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Metro Council members file resolutions on bridge project

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Half of the Louisville Metro Council's 26 members — seven Republicans and six Democrats — are co-sponsoring a measure that would advance the beleaguered \$4.1 billion Ohio River Bridges Project.

The measure asks Mayor Jerry Abramson and Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear to appoint a group to negotiate details of a bi-state authority with Indiana. That authority, which would include seven members from Kentucky, would oversee financing terms of the project — including whether to levy tolls.

Council member Kevin Kramer, R-11th District, head of the Republican caucus, and council President David Tandy, D-4th, are the chief sponsors of the resolution filed Monday.

The resolution asks Abramson or a future Louisville mayor to ensure that, at all times, a council member is one of the mayor's four appointees to the bi-state authority.

Abramson spokesman Chad Carlton said the mayor "would try to honor that part of it."

A separate resolution by council members Tina Ward-Pugh, D-9th, and Tom Owen, D-8th, seeks to have public hearings in each of the council's 26 districts before the council acts on the bridges project.

Both resolutions will get their first readings Thursday.

Ward-Pugh and Owen's measure cites numerous reasons for wanting additional public input. They include claims that the Metro Council will have "little or no say" in a tolling authority once it has been established, and the fact that it's unclear which bridges would have tolls or how much tolls would cost.

The actions come as Beshear and Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels are expected at Louisville's Waterfront Park on Wednesday for a news conference, according to Greater Louisville Inc., the metro area chamber of commerce. The event, scheduled to start at 1:30 p.m., is meant to highlight recent legislation in both states aiming to move the project forward.

"This is a historic opportunity for two leaders from two states to come together and talk about the progress we've made thus far and what we hope to do working in the future," Beshear spokesman Jay Blanton said.

The bridges plan calls for two new spans between Louisville and Clark County, Ind., and a rebuilt Spaghetti Junction interchange, where interstates 64, 65 and 71 meet. It was approved by the federal government in 2003 but has languished — and its cost more than doubled — as Kentucky lawmakers debated how to fund their portion.

Indiana plans to cover its \$1.1 billion share largely with proceeds from leasing a Northern Indiana toll road to a private consortium.

The Kramer-Tandy resolution also asks a Kentucky infrastructure authority, formed by the passage of House Bill 3 during June's special legislative session, to evaluate creating a Louisville bridge authority for a proposed span in southwestern Jefferson County.

The council had authorized a bridge commission to consider a southwest bridge, but House Bill 3 eliminated that power, according to the resolution.

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