

DRAFT
Detroit River International Crossing Study
Local Advisory Council
Meeting Notes
May 25, 2005, 7:00 p.m.
Southwestern High School

Purpose: To review the progress of the Detroit River International Crossing Study.

Attendance: See attached.

Discussion:

Introduction and LAC Role/Responsibilities

Mohammed Alghurabi asked everyone present to introduce him or herself. He then noted that when the LAC was established, a document outlining its roles and responsibilities had been made available to those making the initial nominations, and summarized the key points of that document: 1) that the LAC must adhere to the schedule; 2) that the LAC should represent their constituencies and carry information between the DRIC Project and their constituencies. He also noted that the MDOT Technical Team will provide information to the LAC, usually in draft form. The more information provided to the public, the better. He said the LAC roles and responsibilities document, which he distributed, will be posted on the Web site.

Mohammed then reviewed the Agenda. There were no suggested revisions.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

LAC Business

Mohammed Alghurabi noted several resolutions had been received. One was from the Downriver Community Conference (DCC), a consortium of 19 downriver communities in Wayne County. That resolution opposes a new crossing in the Downriver area and supports solutions such as the Jobs Tunnel, proposed by the Detroit River Tunnel Corporation (DRTP). It was noted that the Wayne County Commission passed a resolution which opposes a Downriver border crossing anywhere between West Grand Boulevard in Detroit and the Monroe County line. In the past, Grosse Ile, Riverview and Wyandotte had also passed resolutions opposing a crossing in their areas.

Next, Mohammed Alghurabi invited LAC discussion of their preference for who should chair the meetings. One LAC member indicated that he did not think anyone could do a better job than MDOT and

its consultants. Another individual stated that it was important for the LAC members to voice opinions, but not get derailed or bogged down. A third LAC member indicated that the value of having an LAC member take the lead role was not clear. Another member noted that individuals around the table had many different agendas, so one chairperson would be difficult to pick, and rotating the role of chair would cause consistency to be lost. Finally, an LAC member indicated the LAC chair should be occupied by a government person. Mohammed Alghurabi asked, in summary, if it were fair to keep him as chair. The consensus was yes.

Mohammed next addressed the question of contact information. He distributed a form to indicate LAC member consent to have their address and similar information available to others. Mohammed noted that the form is being mailed to all LAC members including those not in attendance. Many of those present signed the form and returned it to Mohammed.

LAC Meeting Notes

Next, Mohammed asked if there were any comments on the March 29, 2005 or April 27, 2005 LAC meeting notes. There were none.

Health Risk Assessment

Mohammed next turned to the question of air quality health risks that had been raised at an earlier LAC meeting. Joe Corradino pointed the LAC members to several items in the agenda package. Pages 21 through 23 copied a letter from James Strouds, Director of the Office of Natural and Human Environment in the Federal Highway Administration to Kathryn Savoie, the co-chair of Communities for a Better Rail Alternative, and pages 24 and 25 copied a letter from the Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation to the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, while pages 26 and 27 copied a letter from MDOT to several community organizations in southwest Detroit and Ann Arbor. While the letters were written with respect to the Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Study, they represented the position taken by the Federal Highway Administration and MDOT regarding on the DRIC. In summary, such a health risk analysis will not be performed, as the situation currently exists

Control of Other Proposed Border Crossings

The position of the federal government with respect to processing border crossing proposals/permit applications was discussed. Mohammed Alghurabi drew from the conversations held on May 18th with U.S. agencies cooperating on the DRIC Study, noting permit review would not be deferred because the DRIC project is ongoing. It was his understanding that federal agencies had to deal with permit applications on their own merits and would, of necessity, move forward if someone applied for a permit.

An LAC member asked what then was the point of the DRIC Study. Mohammed Alghurabi responded that government has an obligation to move forward to define the proper border crossing solution.

Another LAC member asked if there were any shortcuts in the permitting process that the private sector could take. Mohammed indicated he knew of no shortcuts. He noted that ,in fact, the Coast Guard has to notify local governments of its intent to act on a permit for a river crossing. And, if a local governmental agency indicates it may be six months processing a permit, the Coast Guard may wait in issuing its permit. But, there would have to be merit for the Coast Guard to delay.

