

Detroit River International Crossing Study
Local Advisory Council/Local Agency Group Meeting
Notes
January 27, 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

Mohammed Alghurabi asked those in attendance to introduce themselves beginning with the LAC/LAG members and then the observers. He introduced Victor Judnic, Manager of the Gateway Project for MDOT, and Terry Stepanski, Manager of the Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Project for MDOT. He indicated each would make a presentation during the course of the evening's meeting.

Mohammed Alghurabi then reviewed the agenda. There were no changes requested. He noted the absence of Mrs. Leonard and indicated that she had contacted him beforehand to express her regrets that she could not attend.

Public Comments

Mr. Rosen indicated that he read in the *Detroit Free Press* about federal money being available on condition that the Michigan legislature first approves the DRIC. He expressed concern of this dependence on the Michigan legislature in order to implement the project. He noted that if the legislature does not approve the project there will be no new government crossing of the Detroit River. He recommended that MDOT Director Steudle and Governor Granholm be more public in their efforts to gain support for the project.

Dennis Nordal of Neighborhood Centers, Inc. indicated that he had read the plan for the Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal project. He expressed concerns about routing intermodal traffic

north from John Kronk on Livernois Avenue to I-94. He expressed concern that the DIFT FEIS did not contain any mitigation for the residents and child-serving agencies along the corridor. He indicated that pedestrian crossings were essential and that the corridor should be “greened.”

Jonathon Koller, a resident of Corktown, indicated the Central Avenue underpass that is part of the DIFT project is inhospitable and too long.

John Bendzick stated that I-94 at Miller needs improvement and the DIFT proposed improvement at I-94 and Livernois will take businesses.

Meeting Notes

There were no comments on the November LAC/LAG meeting notes.

Gateway Project Update

Victor Judnic reviewed the current routing of trucks from the Ambassador Bridge southbound to gain access to I-75. He indicated MDOT examined redesign of the area at I-94/Springwells to accommodate those trucks until the Gateway project is completed as designed. It was decided near-term major improvements would not be made because the DRIC will involve rebuilding the interchange. So, MDOT will try to smooth the traffic at Springwells by adjusting existing traffic signal equipment with some updates possible. The final decision on the change is still to be made in the next week or so.

Victor Judnic stated that court hearing on the lawsuit between MDOT and the Detroit International Bridge Company on the Gateway project was held on January 15. A ruling is expected with 4 weeks of the hearing; none has been issued yet.

Victor Judnic then discussed the remaining construction on the Gateway Project. He noted that the section of southbound I-75 to Vernor is expected to be completed in March and the pedestrian bridge and plaza at Bagley will open in early May, hopefully by Cinco de Mayo. He then entertained comments and questions.

Q: *John Nagy asked if eastbound I-696 to southbound I-75 were to go to two lanes rather than one.*

R: Victor Judnic indicated that a traffic analysis does not indicate that two lanes are warranted.

C: *John Nagy said that volume is not an issue, but it's the weave/merge movement that's the problem.*

R: Victor Judnic said he will look at that issue again. But, he noted that all permanent signs are not yet up in that section of road and, therefore, the weave/merge problem is likely to be addressed by the complete signing.

C: *Norbert Motowski of All Saints Catholic Church stated that the DRIC Springwells interchange improvement would have a positive effect on the activities in the area of All Saints Church. He also was positive about the temporary solution of routing trucks from the Ambassador Bridge southbound over Dearborn Avenue as compared to routing them up Springwells Avenue. He cited that the Springwells area not only includes All Saints Catholic Church, but Southwestern High School.*

R: Victor Judnic indicated that the Dearborn Avenue truck-routing solution is temporary. It is an indirect route. The use of either Springwells or Dearborn by Ambassador Bridge trucks wanting to go south on I-75 is considered a temporary solution. The eventual solution will come after the court ruling on the lawsuit when parts of the project are completed by the Ambassador Bridge as designed and agreed to.

C: *John Solano representing SWDIA asked if MDOT had spoken to anyone in the neighborhood and business community in the Springwells area.*

R: Victor Judnic indicated that there had been extensive communications with the community, including in the Springwells area. Victor Judnic then reiterated that the solution to use Dearborn as a truck route, or even a revised solution to use Springwells, is temporary. The permanent solution will solve the problem and remove the trucks from both Springwells and Dearborn and place them directly from the Ambassador Bridge onto I-75. The courts will decide if and when the eventual solution will be implemented.

