

**Detroit River International Crossing Study**  
**April 11, 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](http://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 had been made 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 being 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:** Ed Nuzrnberg, representing the BASF Corporation in Wyandotte, stated his opposition to any crossing in the Riverview/Wyandotte area. He noted that his company had, for years, been involved in solution salt mining in the Port Hennepin area, which is the north end of Grosse Ile. Because of that, he stated the underlying geology would not support a bridge or a tunnel. He further noted that Wyandotte was at the widest part of the river and that some of the land in the area had been reclaimed to become environmentally significant. He noted that BASF owned Fighting Island and approximately 300 acres of marshland to the south. He concluded by reiterating BASF does support a river crossing in this area.

**Comment:** A. John Schweickart of the Grosse Ile Township Board noted that, while he works for BASF, he was speaking for Grosse Ile. He emphasized that the DRIC Study was a political process and that the citizens of Grosse Ile were opposed to a crossing anywhere in the area. He emphasized that it was a quality of life issue for the residents of Grosse Ile. With respect to Hennepin Point, he noted that in 1994 there was a sinkhole (600 feet by 300 feet) that collapsed to a depth of about 200 feet. He concluded that the area near Grosse Ile is simply not a logical area for a river crossing.

**Comment:** Joe Peterson, a Wyandotte citizen and a candidate for City Council, emphasized that the crossing should not occur in Wyandotte. Wyandotte is now redeveloping and it doesn't need "to go two steps backwards."

**Comment:** Richard Miller of Wyandotte said this wasn't the kickoff meeting for the Border Crossing Study as previous meetings had been held. At that earlier time, he stressed that Wyandotte said "no" to the project and that the elected Wyandotte officials had passed a resolution to that effect. He also stated that in the earlier study, an MDOT individual had told him that using Pennsylvania Road to access the border crossing would be cost prohibitive.

Further, he had learned that Mayor Joseph of River Rouge had indicated he wanted the border crossing. He noted that the Ambassador Bridge and the rail tunnel owners both had proposals to build new border crossings. Based on that, he wondered why the study would still be considering a crossing in the Wyandotte area.

**Comment:** Jeff Olstein, who owns White Furniture in downtown Wyandotte, emphasized that the Wyandotte area and its downtown were viable and that the effects of a bridge or tunnel would not be good, and would extend for miles. He was concerned that businesses would not be able to open their doors because of dust and dirt and noted that the local DDA had just redone the sidewalks with bump-outs to make the area more pedestrian-friendly.

**Comment:** Pietro ViGiorgia, representing a neighborhood association in Wyandotte, asked rhetorically who was behind the study, suggesting the owner of the Riverview Trenton Railroad was involved. He also suggested that Mayor Kilpatrick of Detroit should put the crossing in Delray. He concluded by saying politicians would suffer if they supported a crossing in the Wyandotte area.

**Question:** Riverview Mayor, Tim Durand, noted that the City of Riverview had put out information prior to the meeting to stimulate attendance. He thanked MDOT for “not sugar coating” the presentation of the issues to be addressed by placing a border crossing in the Down River area. He emphasized that the Ambassador Bridge has a ripple effect beyond the crossing, and cited the Huron Church Road back-ups. He noted that Riverview is not a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) community noting it had a landfill. He asked, if the private sector developed the bridge or tunnel, would the study continue?

**Response:** Joe Corradino responded “yes” in that all approvals to be provided by the study would be needed by any private or public proponent of a border crossing.

**Question:** Mayor Durand then asked who is paying for the study and its cost.

**Response:** Mohammed Alghurabi responded that it’s principally funded through federal dollars. Joe Corradino noted his team of consultants had a contract with MDOT for \$16.7 million.

**Question:** Mr. Durand then asked if MDOT's consultants had any conflicts of interest.

**Response:** Joe Corradino stated "no," noting that his firm had worked earlier on the Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project with MDOT as the client.

**Comment:** Mr. Durand concluded by saying that the Wyandotte/Riverview area had erased the smokestack image and he wanted to keep it that way.

**Comment:** Cathy Wells of Riverview, a homeowner near Quarry and Pennsylvania Roads, noted that her area includes one of only four schools in Wayne County noted as "excellent". She was concerned about terrorism related to the project and she noted that Pennsylvania Road is congested and is used, at times, as an alternative route to Fort Street. She stated there must be other suitable sites for a river crossing.

**Comment:** Carolyn Flanary of Riverview complained that the advertisement about the meeting was poor and that the site, Biddle Hall, was too small. She said she had seen the devastation a border crossing has caused in Canada and didn't want one in her area.

