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Crowded streets

Louisville has a traffic problem, but at least it's not Boston, or New York, or Chicago, or Los Angeles.

Boston is a more frightening and frustrating place to drive, thanks to a legacy of old street patterns, numerous heart-stopping roundabouts and tolerance of combative people behind the wheel. But at least there's a comprehensive public transit system, which makes it convenient to park and ride from most places in that metropolitan area.

Louisville is among the most congested cities of its size, as *The Courier-Journal*'s Marcus Green reported last week, citing a Texas Transportation Institute study. And that congestion costs local residents frustration (only one other community in Louisville's population category had longer traffic delays than this city's) and money (\$409 million per year in wasted fuel and time).

The amount of time local drivers spend stuck in traffic hasn't increased much in the last decade, but it still amounts to a full extra week each year behind the wheel. Meanwhile, the number of rush-hour commuters has been held in check by a faltering economy and rising gasoline prices.

Everybody (that includes public transit advocates, light rail boosters, Ohio River Bridges Project proponents and the 8664 crowd) will find something in all of this to support their own agenda. But the fact is, Louisville's major congestion problem is downtown, and the only real solution to that problem is a downtown bridge and a Spaghetti Junction redo.

There's been real progress of late in moving toward a full rollout of the ORBP. The Kentucky General Assembly, after much behind-the-scenes struggle, passed legislation that clears the way for Kentucky and Indiana to create a two-state authority that will oversee financing for the project. The Indiana legislature approved a budget that will create an ORBP Commission to work with Kentucky on a financing and construction plan. And Hoosier Gov. Mitch Daniels says he is open to the use of tolls to raise money for the \$4 billion-plus venture.

The Hoosier share of the anticipated cost is \$1.1 billion. Indiana already has set aside about half that as part of its Major Moves program, which among other things involved a \$3.8 billion lease of the Indiana Toll Road. Kentucky will have to come up with \$3 billion, and nobody in Frankfort has yet decided where that money can be had. But both states now seem to recognize the importance of this effort to improve traffic flow and facilitate development in Kentuckiana.

Proponents of other solutions are fond of claiming that we can't build our way out of the current area congestion. But we can't wait it out either.
