

Detroit River International Crossing Study (DRIC) June 28, 2005 Public Meeting Notes Southwestern 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.

Comments/Questions

Comment: Mary Loubriel indicated she has been a Delray resident for 42 years and that her parents live next door. She stated her father was born and died in Delray and her family is associated with the Holy Cross Church. She noted she works 40 hours a week to make ends meet. She stressed the Illustrative Alternative proposals that affect the Delray area are a “nightmare.”

Comment: Patrick Loubriel noted there is a community across the river called Sandwich, Ontario, south of Windsor, and the people there do not want the bridge, either. He urged “please do not put it in Delray.”

Question: Father Barnabus G. Kiss, Pastor of Holy Cross Church, noted Holy Cross is the only Hungarian-only church in the state of Michigan. He indicated he wants the church to stay and not be acquired for a plaza. He urged MDOT to communicate with the archdiocese about its plans.

Response: The archdiocese will be contacted if the study does include the Delray area as it moves past the Illustrative Alternatives phase.

Comment: Norma Rios indicated she has lived in the Delray area for 30 years. She noted she attends to the needs of her in-laws who are also in the area. She indicated that she owns nine rental properties. She expressed her dismay by the closing of the local schools. She stressed people at the meeting should take a stand against using Delray for a border crossing plaza.

Comment: Exie Jones indicated she has lived in Delray a long time and went to the local schools. She noted people in Delray are investing in their homes. She has spent \$38,000 on remodeling her home. She then asked a series of questions:

Question: What happens to those investments if houses are taken? Will the investments be taken into consideration? Will each home be valued individually?

Response: Individual assessments will be made of the fair market value of a property. The condition and location will determine the fair market value. If remodeling is being done, it is suggested the receipts for the materials/work be kept.

Question: Is there a particular plaza you would rather have?

Response: No.

Question: Have there been meetings in Canada like this?

Response: Yes.

Comment: Ms. Jones stated that MDOT is trying to scare people to drive down the cost of their houses. She stressed people are tired of being pushed around and scared by a new plan every few years that does not come to pass. Manny Moroun is buying up the land. He must have plans to use it.

Comment: County Commissioner Ilona Varga said she is speaking on behalf of those absent at the meeting, particularly seniors. The Delray neighborhood has spent much of its energy in the past fighting off bad things and bad plans instead of spending energy on building things. She urged that Delray should be redeveloped. She noted she is working on a housing plan for the area and urged MDOT to take it into consideration in its border crossing planning.

Comment: Thomas Cervenak from the Peoples Community Services indicated he has been working with the United Way, which has been in the Delray/southwest Detroit area for 80 years. He noted the Delray Community Center is almost finished. He stressed Delray deserves the best. He indicated the people keep fighting off these “bad” things and there is a sense of history and pride in the neighborhood. But, he noted the area is “teetering” and the border crossing proposals will stop a lot of what people have been trying to do. He urged MDOT to please expedite this study and reach conclusions so that Delray can go forward with its various plans. He also noted the matter of environmental justice stating the Delray community has

been discriminated against. He indicated that, if cost-effectiveness is an evaluation criterion, then the border crossing will discriminate against Delray because the houses are worth less. He stressed the solution is to fix the Ambassador Bridge. But, he noted all border crossings should be operated by the public. He concluded by providing a photo of the Delray Community Center under construction (included with the comment forms which follow).

Comment: Jesse Nagy noted he is a resident of the Southwest Detroit area. He stated people in the Delray area have a sense of unity and understand history. He wondered how this plan will affect the legacy of Detroit. He stressed churches are a part of the community; tampering with historic churches, like Holy Cross, is immoral.

Question: Mona Graham indicated she lives in Corktown. She noted on the other side of the border in Windsor are a church, cemetery and historic properties. She asked how these are being dealt with?

Response: They are being dealt with in the same manner as on the U.S. side, i.e., trying to avoid them. This was confirmed by a member of the Canadian consulting team (Audrey Steele) who was in attendance.

Comment: John Nagy indicated he has been looking at SEMCOG's projections and believes truck traffic is expected to double by 2025. If so, he wondered how would placing a second bridge so close to the current bridge relieve traffic? He stressed he was very concerned by the attendance at the first round of DRIC public meetings in April in the Delray area and was glad to see so many people at this meeting. He indicated: the Delray community cares about its seniors; the issue of higher property taxes for people with fixed incomes is a concern; the community cares about each other. He urged those in attendance to show up at all the meetings so MDOT knows the Delray community cares. He concluded by urging that the next crossing must not be privately owned.

