

Detroit River International Crossing Study
June 29, 2005
Public Meeting Notes
River Rouge High School

These notes are of the formal presentation portion of the DRIC public meetings held June 27, 28, 29 and 30, 2005. Written comments received at each meeting follow these notes.

The meeting locations were:

- Monday, June 27, 2005 – Martin Luther King Jr. High School in Detroit
- Tuesday, June 28, 2005 – Southwestern High School in Detroit
- Wednesday, June 29, 2005 – River Rouge High School in River Rouge
- Thursday, June 30, 2005 – Crystal Gardens in Southgate

All meetings followed the same format: Mohammed Alghurabi of MDOT introduced the meeting and the purpose of the study. Bob Parsons of MDOT explained the public comment process of the meeting; Joe Corradino and Regine Beauboeuf made presentations. At the end of the presentation, the public was provided an opportunity to speak in the order in which they had returned speaker cards to Bob Parsons.

Presentation

Joe Corradino explained the presentation would address the contents of the “Blue Book” handed out to the attendees. He also noted that the graphics on display at the meeting depicting the Illustrative Alternatives are included on a CD in the pocket folder at the end of the Blue Book.

Joe Corradino used a PowerPoint presentation to explain the steps in forming Illustrative Alternatives: Step 1) locate plazas on each side of Detroit River; Step 2) connect plazas with proposed river crossings; and, Step 3) connect the plaza to a nearby freeway. He noted that for several alternatives, the plazas in the U.S. are connected to both I-75 and I-275 or I-75 and I-94.

Regine Beauboeuf then reviewed the various crossing issues. She concluded that while a bridge is an option for all proposed crossings, a tunnel is only viable between the Zug Island and Belle Isle.

Joe Corradino then continued the PowerPoint presentation by explaining the use of a technique known as QUANTM to connect U.S. plazas to nearby freeways. He used a series of oblique aerial photos to illustrate how the freeway-to-plaza routes and plazas themselves would cover areas most relevant to the public meeting location. The meeting then turned to public comments/questions.

Questions/Comments

Question: Philip Tachar asked the following questions.

Question: Is the tunnel to be accessible to semi-tractor-trailer trucks?

Response: Yes.

Question: How can we stay involved in the study process?

Response: Through the project Web site and through the Local Advisory Council.

Question: If the route to the plaza is a freeway, how could it possibly benefit the River Rouge community?

Response: The analysis of the local effects on development/redevelopment will be studied in a later phase of work once the "short list" of Practical Alternatives has been chosen by the end of 2005.

Question: How will local traffic get around?

Response: In most instances, there will be at least one local interchange between the plaza and I-75.

Donald Bilinski asked the following:

Question: What is the life expectancy of the Ambassador Bridge?

Response: The bridge is 75 years old and, although its physical condition is not known by the DRIC Study team, it can last a lot longer if properly maintained.

Question: What body will determine how much money goes back into the community from the new bridge?

Response: The answer is not now known. The issue of governance - who operates, maintains and finances the border crossing - is being addressed at a policy level.

Comment: Father Tom Sepulveda, from Southwest Detroit, noted he can see some advantages to a central crossing but also the inconveniences. He indicated the area is already heavily burdened by contamination and an additional bridge will increase the truck traffic and make the problem worse. He urged every caution be taken to avoid the area.

Comment: Daniel Sanquist, from Grosse Ile, stated it is clear to him from the presentation that a south corridor has already been chosen and that the presentation panel is just trying to impress the crowd with all the graphics and other materials; but, the decision has been made. He further stated that the decision does not coincide with the items listed on the evaluation factor form. He stressed he does not believe a southern crossing improves regional mobility. He noted he prefers the crossing at plaza location C-4. He concluded by stating that people should contact their Congressmen: Conyers and Dingell.

Response: No decision has been made on where the new border crossing should go.

Comment: Eugene Kuthy began by noting he is a resident of the Southwest Detroit area. He then read from a prepared statement making the following points. The study's Purpose and Need Statement should also include consideration of the burden and benefit on the community. If \$1 billion is spent for the border crossing project, the community should have input. Southwest Detroit has been highly industrialized; it has been the seat of major manufacturing. Over the decades, businesses have closed, leaving abandoned workers, abandoned housing stock. Attempts to reverse this trend have not been working.