Furthermore, a suggestion that had been made earlier about posting “no trucks” signs on Fort Street can’t occur because Fort Street is an official truck route.

C: *John Bendzick commented that the businesses where he works must use Dragoon almost 100 percent of the time.*

R: Comment acknowledged.

Victor Judnic then concluded this section of the meeting by indicating that anyone who wanted follow-up information could contact Mohammed Alghurabi who would, in turn, immediately contact Victor for the appropriate response. He stressed that MDOT wants to hear from the community.

Community Benefits Coalition Update

Scott Brines invited all of those in attendance to attend three upcoming meetings: February 2, 2010, at Saint Paul AME Church, and February 9, 2010, at the First Latin American Baptist Church. These meetings will be precursors to one that will be a town hall meeting on February 23, 2010, at the Delray Neighborhood House to be held at 6:00 p.m. He stated he appreciated the attendance at the LAC/LAG meeting of representatives of Governor Granholm and the Detroit City Council.

Update on the DRIC

Mohammed Alghurabi provided an update on the DRIC by indicating the following:

- The request for proposal of interest (RFPOI) was released earlier in the day (January 27, 2010). Responses to the RFPOI will be nonbinding and they are due on March 17, 2010. The proposals will be used to respond to the legislature’s request for a demonstration of private sector interest in participating in the DRIC project. He noted the RFPOI is available on the DRIC Web site.
- Ongoing work includes completing a traffic study, as well as building financial models for the DRIC project.

Team II

John Baran indicated that review of the DRIC project is led by the Planning and Development Department of the City of Detroit; he is the manager of that process. The objective is to keep all City agencies involved in the DRIC project as it moves forward. Recent items of activity include meetings with MDOT on the RFPOI and to discuss the possible aesthetics design guide contract. The Planning and Development Department has also been working with the businesses community/MSHDA/Capital Access and Hamilton Anderson on the process to build new housing in Delray. Other Team II activities include determining how much City-owned land exists in the project area and working in concert with the community in follow-up to a meeting in September dealing with air quality issues. Tom Cervenak asked if the truck routing issue, important to Delray, was being addressed by the Planning and Development Department. John Baran responded that it is premature to finalize truck routes before the land use plan for the area is approved.

Presentation on Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Project FEIS

Terry Stepanski made a presentation of the Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Project, citing that the Final Environmental Impact Statement had been circulated and that the waiting period ended on January 29, 2010. Following his presentation the following questions and comments were addressed:

- C: Tom Cervenak indicated that the Central Avenue tunnel is quite long and, therefore, will become a "place of mischief."*
- R: Terry Stepanski indicated that it would be a very welcoming underpass appropriately lighted and with accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists. He considered the solution quite secure and safe, particularly as compared to the at-grade crossings of the railroad at both Central and Lonyo.*
- Q: Tom Cervenak asked if the Supreme Court decision dealing with eminent domain allows the project to go forward when private property will have to be bought for the use of a different private owner.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that the property to be purchased will be owned by MDOT. Any additional use will be through a lease. That matter has been reviewed by the legal parties at MDOT and the Attorney General's office and considered appropriate and not in violation of any recent Supreme Court decision on eminent domain.

Q: John Bendzick asked if MDOT had worked on this project with the City of Dearborn.

R: Terry Stepanski indicated MDOT had done so.

Q: Frank Rodriguez of Century 21 asked if acquisition of businesses at the I-94/Livernois ramps area were part of the DIFT.

R: Terry Stepanski said it was not.

Q: Elizabeth Hughes, citing that over half of the trucks at the DIFT terminal will use Wyoming, asked if there were any kind of walls to be placed along Wyoming

R: Terry Stepanski responded that there are no walls along Wyoming s part of the DIFT because the sensitive land uses are not between Stecker Avenue and I-94, where trucks will be directed to gain access to I-94,nor are they south of Stecker to Eagle and that will be used to gain access to I-75. The sensitive land uses are a mile or more away south on Wyoming.

C: Steve Walker stated that the DIFT project was a total fraud like the federal bailout of the banks. The DIFT is a bailout of the private sector railroads. He asserted that if this project is economically viable, the railroads should be willing to pay for all of it. He further noted that Central Avenue is a bad idea because viaducts in southwest Detroit have a history of flooding.

R. Comments acknowledged.

Q: A representative of the Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Council asked how parks that are along Lonyo will be accessed if Lonyo is closed.

