

Detroit River International Crossing Study
Local Advisory Council/Local Agency Group Meeting
Revised Notes
April 28, 2010, 7:00 p.m.
Southwestern High School

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

Attendance: See attached.

Discussion:

Introductions/Agenda

Mohammed Alghurabi asked those in attendance to introduce themselves. He reviewed the meeting conduct, procedures and agenda: the Gateway Project; Community Benefits Coalition (CBC) activity; Lansing legislative requirements; and, Blue Water Bridge right-of-way experience.

Public Comments

Q: Mr. Rosen asked whether Mohammed Alghurabi had seen the Detroit Free Press letter to the editor purportedly from an “MDOT official.”

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said no.

C: Mr. Rosen thought the letter disingenuous and went on to make comments about Mr. Moroun stating that the government was out to get him. He said one cannot prove a negative. He noted that Senator Carl Levin indicated a bridge might not be necessary. Then he asked if the public were really going to have input. He said if it did not and the bridge did not meet the needs of the community, maybe it should not be built.

Q: I live north of I-75 on Campbell. How will I be affected?

R: Please talk to Jim Hartman at the rear of the room.

Q: What was the meeting of public officials [the press conference of April 16th]?

R: That was a way for the Governor, labor representatives, the Oakland County Executive, Detroit's Mayor and others to express support for the project, in light of the approvals needed in Lansing.

C: Commissioner Varga asked Scott Brines if the community benefits package was part of the legislation. Discussion indicated Representative Tlaib was introducing language. Commissioner Varga said she believed it should all be in one bill, and she stated MDOT should support such a unified bill.

C: Beware of those other than MDOT in the neighborhood trying to buy property.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said that was an important message. He asked everyone to be patient and noted that there would be discussion of property acquisition later in the meeting. As yet, MDOT is acquiring no property.

Gateway Project Update

Mohammed Alghurabi reported on information received via email from Victor Judnic, Manager of the Gateway Project for MDOT. Mr. Judnick reported:

1. Wayne County Circuit Court on April 23rd, 2010, denied a Detroit International Bridge Company (DIBC) motion to reverse the court's February 1, 2010, order for DIBC to build the DIBC portion of the project in accordance with the plans agreed to by all the stakeholders.
2. The Court requested that the President of DIBC appear on May 10th to explain why DIBC could not complete all work within one year and why the president of DIBC should not be considered in contempt of court for not following the February 1 order.
3. The new ramp from southbound I-75 to Vernor Highway should be open to traffic in early May. There have been some delays due to rain.

4. There will be a Cinco de Mayo celebration on May 5th at 2 PM at the new pedestrian crossing/plaza located at 21st and Bagley.

Q: John Nagy asked when the lights at Grand Boulevard and the service drives would be operational.

R: That project would be let early July and completed in September.

Delray Community House Barrier

Mohammed Alghurabi said he had followed up on the status of the buffer planned along I-75 at the Delray Community House. He said the hope had been that it could be tied to the Dearborn ramp upgrade project, but it could not. At present the plans are under review by the City of Detroit.

Meeting Notes

There were no comments on the notes of the previous month's meeting notes.

Community Benefits Coalition (CBC) Update

Scott Brines said the CBC is looking for residents who can travel to Lansing the following day for legislative hearings to gain support for inclusion of the CBC's community enhancement goals in the legislation.

Update on the DRIC Reporting Requirements to Legislature

Mohammad Alghurabi noted that a legislative hearing was scheduled for the next day. MDOT's Director will testify and provide the information required by Section 384 of PA 116 – an investment grade traffic study, and indications of a willingness by the private sector to enter into a public-private partnership. He said legislation was needed to allow public-private partnerships in Michigan, as well as the ability to toll the new bridge and enter into a contract with Canada. He said support of the legislation to allow the activities was received from Wayne County, the Monroe County Commission, the South Wayne County Chamber of Commerce, Automation Alley, and others.

Commissioner Varga said her support was conditional on the Community Benefits Coalition package being included; if it were not, she would withdraw her resolution.

