



# BUILD THE BRIDGES COALITION

**July 1, 2010**

## **Bridges Supporters Urge Progress**

Coalition members and other Bridges Project supporters turned out today at the Bridges Authority meeting to urge progress, citing the need for jobs, safety improvements and less congestion across the river.

In a news conference before the meeting, Coalition Chairman David Nicklies, Houston-Johnson Inc. Vice President Derek Bland and Mr. P Express truck line owner Allan Parnell spoke of the economic benefits and jobs that will result from a safe, efficient bridge and highway network in the region.

Nicklies drew attention to Spaghetti Junction's ranking as the 11<sup>th</sup> worst bottleneck in the nation, using a giant mock speedometer to mark average rush hour speeds of 16 miles per hour in the junction if nothing is built. A Mr. P 18-wheeler was parked behind the three featuring a banner reading: "16 mph stops the economy."

In a separate development, representatives of labor attended, carrying signs saying "Bridges Equal Jobs," and "Stop Talking, Start Building."

Highlights of the authority meeting included:

- **Authority to seek federal grant for Bridges:** The Authority is continuing to look for funding at every opportunity and will compete for a grant from \$600 million in funds to be awarded by the Federal Highway Administration later this year. The so-called TIGER II grant awards are expected to be very competitive and can range from \$10 million to \$20 million for a single project.
- **Cashless, high-speed toll systems:** Described as "the wave of the future," all-electronic tolling was a focus of a presentation by Wilbur Smith Associates that included a video that is already on the Coalition Web site about the conversion from cash tolls to all-electronic tolls on the Florida

Expressway. We will have a copy of this power point presentation on the Coalition Web site soon.

- **Bridges in regional transportation plan:** The successful resolution recently that will allow the project to remain in the region's transportation plan is a major step for progress and a "vote of confidence" in the project by representatives of local governments throughout the region. Authority co-chairman Kerry Stemler said the issue was resolved because "the authority was in place to solve the problem."
- **Financial plan by end of year:** KPMG, the authority's financial advisor, outlined major steps for achieving a financial plan by the end of the year. KPMG's Ted Wilschetz said the Bridges Project is "at the top" among national priority projects.

During a public comment period, Larry Hujo, of the Indiana/Kentucky Regional Council of Carpenters, told the Authority that the project is needed for jobs now and for future generations. The construction industry currently has an unemployment rate of more than 20 percent and he urged "the political will" to build the project.

Other project supporters who spoke at the meeting included Michael Dalby, who addressed safety and congestion issues and the need for additional lanes across the river. Jorge Lanz, citing the use of tolls in his native Puerto Rico, talked about the challenges to his business, which operates on both sides of the river, because of congestion on the Kennedy Bridge. And Sherry Howard, who commutes to Jeffersonville, Ind., from Elizabethtown, Ky. to work everyday said congestion and safety are serious problems that need to be addressed by building the project.

Project opponents were also in attendance and continued to argue against tolls although they did not offer a project funding solution, or they expressed support for only one bridge or no new bridges.

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