

April 30, 2010

The Honorable Michael Bishop
Michigan State Senator, Dist. 12
PO Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

The Honorable Andy Dillon
Michigan State Representative, Dist. 17
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Senator Bishop and Speaker Dillon:

Last week, members of both the State Senate and the State House of Representatives raised issues regarding **Direction2035**: The Regional Transportation Plan for Southeast Michigan. Senator Cropsy raised several issues during a statement on the Senate Floor on April 20, 2010. Later, on April 22, in the House Transportation Committee, Representative Knollenberg raised similar concerns.

I would like to make some general comments and then provide some specific responses to be absolutely clear on SEMCOG positions.

Under federal law, SEMCOG is required to develop a long-range, fiscally constrained plan for our region every four years. This plan identifies the transportation priorities to be funded over the next twenty years based on our best funding assumptions. It is important to recognize that this is a living and flexible document, which can be amended as needed by SEMCOG's General Assembly, our key governing body. The General Assembly is composed entirely of elected representatives from throughout Southeast Michigan. **Direction2035** is not a "wish list" in that, for all projects we place in the plan, we must demonstrate there is a reasonable chance that they will be funded and completed.

Projects are identified as being completed within five-year increments to allow for some sense of priority and staging of projects relative to existing resources. The staging also is consistent with information known at the time the plan was developed. As a result, it is very common to adjust dates regarding these projects. After all, trying to project highway construction or transit projects ten or twenty years into the future is quite a challenge. Funding may not have materialized in the manner planned and a project may be pushed back in time. Conversely, the importance of a project may push other projects aside with the desired project moving forward. This give and take is normal and occurs routinely within our long-range plan.

Last week, some specific issues were raised that should be addressed.

First, it was mentioned that the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) bridge project will not begin construction until 2021, since that is what is in **Direction2035**. While it is true that the current plan indicates completion of the project in the 2021-2025 time-frame, this is not necessarily indicative of when construction will begin. In addition, the project can be amended

to a different time period per the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). Indications are that they are in the process of requesting such an amendment in order to make **Direction2035** consistent with the construction activities identified in the recently approved environmental document.

Second, it was stated in the Senate that the DRIC will be funded “by taxpayer-funded bonds; not private bonds, but taxpayer-backed bonds.” Funding the project through bonding is perfectly reasonable and the core project will not use tax dollars. Ancillary road improvements may use federal and state dollars as has been the case with the Ambassador Bridge. Clearly, the tolls would have to be at the level necessary to repay the bonds.

To conclude, let me make clear that SEMCOG has worked with MDOT as we have worked with all other transportation agencies. We want them to achieve their objectives and, frankly, we believe a second crossing is good for Michigan. However, let me also make clear that we have also worked with the Detroit International Bridge Company (DIBC) in their efforts to build a second span. In fact, SEMCOG has also approved the construction of the Ambassador Bridge second span with the understanding that the company’s plan is to close the existing span once the new span is constructed. It should be pointed out that our approval is contingent upon the DIBC successfully resolving concerns about the second span, particularly those of our Canadian neighbors. The construction of the second span of the Ambassador Bridge is listed in **Direction2035** to begin in 2011. Based on a number of factors, we do not believe that this 2011 date will be met and we anticipate **Direction2035** will need to be amended to push this project back.

I hope this letter is helpful to you and your membership in better understanding our transportation planning process and the status of the two bridge projects. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Paul E. Tait, CAE
Executive Director
SEMCOG

Cc: Michigan Legislators
House Transportation Committee

PT: cp