John Nagy commented that in the past when the legislative committee has reached the time appointed for citizen comments, they have said there is no more time, and he hopes they are not cut off this time.

Mohammed Alghurabi said this House Transportation Committee hearing would be followed by a full House vote and then action by the Michigan Senate. This is all to occur by June 1, 2010.

MDOT Real Estate

Mohammed Alghurabi introduced Tom Jay of MDOT's Real Estate Division to explain MDOT's real estate acquisition procedures and answer questions about the process.

Tom Jay said he had two MDOT real estate representatives with him who have been working on the Blue Water Bridge project in Port Huron. He then explained the basic steps in property acquisition:

1. The property owner will be contacted, if possible, by telephone;
2. A time and place will be established to meet so that MDT can interview the property owner to gain essential information about the property;
3. A specific MDOT representative will be assigned to that owner/property; and,
4. That MDOT representative will continue contact with the owner via phone and/or in personal meetings to explain the acquisition process.

Tom Jay said at the next LAC meeting a video will be shown that provides more information, but the basic closing procedure on a property is:

1. A property appraisal is completed and an offer is made to the owner;
2. The owner has 90 days to consider the offer;
3. The closing is set and the property is purchased.

He said the process varies for residential owners, renters and business owners and that is why it is difficult to present all the information only one time in a way that applies to everyone. And, that is why the assignment of an individual MDOT staff person is so important to explaining the case-by-case conditions that apply to any particular property. He said important principles to understand are that no one is moved until they have a place to go and the process, while conducted under specific federal guidelines, is flexible, responding to the needs of the individual.

Q: Commissioner Varga asked whether Wayne County would be used as the boundary for reasonable relocation or Delray.

R: Paul Sander responded that every property is looked at individually and appropriate comparable sales transactions are identified. He said he would be looking beyond Delray as transactions that are considered comparable have to be a willing buyer and willing seller and be out of the reach of the influence of the project.

Q: John Bendzick noted that the federal government will have the say on the plaza.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi noted there are two parts to the plaza, with the federal government responsible for the central area that serves federal functions and MDOT having control around that area, where there will be ancillary facilities/functions such as toll collection, duty free operations and the like.

C: The comparables will have to be miles away to do any good.

Tom Jay said that federal guidelines require that relocations occur to “decent, safe, and sanitary” housing. Where appraisals fall short of what is required to relocate occupants to such housing, supplemental compensation is provided. There are other provisions for renters. He said that the relocation process is ahead of schedule in Port Huron because most people have been satisfied with their relocation offers.

A gentleman from the neighborhood said Delray is not Port Huron. Tom Jay added that standards have to be met and there is also an appeals process, if owners/occupants are not satisfied.

There was additional discussion about the basis of the appraisal and how far afield MDOT would go in making the assessments. Someone asked if Realty.com would be used. Paul Sander said it would, as one of a number of tools. He explained that in the appraisal business, there are different kinds of appraisals done. A right-of-way appraisal generally results in the highest value being established.

Q: How long should homeowners keep receipts?

R: The appraisals are based on normal depreciation. Generally it is not necessary to keep receipts as MDOT appraises on an “as is” basis.

C: Accessibility to MDOT staff is key.

R: MDOT understands that and pledges to be available as needed.

Q: Why was there a right-of-way need at the Blue Water Bridge?

R: The plaza needs to be expanded.

Q: Was noise and air quality an issue.

R: We have received no such comments.

C: At Blue Water, the second bridge was built next to the first, but with a different look as approved by the State Historic Preservation Officer. I hope MDOT handles this bridge with greater responsibility.

Q: What happens if you have rental property or are a renter?

R: Rental units are treated as commercial property. Renters receive compensation money for relocation.

Other LAC/LAG Business

Ms. Leonard stated that she is opposed to a bridge being built. But if one is to be built, she prefers that it be done with a public private partnership. She then read a statement into the record, which is attached.

Additional Public Comments

C: A representative of Operating Engineers Local 324 stated their local is actively supporting use of prevailing wages and pushing for better benefits for the people of Detroit. He said the Marathon Oil construction is a good example where women and minorities have participated.