The area was settled by northern and eastern European immigrants, and as they worked here, they assimilated and moved out. Now, the area is populated by Hispanic immigrants who tend to maintain higher community cohesion creating more of an enclave. There are also Arabic enclaves in Dearborn. African-American neighborhoods are interspersed throughout the area between Schaefer Road and Outer Drive. Corktown has seen a significant increase in the arts community that lives there and it augments the Hispanic and Arabic art communities.

Southwest Detroit is the only area with positive population growth but it has seen significant disinvestment. “Wishful thinking” seems to be the only support from the City of Detroit; however, there are several first-class tourist attractions in the area, including ethnic and cultural attractions, restaurants, such as in Mexicantown, and now the burgeoning Old Arab Town. These should be tied together; a master plan is needed to do so. The Mexicantown Welcome Center, Corktown, Fort Wayne, the Fairlane Estate, the Arab-American museum, and Ford’s River Rouge plant are tourist attractions all near each other.

Trade with Canada has increased, especially after NAFTA. This trade, with improvements to I-94, I-96 and I-75, has added to the congestion in the neighborhoods. The effects of homeland security measures have also had an impact on the neighborhoods. The DIFT (intermodal terminals) has had an impact on the neighborhood. Improving the border crossing will improve the economy, but it will place a greater burden on Southwest Detroit. Wise planning about the placement and character of the facility as well as the ownership must be considered, with attention to promoting the tourist attractions in the area. This latter issue must have government coordination at all levels and involve community groups. MDOT should develop a proper planning methodology to address this issue. In doing so, it should consider looking at the expansion of the LA airport as a model and the Community Benefits Agreement developed there.

Comment: Jesse Nagy stated this project represents “money over morals.” It represents eradication of a neighborhood. City planning is to help determine where people will live, not where they will drive.

Question: Don Flynn indicated he read the Purpose and Need Statement and suggested it’s the “definition of fanaticism.” He asserts that MDOT has lost sight of the goal and that the King Road alternative is absurd. He further indicated that the people of Grosse Ile will never allow a crossing there, so why even look?

Response: The objective at this point in the DRIC Study is to define all feasible and prudent alternatives.

Comment: Bob Dombrowski from Grosse Ile stated a bridge over Grosse Ile will destroy it. He stressed that no community will fight harder to keep the bridge away than Grosse Ile. He

concluded by indicating Grosse Ile owns more open space per capita than any other community.

Comment: Blondell DeCoursey from Southwest Detroit indicated a crossing should not be placed in southwest Detroit and noted being against all crossing locations.

Comment: Anna Lynn Meloche from LaSalle, Ontario indicated her community already deals with much of the pollution from Detroit due to the wind patterns. She stressed support for planting large buffers of trees surrounding any alignment to a border crossing noting that trees decrease pollution and provide oxygen. She suggested tunneling near River Rouge.

Comment: Mary Ann Cuderman from Sandwich, Ontario noted she has come to all of the U.S. border crossing meetings because she believes people should work together. She indicated she wants the people of Grosse Ile to understand all people have concerns similar to theirs and all people have rights to good air quality, safety and peace. She urged people should work together in a positive manner, not against each other. She concluded by stating that, in the end, someone will have to give up something but they should be given the opportunity to get the best situation in return.

At this point, the questions/comments period was paused while Joe Corradino made the second part of the PowerPoint presentation on the evaluation process and use of the evaluation factors which, he noted, was also covered by the material in the last part of the "Blue Book." After this presentation, the commentary resumed.

Comment: John Nagy indicated he believes the evaluation factors should be changed from saying "maintain air quality" to "improve air quality." Also, he noted the Delray people in attendance on Tuesday, June 28th never once said "put the bridge in someone else's neighborhood." He stressed that currently there are plans to improve Delray; a bridge will hurt them, and any other community investment.

Comment: Jesse Nagy rhetorically asked the following questions: Why not build a straight line; it would save money, land and gas. How about a non-urban crossing? He then

indicated everyone in Delray is proud of their neighborhood. He encouraged everyone to read "Do not go gently into that good night" by Dylan Thomas.

Comment: Eugene Kuthy suggested that another factor should be added to the evaluation form relevant to establishing a regional tourist destination. He also asked if community input was involved in preparing the evaluation form.

Response: The form was reviewed with the DRIC Local Advisory Council. On the issue of a plan for a regional tourist attraction that would be a part of the "land use" portion of the evaluation of alternatives. Community input is involved in the weighting of evaluation factors.

Comment: Gail Ann Martin stated that where all people live is important. She urged movement towards working together for the common good as the best way to establish the best compromise for all.