Joe Corradino said he understood that the Coast Guard would wait for a Presidential Permit before issuing its permit. But, at this point, it is believed that the Ambassador Bridge does not need a Presidential Permit based on an Act of Congress passed in 1972. Whether this is correct will be resolved by the US State Department which is determining if the corporate identity of the owner of the bridge when Congress acted in 1972 was properly transferred to DIBC, the current owner of the bridge.

A member of the LAC asked that a flow chart be developed showing all the key points in the border crossing permitting process of the agencies with that responsibility. Mohammed Alghurabi responded that he would try to obtain such information for the next LAC meeting. He noted that the Community Gateway Collaborative had passed a resolution that no permit be issued until the DRIC Study was complete. That resolution was distributed to those in attendance.

In concluding “Old Business”, Mohammed Alghurabi pointed to a more detailed DRIC Study schedule provided in the meeting packet.

Traffic Forecasts and Project Need

Mohammed Alghurabi then noted that there was a recent article in the *Detroit News* indicating recent traffic forecasts suggest there is no rush for government to build a new border crossing. He asked Joe Corradino to provide MDOT’s position on the matter.

Joe Corradino noted the need for a new crossing was established in the Planning/Needs & Feasibility Study. New data were now being prepared to update the travel demand forecasts. Joe Corradino noted that the newspaper article was focused on roadway capacity, not the other components of need, such as efficiency of operations and reasonable options/redundancy. Nevertheless, he explained that auto traffic was down substantially since 9/11, for a number of reasons for this including the presence of new U.S. casinos, the increased value of the Canadian dollar compared to the US dollar, increased security, etc.

Truck traffic, on the other hand, has rebounded to pre-9/11 levels. Thirty years out, the forecast is for border crossing auto traffic to increase by 60 percent and trucks by 130 percent.

A number of tables and graphs were reviewed. Joe Corradino explained the years in which capacity would reach “breakdown” conditions for each component of the border crossing system. He also explained sensitivity analyses that had been performed with respect to trade growth, diversion to rail, diversion to the Blue Water Bridge, and high-and-low growth in auto traffic. In the end, he stated that under expected conditions, it is now forecast that the combined border crossing capacity (bridge and tunnel) would be reached in 2022. This could be pulled forward to 2015 under optimistic conditions, or pushed back to 2033 under pessimistic conditions.

An LAC member noted that travel peaked before 9/11/01. Joe Corradino noted the latest recession had begun prior to 9/11, starting this downward trend.

An LAC member asked if the projections had been based on the economy at its peak. Joe Corradino said no, that the trends were established over a lengthy period extending back at least 30 years.

An LAC member asked what numbers were used in creating the newspaper article. Joe Corradino responded that the newspaper may have focused on the most pessimistic traffic forecast; certainly the newspaper article did not address the full range of project needs, like redundancy.

An LAC member asked if the traffic data would be updated as time went on. The answer was yes.

When asked if, at some point, growth would stabilize and flatten out, Joe Corradino noted that the forecasts indicate the forecast are that there will be a 60 percent growth in border crossing auto traffic and 130 percent growth in truck traffic by 2035 even though there will likely peaks and valleys along the way.

A question was asked whether truck regulations had been taken into account in the forecasting. The response was that the forecasts look at the big picture, not at the micro level.

Bridges/Tunnels and Plazas

Regine Beauboeuf then presented bridge and tunnel information. Bridge types include arch, cable stayed, and suspension, with suspension bridges spanning the longest distances. Four broad corridors are being considered with respect to bridge and tunnel crossings of the Detroit River: south, central, I-75/I-96, and eastern corridors. The southern corridor is widest and the most challenging to cross because of its length. Tower height could be an issue there because of the Grosse Ile airport. In the central area, the river width is shorter, but there still might be piers in the river, and there are concerns about salt mines. At the I-96 and I-75 corridor, the river is most narrow. At the eastern corridor, in the Belle Isle area, the river width increases again to more than a mile, and it is likely there would be piers in the river or on Belle Isle. Bridge tower heights are a concern in this case with respect to the Detroit City Airport airplane flight tracks. Bridges are considered feasible in all four corridors.

Tunneling technology was then reviewed covering the following types: soft-bore tunnels, rock-bore tunnels, cut-and-cover/submerged tunnels, and mined tunnels. The conclusion is that the only potentially feasible tunnel type is the soft-ground bored tunnel in the I-75/I-96 area and upriver to Belle Isle.

It was asked if a combination of bridge and tunnel had been examined. Ms. Beauboeuf responded that that issue was addressed. But, the difficulty of getting from underground with a tunnel up to a bridge height in a reasonable distance precludes it in the corridors being studied.