Mohammed Alghurabi said he had been asked by Kathy Wendler to supply a list of job classifications that were used during the Gateway Project. He said he would supply the list to the CBC. These represent the skill sets that will be needed for the DRIC project. He said he understood that it was important to start early on building job skills, in advance of when the jobs are advertised. Commissioner Varga said it was really about contracts. Mohammed Alghurabi said that it is against the law to discriminate in hiring. It is not possible to guarantee jobs to certain groups. On the other hand contractors normally hire workers locally.

The meeting ended at 8:30 p.m. The next meeting was announced as May 26, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. at Southwestern High School.

April 28, 2010

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Last evening I listened to your Tuesday, April 27, 2010, presentation given earlier to the Public Health and Safety Committee, city of Detroit Council and also to the comments made by Ms. Kathy Wendler, Southwest Detroit Business Association, the pastor of St. Paul AME Church and Ms. Simone Sagovac of Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision – all three supporting the project.

I heard Councilwoman Brenda Jones' questions regarding the concerns, if any, of the community. Mr. Marcel Todd, CPC, spoke of truck traffic and air quality in the community and more specifically around Southwestern High School. He also interjected a comment regarding the proposed housing that will be erected as a result of persons who live in the path of the project.

While Ms. Wendler spoke of the 10,000 jobs that would be coming into the area as a result of the project, I want to know specifically what are the plans for training and hiring the residents of the Southwest Detroit area working towards project completion.

Based upon the projects that I have observed performed by Michigan Department of Transportation contractors, there do not appear to be minority/poor people working on those crews. I make this statement based upon the current work being done on Schaefer near Oakwood and the Gateway Project. I recall on the Lodge (US 10) Downtown Detroit work approximately two years ago, I observed a female flag person. Jobs mean money into the communities and the elevation of its people.

High national unemployment generally indicates triple the unemployment rate for poor people and people of color – a population that does not have skilled trade job skills but generally low level job skills.

We can not afford to wait for the pie to be sliced then divvy out the jobs. People need to be trained and job ready for a possible year 2013 green light for the Detroit River International Crossing.

I recall in summer 2005 at a DRIC meeting held at River Rouge High School, the then mayor of River Rouge publicly approved this project sight unseen saying his people needed jobs and his

city needed the money. There were many in the audience who wanted to sign up for those jobs that night.

While Michigan Department of Transportation contracts its projects out to contractors, the reality is that MDOT essentially operates a closed shop. It is my understanding that built into those contracts are provisions for a specific percentage of minorities to be hired. If one is not trained, one cannot be hired.

I want MDOT to “get on the horse” and become actively involved in the front end and do whatever is necessary and possible to get the unions to front load and, once contracts are let, monitor the contractors are indeed fulfilling the contract obligations. Saying Workforce Development Department, city of Detroit, will take charge is not enough. Over the years, I have watched Councilwoman Brenda Jones’ monthly Skill Trades Task Force meetings and hear those men and women who have completed their apprenticeship training and still can not get jobs even when they appear at the local union halls.

Yesterday, the President announced plans to work with those states that have the highest unemployment rates. Michigan stands in line among the first. With stimulus dollars being used, hopefully, valid job training and fair hiring practices will take place.

In my professional life, I am a vocational educator. I know the process for job readiness is to conduct a survey of the job needs; (MDOT knows the projected needs); develop specific curriculum or training programs for skills required for job readiness needed for the projected DRIC MDOT jobs. As stated above, there are apprentices who have completed training but are not being placed on jobs. The contracts could be structured such that a specific number of trained apprentices are included for the project. Also, there are several community colleges and trade schools in the area. With MDOT’s assistance, job readiness can become a reality. During the 1960s, there was a program (National Alliance Businesses [NABS]) where companies trained workers giving them employment opportunities. The same practice can be instituted in this instance.

I am not asking that unions disregard training. Simply put, there are people who never have the opportunity to even stand on the floor let alone to break the glass ceiling. I am asking that MDOT be creative in letting contracts that will have tremendous impacts upon the lives of an environmentally ravaged people.

Dolores Leonard, Ed.D., NCC, LPC

Member, LAC