

## **Top FHWA officials pledge flexibility, support for Bridges Project** ***A decision to use tolls would not require delays***

Jeffersonville, IN. 2-22-10

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, in Jeffersonville this morning, highlighted the need to monitor federal developments and legislation to ensure the project receives as much funding and as many financing opportunities as possible.

At a meeting hosted by Congressman Baron Hill, LaHood said there are “serious transportation needs” around the country and encouraged cooperation and unity to get the Bridges Project completed.

The hour long roundtable meeting included Congressman John Yarmuth, Ind. State Rep. Steve Stemler, Mayor Jerry Abramson, Mayor Tom Galligan, Mayor Doug England, Clarksville Town Board President Greg Isgrigg, Coalition Chairman C. Edward Glasscock, One Southern Indiana President Michael Dalby and other Southern Indiana business representatives. Bi-state authority members attending included Kerry Stemler, co-chairman; Charles Buddeke, treasurer; Joe Reagan, Jerry Finn, David Tharp and Pete King. FHWA Administrator Victor Mendez and Indiana FHWA Administrator Bob Tally also attended.

LaHood stressed the “timing is right” to make the case for the project in Washington, D.C. President Obama’s proposed budget includes \$4 billion in an infrastructure fund for projects of national significance, he noted. Congress would need to designate the project as one of “national significance” before it could be eligible and LaHood said based on what he has heard about the project it would qualify.

In addition, the U.S. Senate is expected to vote this week on legislation to extend federal highway funding through the end of the year. The legislation also includes \$600 million in transportation grant funding in addition to \$1.5 billion that was awarded throughout the country this month. The biggest opportunity for the project, however, may be in the months ahead as a six-year federal transportation bill known as reauthorization is deliberated. (The Coalition has written letters to Senators from both states, as recently as last week, urging their support, and continues to monitor developments.)

LaHood at the meeting urged all governments and agencies to work together, “figure out a road map,” and said FHWA officials would be helpful. FHWA Administrator Mendez, in response to a request from Glasscock for “flexibility” from the FHWA, said FHWA would provide “maximum flexibility”

### **Tolling decision would not require delays**

Hill opened up the meeting by stressing the importance of the project and the need to secure financing, but said he opposed tolls because it would cause project delays. Later, however, when specifically asked for the delay that a decision to toll would cause, Indiana FHWA Administrator Bob Tally said at least a year would be needed to re-open the project’s Record of Decision and study the impact of tolls but other project work could continue while a toll proposal was studied.

Kerry Stemler said the region has been paying a toll for years, noting the average commuter is stuck in traffic for an entire work week each year.

Abramson, Galligan and Isgrigg acknowledged tolls would be needed. Galligan and Isgrigg said if that's what it takes, they would support tolls because the project is vital for the region. Abramson warned about becoming a choke point in the nation's highway system and Galligan said the region would "wither" without the project.

David Tharp, a bi-state authority member who is executive secretary-treasurer/business manager for the Indiana/Kentucky Regional Council of Carpenters, stressed the enormous positive impact on economic development and working families relating to the project. The project will create 56,000 jobs during the construction phase.

Rep. Stemler assured LaHood that the Indiana Governor's Office and the Indiana General Assembly were behind the project and working closely with Kentucky. "We are united and together," he said.

###