

# **Gateway Communities Development Collaborative**

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## **Member Organizations**

*Bagley Housing Association*

*Bridging Communities, Inc.*

*Greater Corktown  
Development Corporation*

*Mexicantown Community  
Development Corporation*

*Michigan Avenue Business  
Association*

*Neighborhood Centers, Inc.*

*Southwest Detroit Business  
Association*

*Southwest Detroit  
Environmental Vision*

*Southwest Solutions / Southwest  
Housing Corporation*

## **Testimony to the Joint House and Senate Transportation Committee**

RE: DRIC Study

March 30, 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) study. My name is Karen Kavanaugh and I am the Public Policy Director for the Southwest Detroit Business Association. This afternoon I am representing the Gateway Communities Development Collaborative (GCDC). The GCDC is a collaborative of nine community development corporations working to preserve and revitalize the phenomenal residential and commercial areas of Southwest Detroit. Collectively, the member organizations have generated in excess of \$80 million in real estate development in this revitalizing urban area since 1995. Our organizations have worked for decades at the busiest international border in North America. We are in the shadow of the Ambassador Bridge and the DRIC study's "Area of Continued Analysis." We comprise the neighborhoods that host the most extensive transportation network in Michigan. Three interstate freeways, an international rail tunnel, a network of class I rail lines, along with acres of rail yards, and the Ambassador Bridge are all located or travel through southwest Detroit. By far, the benefits of this infrastructure accrue to the region and the state while the negative impacts are disproportionately borne at the local level.

The Gateway Communities Development Collaborative recognizes that transportation infrastructure is a component of our community and characterizes southwest Detroit. Transportation infrastructure enhancements and investment, if appropriately planned with meaningful public participation, can result in economic value and benefit to the host communities – particularly at an international border. The DRIC Study process is the strongest opportunity in decades to fill a leadership void in public planning for an efficient and secure Detroit - Windsor border while simultaneously reversing the paradigm of transportation infrastructure and negative impacts.

The governments of the United States and Canada are the appropriate entities to be leading such an endeavor. What happens with respect to commerce, economic development, and security at international borders is appropriately a public function. You should be extremely proud that your representatives on the U.S. side – the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration - have pursued the mandate of the DRIC study with significant respect for local community participation. In fact, they have accomplished what we have not – they have united the residents and community-based organizations north and south of interstate 75 – the freeway that divides the community - in southwest Detroit. Additionally, they have created an environment for us all to consider and think more broadly of the connections between the neighborhoods of Windsor and Detroit. Indeed we are one border community. When residents of Delray testify at public hearings that the DRIC study process is the first time that they have felt listened to, respected,

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and included by the public sector, you have reached a critical milestone in creating a different conversation on transportation and community development. When residents and elected officials of Windsor travel to southwest Detroit to testify that our neighborhoods are connected and that they will not support actions that overly burden or exploit one side of the border, you have achieved another critical milestone in creating a mutually beneficial conversation on international relations and development. It bears repeating that your U.S. team has made this happen.

The fundamental underpinning of this success is the public sector's leadership and involvement – and this must continue. The GCDC firmly supports public ownership and oversight of the next border crossing. The interests of the private sector, while important, are simply too narrow to fully achieve all that the DRIC study sets out to accomplish. The greatest threat to achieving the DRIC study mandate is allowing one party – whether public or private – to wield undue influence and control. The Gateway Communities Development Collaborative has had decades of experience with the challenges of working in an area that hosts the only privately-owned international crossing along the northern U.S. border and know first-hand of the inherent conflicts between the private interest to maximize profits and the public interests of community development, community cohesion, and security. We ask the joint committees to consider that the company that owns the Ambassador Bridge owns an entire transportation conglomerate of shipping, trucking, and freight handling interests – many of which are also located in southwest Detroit. We ask you to consider that this conglomerate has an extensive concessionaire privilege on all transportation-related projects of the Detroit Wayne County Port Authority. We ask that you consider the proposal, announced last October, to lease the Detroit interests of the Detroit - Windsor tunnel to this conglomerate. Finally, we ask you to consider the motivation and implications of criticisms raised by this conglomerate of the DRIC study. We have considered these issues and have concluded, without reservation, that providing a monopoly to a private entity on the control and operations at the Detroit Windsor international border will not result in a more efficient and secure border system, local community and economic development, or mutually beneficial international relations.