

Detroit River International Crossing Study
April 13, 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: Sister Julie Slowik indicated she works at Ste. Anne Church and that the Ambassador Bridge has taken over much of the area. She noted that, if a new bridge span were to be built, an air-quality study is needed first. She indicated that, presently, diesel fumes are very heavy at night at the church, which is immediately adjacent to the U.S. Customs Plaza area. She noted that the University of Michigan did a study around Clark Park. She indicated that asthma is above average in the local area and that Detroit is above the nationwide average in asthma. She stressed her concern for the elderly and children and the need to remove trucks from residential areas. She indicated her preference is that a new border crossing go to an older, industrial area Down River. She believed that the study should be most concerned about people and their health.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that it was the intent of the study to do an air pollution burden analysis of local roads serving affected neighborhoods and at the plazas. However, a health impact study would not be done.

Question: Reverend Elliott Fields indicated he did not want more trucks in his area. He also noted he was more concerned about local transportation, like the bus system, than a new bridge. He asked who was going to get the jobs and how would property acquisition be handled.

Response: Joe Corradino noted that property acquisition/relocation would be specifically addressed by the study and that there are laws requiring how that can occur. He further stated that it was possible to develop a local job component in the project.

Question: Margaret Garry of Mexicantown Community Development Corporation noted she was affiliated with Bridge Watch Detroit. She invited people to become involved in Bridge Watch. She asked the current status of the Gateway Project.

Response: Andy Ziegler of MDOT stated that the Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project, ongoing since 1994, had a phased implementation program with Fort Street being reconstructed first, West Grand second, the southbound I-75 Service Drive third and lastly, the main line freeway ramps and plaza area.

Comment: Tony Martinez read a statement that included the following.

I want to express my opinion about the border crossing.

1. We don't need another crossing, unless a person or institution wants to do it just for competition. Again, we don't need another crossing, I insist. What we need is:
 - a. A true and honest cooperation between Canada, United States and the owners of the bridge. I repeat, true and honest cooperation. This is the most important requisite to solve the problem.
 - b. We need the removal of all obstacles imposed on the bridge traffic by Canada, United States, and the owners of the bridge. The obstacles are:
 - i. Collection fees
 - ii. Security checks
 - iii. Traffic lights
 - iv. Customs inspections
 - v. Immigration examination
2. We do not need all the bridges and new construction plans by MDOT. Two years ago it made good sense. Today, with the new demands of security and paperwork imposed by Congress, I believe it is obsolete. Not only that, but the cost to the taxpayers for the construction could reach millions, and the cost of the industry and the commerce in the delays associated with this construction could reach a similar amount. With the soft economy we are experiencing, we can eliminate this burden. The base cost of construction does not include any projection of the cost of maintaining these bridges in the best conditions or the tremendous expense in delays when these bridges have to close for repairs.

I have a simple plan; faster, and economical to solve all these problems. But, it will need a true and honest cooperation between three parties. Before I present the plan, let me give you a terrifying and fictional scenario.

There is a terrorist in the Midwest loading high explosives in two trucks and a van. The goal is to drive to Canada, one truck via Port Huron, the other truck via Ambassador Bridge, and the van via the Tunnel. Their plan is not to go to Canada but to explode their cargo in the middle of the bridges and the Tunnel at the same time.

Today, there is nothing to prevent this tragedy from happening because the only stop before reaching the middle of the bridge is a toll to cross. The result of the scenario would be catastrophic to the Midwest. With something like this happening, car companies would increase the cost of vehicles, losing more against Japanese cars. Michigan would probably reach 20-30% unemployment.

My plan will consist of removing all obstacles from the bridge. Lets talk about the traffic going to Canada, the side I am familiar with.

The first obstacle to destroy are the collection of fees, the weighing of trucks, the distribution of duty-free items and traffic lights. All of these operations and other bridge-related business should be made between Clark Street and West Grand Boulevard, and between Fort Street and the Service Drive.

What I am saying is that the entrance to Canada should be at Clark Street.

The other obstacle should be removal of immigration security and customs facilities at the end of the bridge. Canadian authorities should have all necessary land to do immigration security and customs before the bridge. This can be accomplished between West Grand Boulevard and the foot of the bridge, and between Fort Street and the Service Drive.

Not only will this remove obstacles on the bridge, but also it will give authority to check any cargo or all the cargo before reaching national territory. The southbound traffic should be treated the same. A bridge without obstacles can handle all the traffic you need, up to 10,000 cars per hour both ways.

With this simple plan, everybody is a winner:

1. The owner of the bridge does not need to build another bridge to meet needs.
2. The taxpayers save hundreds of millions of dollars, which can be used to build roads that are really in need.
3. The companies doing business between the two countries are helping the economy.
4. The country improves security.
5. The very best thing is this plan can be done very quickly and expressways have no need to close.