**Comment:** Michele Bond, a homeowner in Trenton, was concerned about the taking of land and truck traffic. She encouraged everyone to make their comments known to MDOT.

**Comment:** Corki Benson, representing the City of Wyandotte, gave Bob Parsons a copy of a resolution opposing the project passed by the City of Wyandotte on April 5, 2005.

**Comment:** Mary LaFrance, representing the Brownstown Township Environmental Action Group, noted the presence south of the Wayne County Metro Airport of globally impaired prairies and important marshlands. She also noted the presence of Humbug Marsh, a significant resource. She urged those present to not let huge industrial power interests "run them over."

**Comment:** Sue Jones of Riverview indicated she just moved back from Chicago, after some years away, and had noticed the local improvements. She noted the River Rouge Mayor favored putting the project near River Rouge.

**Comment:** Janet Donelson wanted to know how much property would be involved.

**Response:** Mohammed Alghurabi responded that the answer to the question is not yet known, as the study is just beginning.

**Comment:** Joe Odine, who lives on Eureka Road, said most of his comments had been covered, but wanted to emphasize the beautiful marshlands around Grosse Ile. He believed that it would take less money to twin the existing Ambassador Bridge and asked why \$16 million should be spent on a study.

**Response:** Joe Corradino responded that the expenditure was necessary to go through the NEPA process.

**Comment:** Chuck Bakhaus of Riverview noted that a bridge in the Down River area would take 200 acres. He said Delray needs help and it would be the best place for a bridge.

**Comment:** Nancy Nelson of Grosse Ile asked who would study the effects of the bridge that goes over Grosse Ile.

**Response:** Joe Corradino said that the border crossing study would determine such effects.

**Question:** Peggy Ott asked how much property would be required for the project.

**Response:** Joe Corradino responded the answer was not yet known. He noted a roadway connecting to a border crossing would have “right-of-way” of about 200 to 300 feet and the plaza would likely be 50-100 acres in size.

**Question:** Ms. Ott then asked if, once a decision is made on an alternative, could private property “just be taken.”

**Response:** Joe Corradino indicated there are laws/regulations affecting property acquisition that prevent private property from just being taken and fair compensation must be provided.

**Comment:** Rubi Bernat of Wyandotte, who works at Ste. Anne’s Cathedral near the foot of the Ambassador Bridge, noted that the Ambassador Bridge has been awful to Ste. Anne. She is afraid bridge-owned property could surround the church. She said trucks get lost all the time in the neighborhoods and northbound I-75 gets blocked by bridge traffic. Finally, she said she has a son with asthma and he had an attack when visiting Detroit with her, the air is so dirty there.

**Comment:** Cindy Boyd noted her interest in membership on the LAC. (She left her phone number.) She was concerned that not much information was available at the meeting on security. She also noted her concern about the effects of a bridge on property values. She said her community has fought to improve the area and it’s beautiful now. Finally, she noted her disappointment in the effort to notify citizens about the meeting. She had learned about the meeting only Friday.

**Response:** Mohammed Alghurabi indicated he would get back to her on LAC participation.

**Question:** Milieo DeJohn of the Riverview Democratic Club thanked the members of the Democratic Club for turning out. He asked who would own the new bridge or tunnel.

**Response:** Mohammed Alghurabi indicated the answer to that question had not yet been determined.

**Comment:** Craig Dunham asked how he could vote on the project. He noted his concern with government’s use of eminent domain and said that if the government wants a property, “it will take it.”

**Comment:** Wanda Pawlowsik of Riverview stated her concern about the lack of meeting notification.

**Response:** Bob Parsons responded that two weeks in advance of the meeting the media were contacted (radio, television). Additionally, some 20,000 meeting notices were mailed. He stated that everyone signing up at tonight's meeting would be added to the mailing list. Mohammed Alghurabi stated that he had worked with community groups, through the Local Advisory Council, to get mailers out to each group's constituency. He added that representatives of additional groups could be added to the LAC and that "observers" also attend LAC meetings as they are opened to the public.

**Comment:** Heather Smiley of Riverview indicated her concern about the meeting notices. She saw a posting at City Hall, copied it and then passed it out to her neighbors. She also called the News Herald to "get the word out." She asked if NEPA was limited to wildlife analysis only.

**Response:** Joe Corradino responded that the environmental study will cover a full range of issues including human, social, economic and natural environmental matters.

**Comment:** Ken Gerasimos of Trenton said that no matter where the bridge goes, it will carry 14,000 vehicles, 7,000 in each direction. What about the ferry?