Comment: Don Flynn urged the community of Delray to do something. He stressed there is a better option than a bridge connected to Delray. He indicated 65 percent of the trucks crossing the border have no local destination. He noted that he expects on Thursday, all of Grosse Ile will be out to defend against the proposals there. Delray needs to be prepared to defend itself like Grosse Ile will do. He referred to Grosse Ile as an "Elitist Ghetto." He

concluded that his proposal would be to use a river crossing plaza at the foot of Pennsylvania and then follow the railroad tracks south until they cross I-75.

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.

Question: Kelli Kavanaugh, of the Greater Corktown Development Corporation and a resident of Corktown, asked whether private interests applying for permits to build border crossings will have to wait until the DRIC Study is completed.

Response: The federal agencies that have to issue such permits have indicated that private entities could continue to turn in permits and the federal agencies would process them while the DRIC Study continued.

Question: Kelli Kavanaugh also asked that the graphics of the plazas near Corktown be updated to show the historic district and new development, not just vacant buildings.

Comment: Olga Savic of Representative Tobocman's office apologized for the Representative's absence, indicating he was still in Lansing on state business. She then thanked the audience for coming out and urged them to continue to work together. She also alerted them to two pieces of legislation sponsored by Representative Tobocman and Representative Law. One, The Michigan Border Protection and Development Act, would create a statewide authority to manage border areas, as there is no current state authority monitoring economic development and security at the borders. Also, the Detroit River International Crossing Authority Act would establish a public authority to manage, operate and/or own the new bridge. She noted that 22 out of 24 crossings between the United States and Canada are publicly owned. The only two that are privately owned connect Detroit and Windsor. She concluded by encouraging people to return the evaluation forms.

Question: Paula Jerzy stated she was born and raised in southwest Detroit, Delray, and is a member of Holy Cross Church. She asked the distance from the proposed I-2 plaza to Canada.

Response: About one-half mile.

Comment: Paula Jerzy noted the difference between fair market and replacement value and advised those in attendance to check their insurance policies to understand the difference. She concluded that Mr. Flynn “has a good idea.”

Comment: Shirley Elkins noted she too was born and raised in Delray and is a member of the Holy Cross Church. She indicated her grandparents, and others like them, built a dream in Delray and that dream should not be let to die. She concluded she is proud of Jesse Nagy for standing up and that Delray will stand up to the people in Grosse Ile.

Comment: Dena Nagy indicated that, while MDOT’s team might see the Delray area as a brick plaza, those from Delray see the C-3 area as a community of family homes, neighbors, people, “not dollar signs.” She noted the people of Delray have been discriminated against. She stressed Delray doesn’t want the bridge there.

Comment: Erin Kowalczyk. The people of Delray will put up a fight.

Comment: George Bailey indicated he is a lifelong resident of Delray. He asked the following questions:

- Question: What would be the plaza’s impact on the water treatment plant?
- Response: The object is to avoid impacting it.
- Question: Are there any brownfields in the plaza area?
- Response: That is to be determined.
- Question: Are the salt mines entirely under C-3?
- Response: They are not all under C-3; there are salt mines/brine wells in other locations along the river. Additional analysis will be done to address this issue.
- Question: What about property taxes?
- Response: MDOT’s real estate personnel (in attendance) were referred to for property tax issues.

Comment: Emma Maher noted her role at the Holy Cross Church. She stated the Delray community has been ignored by the city of Detroit and the surrounding area has many cultures.

Comment: Erika Perez indicated being a resident of the Delray area for 32 years and having grandchildren who are “fifth generation Delray.” It was noted the community takes care of the vacant fields and that people are renovating their houses. The community center was fought for by the people; it brings hope. It was stressed the community is sick and tired of industrial uses coming to Delray. It was asserted MDOT won’t pay fair market value for houses. It was indicated that people are angry about the closing of the McMillan School a year after GM donated playground equipment. It was concluded that the proposed plaza in Delray represents “no hope for our children” and “will likely turn them into drug dealers.”

Comment: Michael Koehler stated he is a 25-year resident of the Southwest Detroit/Delray area. He noted the Ambassador Bridge Company has been buying land around his house. He also noted that Yellow Trucking was not included in the C-3 area which demonstrates the priorities of the study.

Comment: Mike Donovan noted he has lived in the southwest Detroit/Delray area for 35 years. He stated that when he came there, businesses were active; but, then the schools closed and things began to change. He asserted the Delray community is now not together. He indicated the trucking industry is important and a new border crossing is necessary for progress in the region.

