

Detroit River International Crossing Study
April 14, 2005
Public Meeting Notes

These notes are of the formal presentation made at the core of the Detroit River International Crossing and DRIC study public meetings held April 11, 12, 13 and 14, 2005. Written comments received at each meeting follow these notes. All meetings used the same format.

The meeting locations were:

- Monday, April 11, 2005 – Biddle Hall in Wyandotte
- Tuesday, April 12, 2005 – River Rouge High School in River Rouge
- Wednesday, April 13, 2005 – Southwestern High School in Detroit
- Thursday, April 14, 2005 – Martin Luther King Jr. High School in Detroit

Bob Parsons, Public Hearing Officer of the Michigan Department of Transportation, outlined the purpose and agenda for the meeting and introduced the translators. He emphasized that the Michigan Department of Transportation was interested in receiving public input and welcomed oral comments during the question/comment portion of the meeting. He also noted comment forms were available (to be returned at the meeting or mailed afterwards). The Web site (www.partnershipborderstudy.com) and an 800 telephone number (1-800-900-2649) were available at anytime for input to the study process.

Bob Parsons introduced Mohammed Alghurabi, DRIC Project Manager for the Michigan Department of Transportation. Mohammed thanked those in attendance and introduced Joe Corradino of The Corradino Group and Regine Beauboeuf of Parsons Transportation Group. Using a PowerPoint presentation (available on the Web site), he explained that the Bi-National Partnership guiding the study consists of four agencies, the Federal Highway Administration, the Michigan Department of Transportation, Transport Canada and the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario; the state and federal agencies that would be involved; the project schedule; and, the U.S. study process guided by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). He concluded by emphasizing the need for public input, noting that all reasonable alternatives would be examined and no decision on a border crossing. With that, he introduced Joe Corradino of The Corradino Group, the U.S. Consultant team's project manager.

Joe Corradino, continuing with the PowerPoint presentation, explained in greater detail the NEPA process. He noted that the first group of alternatives would be developed in June. Those options, known as Illustrative Alternatives, would consist of the border crossing itself, the connecting plaza for customs processing and other functions, and the roadway connecting the plaza to the interstate highway system. Illustrative Alternatives would similarly be developed on the Canadian side of the border.

At this first round of meetings, public input was being solicited to define where the alternatives should or should not go. He noted that technical studies are under way to support the evaluation of the alternatives to be developed. Those studies would allow, by the end of 2005, the elimination of some alternatives, with those remaining, known as Practical Alternatives, to undergo more detailed analysis. Early in 2006, the list of Practical Alternatives would be finalized and then be the focus of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). That draft would be completed by the end of 2006 with the hearing for public review of the DEIS scheduled for January 2007. By mid-2007, or earlier if possible, the Preferred Alternative would be identified. The Preferred Alternative would consist of a connection between a major roadway, such as an interstate highway in the United States, to a U.S. plaza and then to a border crossing (tunnel or bridge) connecting to a Canadian plaza, and appropriate roadways in Canada for an end-to-end solution. The Final Environmental Impact Statement would be available by the end of 2007.

Joe Corradino noted that complying with the NEPA process was mandatory and that the three-year schedule reflected the need for public involvement and a great deal of technical analysis. He cited the draft Purpose of and Need for the project and presented a chart that showed a narrowing process with the initial number of alternatives gradually reduced at the same time the database and technical analysis expanded.

Joe Corradino concluded his presentation with a few examples of issues influencing the study in several areas.

Bob Parsons then began the question/answer/comment portion of the meeting. He invited those present to indicate their interest in speaking by completing a form, which he would use to announce the speakers in the order in which the forms were received.

Comments/Questions/Responses

Comment: Mitchell Alexander, a resident of southwest Detroit, indicated that everybody should have received notification about the meeting and that the project needs extensive community input. He indicated that the government agencies are making decisions without a full understanding of economics and economic development from a broad perspective. He stated that neighborhoods are fragile and healthy neighborhoods are important to the whole city. Security is a concern if there were another crossing in southwest Detroit. He then asked, if the Ambassador Bridge moves forward with its plans to create a second span, would MDOT come out and say that no permits will be issued? Finally, he stated that there should be a non-negotiable point that a new crossing be publicly owned.

Response: Mohammed Alghurabi indicated a presidential permit was necessary to build a new river crossing and an environmental assessment is necessary on the Canadian side prior to the Ambassador Bridge creating a second span.

Question: Dennis Bryant asked if surveys were done in Ontario of truck companies.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that SEMCOG had data from earlier surveys of cross-border trucking. Additional surveys may be done by then.

Comment: Mary Ann Cuderman from the Windsor Truck Watch Coalition indicated she was from the Sandwich area at the foot of the Ambassador Bridge, living two blocks from the bridge. She noted that the Ambassador Bridge has an application into Transport Canada to clear the second span for construction. She was concerned that individuals can drive right onto the bridge without stopping because the clearance and tolling occurs on the far side of the bridge. Her group supports public authority operating a new bridge.

Comment: Steve Walker, a resident of southwest Detroit, indicated that speed should be added as a factor when considering the issue of “safe, secure and efficient movement of vehicles” as part of the project purpose. He believes it is important to get across in a reasonable amount of time.

Comment: Ann Gail stated she was disappointed with the public notice of the meeting and has been calling radio stations to try to get more attention. She likened the public notice process for the border crossing study to what happened in MDOT's I-375 study. She said money shouldn't be spent on a new bridge. Instead, the plazas should be fixed. Trucks should use the bridge at night when more capacity is available. She noted that the consultant's fee was \$16.7 million with another \$4.9 million to the other consultants. (Note: this is incorrect as the \$4.9 million is included in the \$16.7 million figure.) She urged all those in attendance to encourage their friends to write comments about the project and send a copy to the Governor.