Note: West Grand Boulevard does not need to close. With good construction strategies of barriers and cameras, as well as the new buildings for the different agencies, we do not need to close West Grand Boulevard.

Comment: Tom Cervenak of People’s Community Services stated that his United Way Center was in Delray. He stated that the location of a new bridge is an environmental justice issue, in particular, because of the high asthma rates in the Southwest Detroit/Delray area. He indicated there was an attitude that Delray was among the worst areas, but says the area has already had its fair share of impacts.

Comment: Don Friend of HPX Corporation stated he is the guy that is going to build the bridge at Pennsylvania Road. He said it was a matter of simple mathematics. His location was the best. He stated that he’d bankrupt anyone who builds at Zug Island. He also indicated he will build the bridge without government money. The governments would be responsible for the connecting roads. He said he didn’t really know about truck pollution and the regulations, but that hydrogen is the best fuel source and that trucks could convert to hydrogen.

Comment: Deb Sumner of the Clark Park Coalition. and a member of the Historic Hubbard Farms Property Owners Association, stated her belief that local historic district formation has done much to protect the area from acquisition by the Ambassador Bridge. She believes that Andy Ziegler of MDOT and Joe Corradino have worked honestly on the Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project. She inquired whether, as Andy Ziegler had stated, that the goal of that project was not to support an expanded Ambassador Bridge.

Response: Andy Ziegler stated that, from the beginning of the Gateway Project, the mandate of the project was to not preclude, by plaza design, the connection of a second span to the plaza.

Comment: Deb Sumner stated that all the national agencies involved would need to work together to be aware of the bridge needs and security. She noted she has been trying to protect the community for years. She stated that the City of Detroit was not protecting the Delray area. She indicated that community activists needed to get involved, because there was no help from the City of Detroit.

Response: Joe Corradino noted that the Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project cleared access to the interstate system for both the existing and a future span, but this was not approval of a second span. Other permits/clearances would be necessary in both the U.S. and Canada to approve a second span.

Response: Andy Ziegler added that all the public input being provided both during the Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project and in the Detroit River International Crossing Study was very positive and helpful and that Ambassador Bridge project had involved years of public involvement. Finally, the Gateway Project was devoted to solving the issue of trucks and access to the freeway. He believed that the Gateway Project will solve that problem.

Question: Skip Alvarado asked if there was someone on the partnership team specifically looking at security.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that the Department of Homeland Security would be a cooperating agency on the project.

Comment: Mr. Alvarado indicated he believed a new border crossing would be built and urged that good planning be used. He stressed his concern about security on a new facility.

Comment: Adam Steinberg stated that when the new bridge is built, it should have bicycle and pedestrian access.

Comment: Jane Garcia of Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development stated there should be a plan that causes as little impact as possible. She stated that growth has been ongoing in southwest Detroit and that a measure of this is that churches are packed on Sundays. There is a constant problem with trucks on local streets and this study should consider that.

Question: Roger Gaudette of Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision asked how the alternatives would be evaluated.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that a critical first issue in the evaluation process was the location of potential plazas. Then, the roadway from the plaza to the nearest interstate needs to be established. With that done, a number of Illustrative Alternatives would be presented to the public in June. At that time, there would also be a weighing of factors to allow an evaluation of alternatives, which would be conducted over the summer of 2005.

Comment: Ann Gail stated that the I-375 project had poor public involvement and so does this study. She indicated that 20,000 postcards should have been distributed in each of the areas where a possible border crossing could be located. She indicated that the money for the border crossing study should go to housing and schools. She noted nobody got color handouts of the PowerPoint presentation at the first public meeting in Wyandotte. She stated that \$16.7 million for Corradino and another \$4.9 million for Parsons (the speaker misunderstood that Parsons' budget is included in the overall contract amount) was just too much money for a study. She asked if we really need a bridge. She stated that Senator Levin said that Customs should be done differently. She encouraged those present to write letters.

Comment: Don Graham stated that another bridge or tunnel is needed for efficient movement across the border.

Question: Mr. Alvarado spoke again stating that the bridge is going to be built and it's going to take a tremendous amount of labor. He asked if there were plans for a bank of jobs to go to the local area.

Response: Joe Corradino responded that there is no plan yet, it's too early, but there are many examples nationwide of jobs and job training being associated with major transportation projects.

Comment: John Nagy stated that Delray has gone down for fifty years. To protect this area, in which he lives, he goes to meetings nightly. He indicated the quality of life in Delray is at its lowest point. He objected to suggestions made at the two previous public meetings to put the project in Delray. He stated that "everything goes in my neighborhood" and that he is tired of this. Most of the people in his area are senior citizens. He said he passed out 500 flyers about the meeting and was very disappointed at the turnout.

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.