



BUILD THE BRIDGES COALITION

May 6, 2008

Bridges Authority told to get moving, consider tolling among funding options

Bridges Project supporters today encouraged officials overseeing development of a project finance plan to move faster and to consider all funding options including high-speed electronic tolling.

At a meeting of the Louisville-Southern Indiana Ohio River Bridges Project Authority, project advocates cited jobs, safety and congestion as pressing needs for completing the project.

Coalition Chairman David Nicklies urged the Authority to “pick up the pace” of developing the finance plan, adding that the plan needs to be completed this year. He said there is a window of about 12-18 months when interest and construction costs are expected to remain relatively low, which could save the project as much as \$1 billion.

One Southern Indiana President Michael Dalby also urged the Authority, meeting at Louisville’s Muhammad Ali Center, to “act faster” and said tolling should be considered.

Nobody wants to pay tolls, he said, but a lack of federal funding for major highway projects means other options must be examined. If tolls are the only way to get the bridges built, Dalby said, “then we accept a funding solution that includes tolls.” Dalby said that policy was circulated to some 1,900 members of his organization without a negative comment in response.

Dale Orem, a banker and former Jeffersonville mayor, cited other bridges and roads built in Kentucky and Indiana with tolls including the Clark Memorial (Second Street) Bridge and Kentucky’s parkway system. “If it takes tolls to build this project, that is what we need to do,” he said, adding that the bridges are needed “for economic well being and the livelihood of our kids and our grandkids.”

Kenya McGruder, president of the Louisville Urban League Young Professionals, said the project will be expensive but “we need to get down to the business of working together to get the bridges moving.”

Mike Ludden, president of L. Thorn Company, spoke in favor of looking “at all avenues of financing including tolling and private and governmental partnerships.”

Ludden and Charles Moore, president of Eagle Steel, cross the river on their daily work commute and both are with businesses that depend on the bridge and connecting highways. Safety is a key issue that needs addressing, they said. Moore said employees of his company would willingly pay a toll if it meant safer trips and less time wasted in traffic.

Another cross-river commuter, Jeff Uligian, is plant manager for Genentech, Inc. whose national distribution center is located in Louisville. He is also past co-chair of the 130-member Greater Louisville Advanced Manufacturing and Logistics Network.

He knows first hand, he said, the problems with our cross river bridge and highway network. “These are very real, right-now issues that must be addressed today,” he said, adding that he supports electronic-tolling as an option.

“Speed should be the operative word at this point. Every week that passes costs us all time, money and potential lost opportunities,” Uligian said. He challenged the Authority to “move faster and do the right thing.”

Patti Clare, deputy director of the Downtown Development Corporation, stressed the importance of the downtown piece of the project, citing the ‘economic drag’ of the current bridge and highway network. She urged exploration of all funding options including high-speed all-electronic tolling.

Citing his wasted time trying to cross the river earlier this week, Greg Isgrigg, president of Clarksville Town Council, noted that new bridges have been talked about for years. “We need to move on,” he said, adding, “We need jobs.” Infrastructure throughout the country needs upgrading and “we have to come up with alternative financing and if it’s tolls, so be it.”

Larry McFall, president of the Jefferson Riverport International and a board member of Kentuckians for Better Transportation which supports all modes of transportation, focused on how Louisville has thrived as a result of a mix of transportation modes. But the weak link, he said, is the congestion associated with the bridge and highway system.

“This project will improve ALL modes of transportation in our region. It will raise all our boats, including air service, rail service, waterway commerce, even public transit.”

He challenged opponents to be constructive and to define what they are for.

Calling the Bridges Project “long overdue,” McFall said accelerating the project could save hundreds of millions of dollars.

Authority Elects Buddeke Chairman; Byrne, treasurer; Frazier, secretary

Among its first actions at the meeting was the unanimous vote for Charles Buddeke as the new chairman of the Authority. Buddeke, who was appointed in January by Governor Steve Beshear to the authority, replaces Joe Prather, whose appointment to the authority was not confirmed by the Kentucky State Senate.

Other officers approved: Pat Byrne, an appointment of Governor Mitch Daniels, moves from secretary to treasurer, and Sandra Frazier, an appointment of Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, is secretary.

Foundation Set for Progress

In an overview to the Authority board, Executive Director Steven Schultz said the authority, which met for the first time in February and was officially ratified by the Kentucky General Assembly five weeks ago, has a strong foundation in place for major progress on a Finance Plan.

He clarified the authority's role as developing and constructing the Bridges Project and made clear that key project elements are not open for change. "The project has been defined for us. It is not within our scope to change the parameters," Schultz said.

Selection of a strategic finance plan consultant is nearly complete, Schultz said, and the Authority has hired a communications director, Christi Lanier-Robinson, who will begin work on May 20. The Authority also launched a Web site this week – www.thebridgesauthority.com which includes brief bios of authority members, meetings agendas and minutes, frequently asked questions with answers and other information.

Authority adopts policy for 'robust, aggressive' equitable business opportunities

The Authority adopted a "policy statement on inclusion." The policy states that the Authority "recognizes that a project of this scope and magnitude has the potential of creating many opportunities for employment, contracting and workforce development for the states' diverse populations" and is "committed to partnering with all state, local and community resources to ensure the promotion of equitable business opportunities through the use of the federal Disadvantage Business Enterprise (DBE) and On the Job Training Programs and the implementation of robust and aggressive outreach measures."

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