**Response:** The ferry has been found to be inadequate to meet the purpose and need for the project.

**Comment:** Sheri Fricke objected to the bridge. She said that access to the waterfront was a valuable community asset. She noted the presence of Ford Hospital. She was concerned about loss of tax dollars. She noted that at Pennsylvania Road and 18<sup>th</sup> was the only school for special needs children. She was concerned about truck accidents and noted the recent truck tipping. She said Michigan didn't have the money and asked who had bought the pizza.

**Response:** Joe Corradino said the consultant had bought the pizza.

**Comment:** Gary Oswald had departed, but left questions that had already been answered related to potential bridge ownership.

**Question:** Brian Murphy of Wyandotte said it sounded like we are getting a bridge. Is NO an option?

**Response:** Joe Corradino stated that with any federal action, No Action must be an option. It will remain so until 2007, when a decision on an alternative will be made.

**Question:** Robert Benson of Vinewood asked if the presenting group were the same group that had been there last time.

**Response:** Joe Corradino said he was part of the group that did the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study.

**Question:** Mr. Benson continued by saying that an earlier study had found that much of the traffic was truck traffic going south. The truck/trade volumes are huge and that a doubling is unacceptable. What about trucks going to Maroun's terminal? How would it go?

**Response:** Joe Corradino responded that a part of the study was to determine how to route traffic. Projections of traffic had changed since the Planning/Needs and Feasibility Study. And, direct routes to the south were being considered. Even traffic at the existing Ambassador Bridge was being rechanneled to keep it off of local roads.

**Comment:** Sam Haitaian said he believed it was important not to fight a crossing and not to do nothing, but to do something and not point fingers.

**Comment:** Blair McGowan noted he believed the need for the project should be questioned as border crossing traffic has lessened since 9/11/01. He thought the higher price of gasoline might cause a shift of freight shipments from trucks to trains, also lessening the need for the project. He noted that it was in the interest of the Ambassador Bridge to do whatever it could to retain its traffic. He thought traffic going to/from Ontario might be diverted to the Blue

Water Bridge, as the distance between Battle Creek and London, Ontario was the same via I-69 and the Blue Water Bridge as through Detroit. Further, he noted technology might help to address the need such that a new border crossing may not be the answer. He stressed that neither Windsor nor Detroit needed the additional tons of pollution he believed would be associated with a new border crossing. He would like to see the health issue be addressed in the Purpose and Need Statement for the project. He concluded by asking if all the meetings on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday would be the same.

**Response:** Mohammed Alghurabi indicated each study meeting in the different locations during the week were of the same format and content.

**Question:** Sam Haitaian of Riverview asked if there were three more meetings this week and if the presentations would be the same.

**Response:** Bob Parsons said "yes."

**Question:** Linda Drysdale asked if individuals would be notified for the next round of meetings in June.

**Response:** The answer was "yes."

**Question:** Linda Drysdale continued that, because of the small size of the room, some individuals had to leave and couldn't get into the meeting. She asked if we would accept petitions and if there were sufficient petitions whether "they would win."

**Response:** Joe Corradino responded that the room size issue would be addressed for the next meeting. He also indicated everyone's input was important and petitions are certainly to be recognized. But, he noted that petitions, in and of themselves, are not conclusive information upon which a NEPA decision is made.

**Comment:** Ms. Drysdale continued by noting several things on the Web site that needed to be improved.

**Response:** Bob Parsons responded that Ms. Drysdale's comments would be addressed. He suggested that people go to the Web site for additional information.

**Comment:** Diane Jenkins noted that MDOT had underestimated the crowd. She said she was a lifetime resident of Wyandotte and her son is building a house in the community. She noted she is a respiratory therapist and an investor. Because of this border crossing study, she would not recommend anyone invest in Wyandotte.

**Comment:** Christine Elmore, a citizen from Wyandotte, stated her concern about the remains of an Indian village in the Fort Wayne area. She also noted her interest in being on the LAC.

**Comment:** Frank Giannotti of Riverview stated he had been relocated as a result of a road widening project there. He stressed that he could not buy a house for the money that he had been given with that project. He was against a new bridge.

**Response:** Bob Parsons responded that questions on property acquisition could be handled by Tom Jay of the Real Estate Division from MDOT who was present. Tom Jay identified himself.

**Comment:** Mary Cross of Wyandotte said that there had been job cuts at the Border Patrol and asked how the study could be funded under such circumstances. She noted lots of potholes and suggested that MDOT look at how other states fund their road improvements.

The formal question/comment period concluded about 8:30 p.m. Bob Parsons invited those in attendance to remain for one-on-one contact with MDOT to address their issues.