Response: Bob Parsons responded by saying MDOT encourages the media to be involved in the project.

Comments: John Nagy stated that at the first meeting in Wyandotte on Monday night, there were 600-700 people. But, he was disappointed that so few people were in attendance at Martin Luther King High School that night. He noted there were more consultants than citizens. He indicated that residents should drive down to the Ambassador Bridge to see what it's like. He said that existing neighborhoods would suffer from a new bridge. He said that Delray does not want the bridge. He noted not one City Council person was present at any meeting. He did thank representative Steve Tobocman for attending. (Aides to several City Council people and a City Planning Commission representative were then recognized as being in attendance.)

Response: Mohammed Alghurabi responded by saying 20,000 mailers were sent to residents and businesses two weeks prior to the meeting to stimulate attendance. In March, one-on-one contacts were made with U.S. representatives of each community who were asked to get the word out. The Local Advisory Council held its first meeting on March 30th and a number of LAC participants indicated they would help get the news of the meetings to their constituents. Further, he personally e-mailed a number of groups a copy of the mailer for their distribution. He noted that a press release had been issued to all the media two weeks ago. He continued by indicating Local Advisory Committee meetings are to be held the last Wednesday of each month. The LAC meetings are open to the public. He stated that a number of Mayors are in attendance themselves as opposed to sending representatives. He suggested MDOT was

open to other ways to increase awareness of the project and he solicited from the group any additional ideas they have on how that could be done.

Question: Kathryn Savoie asked the number of people in the study area.

Response: Joe Corradino indicated that the population of the preliminary study areas was approximately half a million.

Comment: Diane McMillan noted that precinct delegates should have been notified of the meeting and encouraged people in the audience to help distribute information to get the word out.

Question: Constance Bodurow, who lives in LaFayette Place, asked if anyone at the meeting was taking notes.

Response: Mohammed Alghurabi stated "yes."

Comment: Ms. Bodurow then suggested that evening meeting hours may be difficult for working people to attend and suggested that meeting should be held on weekends. She suggested the Web should be used to communicate.

Response: Joe Corradino indicated that information related to the study is put on the Web as soon as it is possible. Emails and hotline phone calls were responded to daily and notes of the meetings would be posted on the Web for review.

Comment: Ms. Bodurow indicated that the study was rushing right into an Environmental Impact Statement.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study had determined a need for the project after almost four years of work. Nevertheless, the issue of project need was being re-examined insofar as changes had occurred with respect to SARS, the value of the Canadian dollar, 9/11 and other events.

Question: The speaker asked if the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study were driven by the business community.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that it was driven by the four governments that are part of the Bi-National Partnership.

Comment: The speaker urged consideration of sustainability and urban design goals and the need to sustain fragile neighborhoods. He noted the area has tremendous cultural resources and the Detroit River is an International Heritage River.

Response: Joe Corradino noted that teams of people had been inventorying culture resources among other features in the study area. In the near future, interviews would start with stakeholders and with interested/concerned groups in the corridors to gain their understanding of what it will take to sustain their neighborhood.

Comment: Mitchell Alexander spoke again indicating he had attended an earlier public meeting in the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study and there were specific proposals for crossing the Detroit River. He wondered why they weren't the same this evening.

Response: Joe Corradino indicated that the need had been established in the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study at which time sample crossing corridors were developed. He stressed that the NEPA process must consider all reasonable and practical alternatives so the current phase of work starts with a "clean slate."

Question: The speaker asked if a certain portion of the budget could be directed to outreach and that perhaps media spots could be purchased rather than just press releases being extended to the media.

Response: Bob Parsons said that suggestion would be considered.

Comment: Gwen Montie of Riverview indicated she had been to all four meetings and was concerned she would not have a say in the project.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that the process of evaluating alternatives would be done in public view. The Do Nothing Alternative is always considered an option through the public hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. For example, in June the public will be asked to weight factors by which the evaluation of Illustrative Alternatives would take place. But, he noted in the end, the Bi-National Partnership will make the final recommendation and it will consider regional, national and international economic and transportation issues.

Question: The speaker asked how a decision was made to go to Biddle Hall in Wyandotte.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that Biddle Hall was the location of the last Down River meeting, the last meeting in the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study.

Question: The speaker then asked about the April 27 date for the LAC and inquired how many seats there were at the table and how many seats there were in the room and then asked how big the room was.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that the room could hold a few hundred people.

Question: Ann Gail asked if anyone was aware of a 700 page TRB Research Report. No one responded in the affirmative.

Comment: The speaker stated that the No Action Alternative had not been mentioned at previous meetings. The speaker asked about the LAC.

Response: Mohammed Alghurabi stated that the Local Advisory Council is designed to get grass roots involvement throughout the study.

Question: The speaker asked if there were more than one LAC.

Response: Mohammed Alghurabi said there was one LAC for the entire study.

Question: John Nagy asked, if a particular site is selected, how contamination would be handled.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that EIS will cover contamination and outline the cost and time it takes to remediate any problem areas.

Question: Kevin Tosolt asked that if two options come out in the end, could two options be carried forward.

Response: Joe Corradino stated that in the end, only one new crossing solution is needed to meet the capacity requirement of the future.

Comment: A speaker in the audience indicated if no other options prevail, the Ambassador Bridge “wins”.

Response: Joe Corradino responded by saying the private sector can pursue any alternative it wants but it must, in the end, get the same permits that would be required for any alternative selected through the Bi-National Partnership study process.

The formal question/comment period ended about 8:35 p.m. Bob Parsons encouraged those present to ask any further questions of staff positioned at the meeting displays.