Next, plazas were discussed. It was noted that plaza locations would be presented to the LAC in June along with the routes to them. Plazas were being sized based on discussions with border protection agencies. Generally, 80 acres or more is the plaza size being used at this time. Bruce Campbell provided a functional description of plazas. In response to a question, it was noted that the existing plaza at the Ambassador Bridge is approximately 40 acres.

Next a period of general questions and comments ensued with the LAC.

Q: Would there be studies on the economic effects of plazas?

R: Over the summer, that issue would be examined in terms of land required and potential jobs relocated. Mohammed Alghurabi noted the intent of the June meetings of the LAC and the public was to identify alternatives, including the plaza sites. The analysis of impacts would come later.

Q: How big an area is generally affected?

R: As noted, the plazas were assumed to be a minimum of 80 acres. The connecting road corridor was assumed to be 100 meters wide (about 300 feet). It was not known at this time how many total acres would be involved in each road/plaza alternative.

Q: If you're looking at the impacts later, will you look at what has happened around the existing Ambassador Bridge?

R: Yes.

Q: At what point will you show impacts?

R: The Illustrative Alternatives evaluation paper, which is part of the LAC Agenda Packet, shows the kind of data that will be analyzed (page 33 is Table 1 of the Illustrative Alternatives paper, which shows proposed evaluation factors and performance measures). How those data relate to each alternative will be available to the public in December. It was noted that the last page of the paper shows a scoring form wherein the evaluation factors are to be given scores between 1 and 100. He emphasized that the LAC members were invited to fill out the form and take copies of the form with them to distribute so that others can also weight the evaluation factors. He noted that the Partnership and its consultants would similarly weight these factors.

Q: Are the factors open for discussion?

R: Input is always invited, and was invited at last month's LAC meeting.

Q: If there are multiple forms from a group, how are those forms in that group weighted against other groups?

R: All forms are treated equally. They are not organized by group.

Public Comment

Mohammed Alghurabi next moved to the second public comment period.

Q: An article in the newspaper from about a year ago mentioned another study Joe Corradino is working on and a staging area of 850 acres. Is that what we're looking at here?

R: Joe Corradino said the article referred to a study known as the Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Project, which involves trains and trucks at terminals. That project involves in Southwest Detroit a terminal of approximately 300 acres, additional existing rail property of 200 acres and a possible terminal expansion area of 350 acres for a total of 850 acres. All this is unrelated to the Border

Crossing Study.

Q: Could a plaza ever grow to that size?

R: No. But, if you are referring to the roadway **plus** plaza area, the amount of acreage needed for both is unknown at this time.

C: Del Ray is the economic heartland of Michigan. In 1975, the interstate was pushed through the area, and then a wastewater treatment plant took 800 homes. When this happens, businesses fail, schools close and churches move away. This forces people out. The families there cannot tolerate more of this type development. It is unethical and un-American to do this to Del Ray. The residents there say "enough is enough."

Q: What is the public notification process for the June meetings?

R: Mohammed Alghurabi noted that, based on previous comments from the LAC and others, that a switch was being made from a public mail-out campaign to paid radio spots. Joe Corradino added that this would be a targeted effort based on market research. The mail-outs would be made to all those who had signed up at DRIC Study meetings.

Q: Will there be a Spanish and Arabic translations?

R: Yes. The mailers being sent out are being done so in three languages.

Q: How can we get more flyers?

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said to contact him and he could provide whatever was necessary.

Q: When the plazas are identified, will the boundaries be identified by street name? Will there be a detailed description so one can understand exactly where the plazas are?

R: Yes.

Q: When the plazas and roadways are built, will there be any local access or will it go just to the freeway?

R: The link between the plaza and I-75 or I-94 would be a freeway-type link. Local access to that link would likely be provided but the exact locations had not yet been determined.

*C: I'd like the media who are present to know that when they report, they need to get their information correct. The commenter had previously called the **News Herald** to correct information presented in that paper.*

Q: The River Rouge Mayor has indicated he believes that he will get something out of a new bridge, but the commenter disagreed. The commenter also indicated that Del Ray doesn't want a border crossing.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi stated it was important to be diligent and to be transparent and to review all potential alternatives.

Mohammed then thanked everyone for coming and providing comments and noted that the next meeting would be at the same location on June 20th.

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