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Coalition forms to support Ohio River Bridges Project

Group seeks faster, cheaper construction schedule

Business and economic development leaders from Kentucky and Southern Indiana are joining forces to support building the Ohio River Bridges Project as quickly and as inexpensively as possible.

More than a dozen business, civic, labor and government organizations will participate in The Project Coalition, with members from Louisville, Bowling Green, Shelbyville, Elizabethtown, and Southern Indiana.

“The Bridges Project is crucial for keeping and attracting good jobs in our region and throughout Kentucky and Indiana,” said Joe Reagan, president and chief executive officer of Greater Louisville, Inc., the metro chamber of commerce.

“The support for this project is strong and deep in both states and we are going to work hard to make sure the project is built as quickly and as cheaply as possible.”

The diverse coalition underscores the Bridges Project's importance to the region and throughout Kentucky and Indiana, said Michael Dalby, president and chief executive officer of One Southern Indiana.

"Our transportation network is the underpinning for our economy," Dalby said. "Our bridges and connecting highways are showing signs of failure and we need this project to make sure we have a strong economy in the future."

GLI, One Southern Indiana and two other organizations - the Louisville Downtown Development Corp. and the Regional Leadership Coalition – are leading the coalition effort aimed at speeding up construction of the two new bridges across the Ohio River and the reconstruction of Spaghetti Junction where I-65, I-64 and I-71 converge.

The coalition wants the Kentucky General Assembly to approve a funding approach for the project that would cut years off the current 17-year construction schedule, significantly reducing the \$3.9 billion cost estimate, Reagan said.

The coalition, which is expected to grow in coming months, plans to spread the word about the need for the project and its benefits for the region and both the states of Kentucky and Indiana, Reagan said.

The coalition will also work with federal and state agencies and elected officials at all levels on possible funding approaches, Reagan said, adding that a thorough exploration of funding possibilities is needed.

Bowling Green Mayor Elaine Walker, a member of the coalition, said, "The I-65 corridor needs an efficient bridge system in Louisville. Our businesses, including the Corvette Plant in Bowling Green, and other auto assembly plants throughout the region and state, need this project to move their products. We need it to compete successfully with other regions and states for good paying jobs in the future."

Charles Buddeke, a member of the coalition and a board member of the Greater Louisville Logistics Network, said the Louisville region is a national logistics hub and “hundreds of employers and tens of thousands of people everyday depend on our roads, bridges and connecting highways. The Bridges Project is long overdue and we simply must get it built as soon as possible.”

Kentucky State Rep. Scott Brinkman, R-Louisville, said he’s “tremendously encouraged by the formation of the coalition,” which he said could help educate legislators and the public about “the critical necessity of the Bridges Project for the future economic prosperity of the entire Commonwealth.”

In addition to GLI, One Southern Indiana, the Downtown Development Corp., and the Regional Leadership Coalition, the Bridges Coalition includes representatives of the Greater Louisville Building and Construction Trades Council, Associated Builders and Contractors of Kentuckiana Inc., the Greater Louisville Logistics Network, the Louisville chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners, the Hispanic-Latino Business Council, and the African-American Business Alliance. Representatives of the cities of Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, Jeffersonville, Ind., and Louisville Metro are also participating.

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