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that the parks are still accessible from the north and from the south. In the latter instance park users can take Central Avenue and the rebuilt access road along the north side of the terminal to gain access to Lonyo.

Q: *An unidentified speaker asked when meetings would begin on implementing community benefits.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that they would occur after the Record of Decision was signed.

C: *An unidentified individual noted that there was no Spanish translator at the meeting.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that Harvey Santana, who speaks Spanish and has acted at all DIFT meetings as the Spanish translator, was in attendance.

C: *The same unidentified commenter indicated that the announcement that a Spanish translator was available had not been made and should have been.*

R: Comment acknowledged.

Q: *Tarek Baydoun of Senator Irma Clark-Coleman's office asked about benefits relating to the project and their relationship to the cost.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that there would be significant numbers of jobs and an improvement in tax base such that the increased tax revenues to the state and local governments would far outweigh the government's share of the project.

Q: *Mr. Rosen asked how much money was to come from the railroads.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that the railroads would pay 50 percent of all rail improvements, with the government matching that investment.

Q: *Simone Sagovac of the Community Benefits Coalition indicated that the community has concerns about impacts to the neighborhoods. She asked where are the railroads on improving the current situation.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that MDOT will continue to work with the railroads to ensure that they address their responsibilities. In some cases what are considered railroad responsibilities are really not.

Q: Raquel Casraneda-Lopez asked who will own the Central Avenue viaduct.

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that MDOT may take over Central Avenue, but that decision has not been made.

Q: Jonathan Koller asked if there are other places in the United States where pedestrians go underground for five minutes.

R: None were cited.

Q: John Solano asked why Lonyo Avenue would be closed when there are community attractions such as parks along it.

R: Joe Corradino indicated that the Lonyo crossing of the railroad tracks is one of the most unsafe in Michigan, particularly in relationship to the number of fatalities. Closing Lonyo and making a safe crossing of the rail yard at Central is a significant improvement over current conditions. Furthermore, access to facilities along Lonyo is still available by virtue of using the Central underpass.

C: An unidentified speaker indicated that all the railroad viaducts in the community flood.

R: Joe Corradino indicated that a number of these problems, particularly on Livernois Avenue, is a function of runoff of silt/dirt from the rail yard which clogs the inlets and causes the viaducts to flood. He stressed that a drainage solution that accompanies the DIFT project would not allow that to happen.

C: John Bendzick indicated that the proper drainage solution is not to simply pave the yard, but to do a complete rebuilding of the sewer system in the area.

R: Terry Stepanski explained that the solution for the DIFT project would take the runoff from the terminal area, store it in pipes, and then eventually, and consistent with water quality regulations, deliver it to the Rouge River.

C: *Lisa Goldstein indicated that she was disappointed that many people were not familiar with the DIFT and that another formal public hearing was needed to address this situation. She explained that the current meeting is being held much too late in light of the end of the waiting period two day's hence. She also noted that the City Council had asked for more time to comment on the DIFT FEIS. She further indicated that she had the unfortunate experience of reading the DIFT FEIS. She noted that it was clear to her that the City would be responsible for maintaining the buffer and indicated it was her opinion that was not an appropriate responsibility for the City. Finally, she asked that some kind of "tipping fee" apply to each lift (transfer between truck to train) and the proceeds dedicated to maintaining the DIFT project.*

R: Terry Stepanski indicated that a significant effort had been made throughout the DIFT project to have the community involved and get the message out about the project. Joe Corradino indicated that it was his understanding it was inappropriate to apply a "lift fee," which would be considered a tax, because such is considered a violation of interstate commerce. Terry Stepanski stressed that the railroads will contribute a large amount of money (almost \$200 million) to the project.

Q: *An unidentified speaker asked if it were true that the Canadians had already purchased land and started construction for the DRIC project.*

R: Mohammed Alghurabi indicated that much of the land for the plaza area had been purchased by Transport Canada from the City of Windsor and that work on one or more bridges along the Windsor-Essex Parkway was going forward.

C: *Mary Ann Cuderman indicated that the bridges were part of the extension of Highway 401.*

Other Business

Mohammed Alghurabi introduced Raquel Casraneda-Lopez of the U.S. Census Bureau. She indicated that jobs for conducting the U.S. Census are available. She indicated the jobs paid \$16.50 per hour and the applicants must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, or a permanent resident.

With that, the meeting ended at 9:30 p.m. The next meeting was announced as February 24, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. at Southwestern High School.

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