Question: Don Flynn asked who proposed the King Alternative?

Response: The consulting team led by Joe Corradino.

This concluded the public comments of the Wednesday, June 29th DRIC public meeting at River Rouge High School.



06/27/2005: Comments of Eugene W. Kuthy at the MDOT Public Hearing on the Detroit River International Crossing Study.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Eugene W. Kuthy; I am a resident of the City of Detroit, my address is 1328 Nicolet, Detroit Michigan 48207. I was born in East Dearborn across from the Ford Auto Manufacturing Rouge Complex where my father was employed as a grinding machine operator. My family lived in several locations in and around Delray/Southwest Detroit. We also resided on Beard Street near the Beard Elementary, which I attended through second grade. My family then moved to a home between Fort and Schaefer and Fort and Visger road. I completed my elementary education at Boynton School and graduated from Southwestern High School. After completion of undergraduate and law degrees, military service, and raising a family, I returned to Detroit. At the request of a number of other former residents who dubbed themselves “Southwest Detroit Alumni,” I joined the Board of Directors of several Community Development Corporation (CDC’s) active in the area. These included All Saints Housing Corporation, Springwells Community Development and Housing Corporation, Bridging Communities, Inc., and Southwest Non-Profit Housing Corporation where I am Vice Chairman of the Board. I offer this personal information to assist in validating my subsequent comments.

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BACKGROUND

Southwest Detroit, along the Detroit River, has been highly industrialized for well over a hundred years. Its greatest period of growth as a manufacturing center started after the construction of the Ford Motor Companies “Ford Rouge Manufacturing Complex.” This event sparked heavy industrial growth, especially major auto assembly plants and parts manufacturing plants and a variety of support businesses. Growth obtained on both sides of the Rouge River and the adjacent suburbs of Dearborn, Melvindale, River Rouge, Ecorse, and Lincoln Park. Similarly, this growth occurred on both sides of the Detroit River i.e. Windsor, Ontario, Canada. This has changed over the last several decades as heavy manufacturing businesses have closed or relocated, leaving large stranded worker populations, aged housing stock, and all the other characteristics incident to economic disinvestment.

Policy responses to this have been and are predicated on the premise that manufacturing companies could and should be lured to this area. Very little evidence of the effectiveness of this response is apparent.

Meanwhile, some significant physical changes and population shifts have taken place in Southwest Detroit and its immediate suburban environs. These changes in the aggregate, sufficiently exhibit serious potential for this to be developed as a Regional Tourist Attraction (RTA).

POPULATION CHANGES

Northern and Eastern European Immigrants

The Dearborn area to the East of the Ford Rouge auto manufacturing complex served as the initial entry point for many ethnic groups, as well as a focal point for their homes, churches, schools, stores and social groups. After some period of time those ethnic groups assimilated into the general population and



moved elsewhere. Such was the pattern for early immigrants from Northern European countries and then Eastern European countries.

Hispanic Immigrants

However, immigrants from Mexico and other Hispanic countries did not assimilate as readily as the earlier European groups and generally maintained their cultural cohesiveness. They developed a “Mexican Town” enclave that straddles Vernor Highway from Corktown on the East to Patton Park on the West. “Mexican Town” has Hispanic immigrants from virtually all the Caribbean, Central, and South American countries. Its businesses and restaurants reflect their cultural heritage and attract visitors from the metropolitan area, and increasing numbers of visitors from other states and countries.

Middle Eastern Immigrants

The arrival of immigrants from the Middle East, both Muslim and Christian, generally followed this pattern of settling in the East Dearborn area and establishing an ethnic enclave complete with retail stores, restaurants, mosques and churches etc. A number of Middle Eastern families settled in Dearborn and this has expanded into a very large Middle Eastern ethnic community. The principal street for the community is West Warren Avenue and like its “Mexican Town” counterpart draws visitors from other states and overseas. A surge in out of area visitors is expected now because of the opening of the Arab American National Museum in West Dearborn.

Artistic Communities

The Corktown area of Southwest Detroit which roughly is bounded by the Lodge Freeway on the East, I-75 on the West, Michigan Avenue on the North, and the Detroit River on the South has experienced a significant increase in new home ownership. In addition a large number of late 19th



century and early 20th century homes have been rehabilitated during the past few decades by members of the growing artistic community in Corktown. Thus Southwest Detroit has yet another such artistic community along with the more well developed Middle Eastern and Hispanic artistic communities.

