



BUILD THE BRIDGES COALITION

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Louisville Metro Council urged to support project *Council members cite need for bridges and volunteer to help*

Build the Bridges Coalition representatives urged Louisville Metro Council members yesterday to get behind the Ohio River Bridges Project by supporting continued progress and a long-term funding solution.

Several council members, who attended a Transportation and Public Works Committee meeting, also cited a need for progress and volunteered to help build support.

Councilman Robin Engel, expressing concern about large amounts of freight carried over the Kennedy Bridge, said a new I-65 bridge downtown is needed. "I want this built quickly," he said.

Engel said council members helped build support for the downtown arena with state lawmakers and if council members were needed in Frankfort for the Bridges Project, "I pledge to do my part."

Councilman Stuart Benson, citing inflation and labor costs, said the bridges need to be built as soon as possible. "I think we need to get going, push on the governor and say, 'Let's go, guys,'" he said.

Councilman Kevin Kramer also voiced support for the project.

Several members said they agreed with Councilman Dan Johnson's expression of frustration during the meeting and his admonition to "stop talking and just build."

Councilman Hal Heiner, vice-chair of the committee, said the region is saying, "We're really not sure this is ever going to be built."

Addressing the council, Coalition Chairman C. Edward Glasscock said successful community initiatives – the downtown arena, the expansion of the airport and the merger of city and county governments – had challenges and setbacks.

“Citizens and political leaders with a vision of progress for the community united, persisted and succeeded. We are going to have the same commitment for the Bridges Project,” said Glasscock, who called the project the “most important economic development and quality of life initiative for our region in our lifetime.”

Coalition member Kerry Stemler, who lives in Indiana and does business on both sides of the river, said supporters need to let their governors and state lawmakers know they want to see progress.

“Instead of apathy and saying it won’t be built,” Stemler said, “we need to get behind it and make it happen.”

GLI President Joe Reagan, also a coalition board member, cited a need for progress now, noting that the 2008 Kentucky General Assembly authorized \$231.5 million to spend in the next two years on the project and that Indiana also has funding available.

“We need to focus attention on getting the money that has been approved spent on the project,” Reagan said. “And we need a long-term funding solution to accelerate the project.”

The coalition will be working for legislation from the 2009 Kentucky General Assembly establishing a public authority that could issue bonds and use high-speed electronic tolls to help pay for the project. Reagan described any toll revenues as “gap funding” that would be used in addition to federal and state highway funds.

Tom Warne, an engineering consultant for the coalition, advised that a major change in the project plans would turn back progress. He said building just one bridge would mean essentially starting over in the environmental study process and cause years of expensive delay.

Holding up a copy of the project’s authorization, the Record of Decision, Warne told council members that the document represents years of study and a final determination on what to build. He described the document as a rare achievement and said communities who have such approval do not want to change course but want to move forward.

The Coalition addressed the council committee at the invitation of Chairwoman Tina Ward-Pugh.

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