Comment: John Williams noted he has worked in the Delray Neighborhood House for five years. He stated that proposed plaza C-3 will destroy the community. He stressed he came to the Delray area because he chose to be there. And, he indicated that a recent Supreme Court ruling on eminent domain demonstrates that government is against the people. He concluded by indicating this plan is an abomination and urging the “paradigm of our civic initiatives must change.”

Comment: David Nagy indicated he was glad “to watch the MDOT panel members squirm.” He noted Delray worked hard to get people to the public meeting. He stated the “project has pictures of the Delray area taken from an airplane, but the residents have pictures of the Delray area taken from their homes.” He stressed “you are not rebuilding Detroit, you are destroying

it.” He concluded by stating that the presentation of the evaluation process/form in the middle of the questions/comments was intended to divert the people’s attention.

Comment: Margaret Garry noted she and others went door-to-door in her neighborhood to encourage attendance at this public meeting but the residents are “too tired and exasperated to participate” and they do not think there is anything they can say or do to make a difference. She then urged that there needs to be a “new model” for border crossings; no private ownership. She indicated impacts to the community should be as important as those to the natural environment. She wondered about the costs of the other improvements needed to make a border crossing work. She informed the group that expansion of the Ambassador Bridge or related bridge plazas should be south and west of the current Ambassador Bridge plaza. She concluded by encouraging people to complete the evaluation factor form and to be selfish in doing so by not concerning themselves with issues that are unimportant to their community, indicated that the factor “regional mobility” is not important to local community members.

Comment: Mary Ann Cuderman stated she is from the Town of Sandwich in Canada. She noted she supports and applauds the turnout at the meeting and identifies with the Delray residents. She indicated her support for a public authority to control a new border crossing. She stated that she had just come from a meeting of the Ontario Municipal Board at which she and others are appealing a Canadian Transit Company expansion to the west of Ambassador Bridge Canadian plaza. She noted the Ambassador Bridge countered with a motion to dismiss the appeal because it is “frivolous.” She concluded that communities must participate in the DRIC process and encouraged people to complete the evaluation sheets.

Comment: Kathy Johnson stated her community is strong.

Comment: Virginia Miller noted she is a resident of Delray and that she and her husband returned from Florida to live in the city of Taylor, but found no security in that suburban community, so they moved to Delray because Delray was safe. She stressed people care about each other in Delray; there is hope there; it is better than in the suburbs.

Question: Mitchell Alexander indicated he is a southwest Detroit resident. He asked why isn't there anything in the Purpose and Need Statement about supporting local economies? What happens when this neighborhood disappears? Who is supported by the border crossing? He stated the solution should be to fix the Ambassador Bridge and create more capacity and further, there needs to be a comprehensive look at air quality. He concluded that with all the other projects going on in the area, including the DIFT (Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Study) and interstate highway projects, the total cumulative impact on air quality should be understood.

Response: "Repairing" the bridge would not address the long-term capacity needs. The project's purpose addresses the national and international economic and security needs of a new crossing. The evaluation factor form addresses many local and regional issues.

Comment: Odilia Avellaneda asked, rhetorically: "what would you do if you found a child in the street; would you help?" She then stated that people of Delray do not have the responsibility or obligation to carry the burden of politicians who want the new bridge. She urged, "leave us in peace."

Comment: Sherri Czarny noted her role at Holy Cross Church. She stated Delray is safer than Lincoln Park. She indicated her husband, who is a trucker, has said he would rather sit in traffic because there isn't a new border crossing rather than tear down the Delray neighborhood.

Comment: Jim Drewno indicated he has relationships with both the Holy Cross and St. John Cantius Churches. He noted blasts from the salt mines happen at 3:30 pm every day. He indicated there is a "conspiracy against Delray:" first, the closing of 4th Street Police Precinct to drive down property values, then the closing of the schools.

Comment: Earl Dillon noted being born and raised and going to McMillan School which is now closed. It was indicated closing the school, the police station, and tearing down the churches and homes has had a bad effect on Delray. "Let's build it up, not tear it down." In conclusion, the MDOT study team was advised to "explain to your families what you're doing to our families."

Comment: Anna Naim indicated that when there was a blackout a few years ago, the community came together in an impressive way. She talked about backyard cookouts, and people looking out for each other in Delray.

Comment: George Bailey reiterated that at 3:30 every p.m. there is blasting for the salt mines.

Comment: Jesse Nagy indicated he is starting a petition against the DRIC project and urged anyone who would like to sign it to see him.

Comment: Virginia Miller stated that Mike Donovan actually does like the neighborhood and is very helpful and a good neighbor and he likes the Delray area more than he says.

This concluded the public comments of the Tuesday, June 28th DRIC public meeting at Southwestern High School.

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