The State of Michigan has recognized and encouraged these activities by awarding a “cool cities” grant to the Southwest Business District Association and to the Corktown community.

Other Population Observations

The 2000 Census revealed that Southwest Detroit was the only area in Detroit that experienced population growth. Census updates show a continuation of that trend.

PHYSICAL CHANGES

Disinvestment

Southwest Detroit and its adjacent suburban cities have had significant disinvestment as the auto industry has closed assembly plants and parts plants. At this point wishful thinking appears to be the only support for an equivalent return of similar manufacturing industries to this area.

Regional Tourist Attractions

Rather spontaneously, as the manufacturing industries left the area, a series of ethnic restaurant, and retail establishments, cultural organizations and major tourist attractions in parts of Southwest Detroit and the adjacent suburbs.

These include:

1. The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village (now “The Henry Ford”),
2. The aggregate Hispanic restaurant and shopping community largely settled in the Vernor Highway corridor that is known as “Mexican Town”.



3. A similar aggregation of ethnic Middle Eastern restaurants and shops in East Dearborn in the Shadow of the Ford Rouge Plant that some have labeled “Old Arab Town”
4. Yet another larger aggregation of ethnic Middle Eastern businesses and restaurants on West Warren Avenue in Dearborn.
5. The Mexican Town International Welcome Center and Mercado under construction near the entrance to the Ambassador Bridge which will offer cultural and artistic events, retail and office building and State of Michigan Welcome Center.
6. The former Irish ethnic enclave that constitutes Corktown, the “Oldest Continuing Community in Detroit,” which is further distinguished by its active artists colony, Irish bars and restaurants; and under development, a history museum with memorabilia of the area.
7. The Historic Fort Wayne complex which is soon to undertake a development plan to establish the site as a regional destination with the historic Star Fort and the Military Village as core attractions.
8. Henry Ford’s Fairlane estate on the banks of the Rouge River and on the campus of the University of Michigan, Dearborn which is already an established tourist destination
9. The newly opened Arab American National Museum in Dearborn which is expected to be a national tourist attraction as well as a local attraction.
10. The Ford Motor Company Assembly Line Plant tours and also tours of the Company’s ecologically important experiment with a so-called “Green Roof” on its Dearborn Assembly Plant in the Rouge complex.

EXTERNAL IMPACTS

Trade with Canada has dramatically increased even as the auto manufacturing industry left Southwest Detroit for other locations. This trade increased exponentially with the passage of the North



American Free Trade Act (NAFTA). This coupled with the junction in Southwest Detroit of three major expressways (I-94, I-75, and I-96) has led to a significant increase in truck traffic that in turn has had a deleterious effect on the surface of many neighborhood streets, street safety, and air quality.

Transportation infrastructure modifications and other Homeland Security issues are also likely to add additional burdens on local Southwest Detroit neighborhoods similar to those brought about by additional truck and rail traffic in response to NAFTA.

It has already been separately established that national, state, regional, and local benefits likely to result from construction of the DIFT will at the same time result in yet other burdens imposed on certain Southwest Detroit neighborhoods.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The main purpose of DRIC and DIFT and several other related transportation infrastructure projects in Southwest Detroit, as stated in the DRIC Draft reports, are to “provide safe, efficient and secure movement of people and goods across the Canadian- U.S. border in the Detroit River area to support the economies of Michigan, Ontario, Canada and the U.S.” Missing from the planning of these projects, however, is an explicit goal to concurrently support with these transportation infrastructure project efforts, to the extent practical, local economic development and environmental projects that improve the region’s quality of life.

At the same time it would appear that there is an affirmative duty on the part of State and Federal Highway Agencies to avoid, whenever possible, transportation infrastructure project actions that would frustrate contemporary local economic development and environmental improvement projects.

It is obvious that national, regional, state and local economic interests will have the benefit of being better and more efficiently served by improving the Detroit River area cross border transportation infrastructure between Canada and the United States. It is equally obvious that Southwest Detroit and



its adjacent suburban communities will be bearing, as they often have in the past, more of the economic, social, and environmental burden than other communities in the state and region.

The population and physical changes that have already taken place in Southwest Detroit and its suburban environs strongly suggest that, with wise coordinated planning on transportation infrastructure placement, physical character and operations, a fully developed Regional Tourist attraction could be realized. The resultant business development would promote further investment in the area and create jobs for residents. Obviously, this has great potential to offset much of the negative effects that are incident to such projects.

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