

Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson talks to Jeffersonville Rotary

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— Southern Indiana and metro Louisville have far more similarities than differences.

That's the message that Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson brought to members of the Jeffersonville Rotary Club on Tuesday.

"This river that I came across, that you go across from time to time — a lot of people want to say it's a barrier, a lot of people want to say it's a wall," Abramson said.

"But if you go back over the years in terms of the explorers, the geographers or anybody who was working in commerce throughout the history of this region, that river is something that really drew us together."

"People are beginning to understand that literally we have far more in common with each other than we have that separates us."

Abramson — who's been mayor of Jeffersonville's cross-river neighbor for 20 nonconsecutive years — referenced a Brookings Institute report that said metro areas, not states or counties, are the economic engines of the country.

"Those are the areas that literally create opportunities for families, those are the areas that create products, create services," he said.

BUILDING BRIDGES

"Anybody who doesn't understand that we need two bridges and a reconstructed Spaghetti Junction simply doesn't understand this region of the United States," he said.

The Ohio River Bridges Project, which he and other leaders back, proposes new spans on the east side of Louisville into Utica and in downtown Louisville into Jeffersonville.

Critics of the plan question its \$4.1 billion price tag. Some groups have argued for just one bridge on the east end of Louisville.

He said there are an average of two accidents per workday at Spaghetti Junction — the interchange where Interstates 65, 64 and 71 meet. And he said the Kennedy Bridge, which carries I-65 across the Ohio River, already is at capacity.

Building new bridges will keep the economy strong and keep goods and services moving across the country, he said.

"When something gets shut down here, everything stops."

He acknowledged that the state of Indiana has done its part, garnering money for the project from the lease of the Northern Indiana Toll Road. He was hopeful Kentucky would find a way to fund it as well.

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

"We're still working on the Big Four Bridge," he said, referencing the old railroad bridge between Jeffersonville and Louisville.

Efforts to convert the bridge into a pedestrian crossing between the two states are ongoing. “We have put up about \$4.4 million on our side in private donations. We’ve been able to get another \$2 million in federal funds. You guys have been working over in Jeff, in terms of the design.” He said the project could create new jobs for those getting it up and running. Louisville leaders are trying to use money designated for the bridges project — which would have been used to create a pedestrian crossing on the proposed new bridge — for the Big Four, he said.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Officials were working on expanding public transportation between the two states. On June 1, transportation provider Transit Authority of River City will add a new express route between Charlestown and downtown Louisville’s medical district. There are already six bus lines going over the river, Abramson said.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abramson said he’s been working with economic development agencies One Southern Indiana and Greater Louisville Inc. “It’s better for you, I would submit, that a company that grows in Indiana and for whatever reason decides Louisville makes more sense, for them to leave Southern Indiana and come to Louisville than for them to leave Southern Indiana and go to Memphis, [Tenn.],” he said. “And it’s the same way for me.”

JERRY E. ABRAMSON

- He is the longest-serving mayor in the history of Louisville.
- He has served three terms as mayor of the city of Louisville, and is in his second term as mayor of the consolidated city of Louisville metro.
- He was named Kentucky’s best civic leader for the fifth time in 2005 by Kentucky Monthly magazine. — www.louisvilleky.gov

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