Ohio River bridges today know all the planning that was done to improve the old bridges and construct the new bridge? Do they know about all the right of way professionals — the engineers, surveyors, title specialists, buyers and lawyers — who dedicated their talent and time to make the vision of the ORB Project a reality? Do they know or remember how arduous it was to travel from one side of each bridge to the other or the impaired condition of the bridges before they were updated? Realistically, I know they probably do not, and they certainly do not know how diligently numerous right of way professionals worked to make the ORB Project vision not only a reality, but a phenomenally successful project. Although they don't know, the improvement of people's lives affected by the ORB Project will endure for years, long after the names of those involved in the project are forgotten.

Like many major public improvement projects, the ORB Project was in the planning process for years. Decades ago, when I was a newly minted deputy attorney general, I recall that, in hushed voices, others in the office opined that the ORB Project would never come to fruition. But it did come to fruition, and when it did, it did so with a vengeance. The project deadlines were on steroids, and it was not just to clear the right of way to begin construction. It was to clear trees on the properties that were



part of the project because of the bats. The Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 protects the Indiana bat's mating habitat — trees — during mating season. So, the trees had to be hastily cut down by March 31, or the project could be seriously stalled.

The sense of extreme urgency permeated the project. On more than one occasion, I recall answering my cell phone with one of the project managers on the other end chanting, "Yasmin, pick up the phone, pick up the phone." I often quipped that the right of way project team did not operate in real time but in accelerated "dog years." Yes, at times it was stressful, but mostly, it was exhilarating.

### The Perfect Blend for Success

As a right of way project team leader, you know that the success of a project is not only based upon your and your team's part, but all the other leaders and their team members. Some projects are the perfect blend of optimal timing, hard work by committed right of way professionals and the community embracing and appreciating the project. This perfect blend existed with the ORB Project and propelled it to exceptional recognition. Moreover, the project was a lot of fun, which made it pass in an instant. As quickly as the ORB Project started, the right of way team's job was concluded. It was awarded IRWA Project of the Year, and on another clear, sunny day, this time in September, 2013, the ORB Project right of way team leaders convened for a photoshoot in downtown Indianapolis in front of a much smaller bridge over the White River for the cover of the November/December 2013 edition of Right of Way Magazine.

The recognition that the ORB Project received was an honor, and it was certainly a privilege to have been a member of the right of way project team. But it was the experience and lessons I learned as one of the ORB Project team leaders that are paramount and will endure, including one valuable leadership lesson. It's not enough to ensure that work is completed adeptly and timely. As a leader, it is my responsibility to inspire and facilitate teamwork and pride in the mission.

No question, the ORB Project team was on a mission and fulfilling the Association's purpose. I have pondered, is the IRWA statement about a purpose or a mission? Lately, significant discussion about "purpose statements" and "mission statements" has transpired by speakers at programs on company start-ups. Is there a difference, and if so, what is the difference? The "Effective Governance" website attempts to explain the difference between the two.



"A purpose statement provides the reason or reasons you exist. It is why you exist, whereas the mission is about *what you do and for whom.*" [Emphasis in original text.] The website admits that the difference is not easily grasped. "This distinction is often difficult to extract from strategic plans or corporate websites." Perhaps the definition is a difference without a distinction, like a real estate appraiser explaining to non-appraiser the difference between "an extraordinary assumption" and "a hypothetical condition."

Candidly, I doubt 88 years ago, Mr. Balfour and the other 13 men who formed the SCRWAA were concerned about the difference between a purpose statement and a mission statement. Ultimately, that's not significant. What is significant is that the Association's purpose has endured and will continue to last long after the names of those involved in public improvement projects, large and small, are forgotten. The infrastructure that we help build does improve people's lives and will endure for years to come. 🌟



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