

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
ON
DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL CROSSING (DRIC) STUDY

519 House Office Building
Lansing, MI

March 23, 2006
12:30 p.m.

Joint Transportation Committee Meeting

Rep. Philip LaJoy, Chair
Sen. Judson Gilbert, Chair

Comments submitted by

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Fort-Schaefer (48217) Community member
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Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) Local Advisory Council member

DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL CROSSING (DRIC) STUDY

I understand the purpose of this meeting today is to determine if the state of Michigan would be better served by a private versus a public bridge crossing, to determine if utilizing private dollars versus public dollars is feasible and if the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has fully disclosed its process in conducting the current and existing study.

As a member of the DRIC's Local Advisory Council and a resident of the Fort and Schaefer community in Southwest Detroit, I also have a purpose and have several concerns that I wish this honorable body to consider. My primary concerns are (1) environmental impact upon the community (2) additional truck traffic (3) Detroit transportation corridor and (4) public property held by a private entity.

Building a new bridge to accommodate more trucks will cause additional pollutants to be released in an already overburdened polluted area. The Southwest Detroit corridor bears a disproportionate amount of pollution. In my community there already exists a number of industrial polluters, i.e., an oil refinery, steel mills, an asphalt terminal, a lime facility, and a municipal waste water treatment plant to name a few. Air quality is a concern for our residents. If government agencies conduct air quality studies they are at best hit and miss, not thorough or non-existent. While Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) appears to be clamping down on some polluters, the damage to human health will never be fully acknowledged nor can it be erased.

The Sierra Club's definition of environmental justice is - the fair treatment and equal protection under Federal environmental laws to ensure that all people, regardless of race, culture or income level, live in clean, safe and sustainable communities. For me, environmental justice is a human right. It is a civil rights issue. Environmental justice focuses on communities in crises caused by the larger society but fostered on communities such as mine –communities of color and low income.

Few governmental agencies seem to be focusing on the impact of diesel fuel and the health impact on our school children. Studies indicate that children's lungs are still developing and inhale more particulate matter than adults. Expressways and heavy industry areas are more prone to be located in communities of low income and people of color. A copy of a study written by professors Yi-Chen WU and Stuart A. Batterman, Environmental Health Sciences, University of Michigan, *Proximity of schools in Detroit, Michigan to automobile and truck traffic* is provided to the transportation chairs.

The citizenry look to their legislators for relief, but it is slow in coming and metered out to a seemingly chosen few. It seems, once elected, legislators tend to forget why they vowed to serve and whom to protect.

Additionally, the soon to be operationalized Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal (DIFT) located in the Livernois and Michigan Avenue area will also compound not only existing pollution but also traffic patterns. Many truckers simply do not follow specified truck routes even though signage is visible. Should a new bridge be erected, there will be traffic backups. Truck traffic will

exit the bridge and take thoroughfare streets bordering communities causing additional pollution to enter the communities in a closer proximity and causing further harm to roads that were not built to withstand the volume of additional traffic; consequently, property taxes must be increased for needed road repairs.

In the city of Detroit, its planning department envisions the Southwest corridor to be a potential transportation hub. Governor Jennifer Granholm is promoting economic growth in Michigan. In a recent conversation with her, she expressed to me that the state needs economic growth and development; that we were moving away from a manufacturing based economy. If Southwest Detroit is to be designated the transportation corridor for the state, it seems only fitting that the communities involved be made whole. Intact communities will be dismantled, families uprooted, remaining communities will endure added inconveniences. There must be binding community benefit agreements that proportionately protect the impacted communities.

While some legislators may be considering whether a bridge should or should not be built, others are debating whether it should be built with private or public funds. Permit me to caution future ramifications of using a private funding source. Speculation is that the owner of the Ambassador Bridge Company will complete a new bridge in six to seven years. The owner already has a lease agreement with the city of Detroit for the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, owns a railroad near the river in a downriver community and has been given carte blanche authority of the Detroit-Wayne County Port Authority. This private company operates as a private entity that does not come under city, county, state nor

federal guidelines. Essentially, the owner of the Ambassador Bridge Company will hold a transportation monopoly in the Southwest corridor if legislators approve House Bills 5028 and 5029. These two House Bills give the appearance of complete absolution to the proposed new owner of the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority. The Wayne County Commission paved the way for this legislation when it approved and voted upon an agreement giving the publicly held port authority to a private company.

My experience as a LAC member has been that the Michigan Department of Transportation's representatives have been responsive to my questions whether sitting at the table, via email or telephone calls. I have a crate of handouts from the LAC meetings and the community meetings. I read all materials thoroughly and attend all LAC meetings and all community workshops. I ask a lot of questions.

In summary, while I am not convinced a bridge is needed public nor private, I do not wish my community to be disrupted but should the DRIC study conclude a bridge is necessary for the projected future economic development of the state of Michigan, let it be under the jurisdiction of the public--public ownership and public guidelines through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). Too many private companies have come into our communities, our cities and raped our precious resources without recourse for the citizens.