

Toll-Free Better Bridge Solution

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Boiling a Frog: Time to 'Jump' to a Toll-Free Better Bridge Solution

By Steve Wiser, AIA

How did we as a community arrive at this point? We are about to build two bridges and quadruple the size of spaghetti junction. This \$4.1 billion dollar monster will be paid by tolls on the bridges. Only the Chicago region and Louisville will be the only inland cities with tolls. St. Louis, Cincinnati, Memphis, Pittsburgh, etc., do not have tolls.

Have we lost all perspective on how this will negatively harm our community's growth? This drastic situation did not occur overnight. It's been a slow, steady 50 year process that has resulted in this worst case scenario.

Costs have skyrocketed almost 2,000 percent since the initial projection of \$200 million was made for the east end bridge in 1990. The tunnel alone has soared 300% in just the last three years.

If today, without all this past history, a task force recommended a \$4.1 billion dollar, two bridge, massive overhaul of spaghetti junction, toll-funded proposal, both governors would respond: 'are you NUTS!?! You want to divide our two states with tolls? Go back and find a more realistic solution!'

So, its surprising no one in a leadership position says 'whoa, let's take a step back. Is this really the best way to create cross-river connections?'

No one wants any more delays or increased costs. In fact, folks want the bridges built faster, at a lower cost, with no tolls. The reason given for this lock-step approach to this bewildering scheme is that it's the only solution both states can agree on. And, the 'Record of Decision' (ROD) by the federal highway department can't be revised.

Well, a simple 'Google' search reveals that changes happen on RODs all the time, so that doesn't seem to be a major roadblock. Certainly the costs and schedule for this project have constantly spiraled upward without any leader complaining that these ballooning excesses are harmful to the project's implementation.

As to the only bi-state solution, well, Kentucky and Indiana work together routinely, without such drama, tolls, or complicated process, to build bridges across

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the Ohio River such as the recent Owensboro Natcher Bridge, and the upcoming Madison, Indiana Bridge.

So, in taking a cue from Gov. Daniels charge to the bridge authority to consider every option and approach this task in a business-like manner, and not government-like, I submit my proposal:

- Build the east end bridge without the tunnel
- Instead of the tunnel, relocate the Drumanard mansion, recreating the landscape, as the 'Olmsted Interpretative Center'
- Build two new 'local-access' bridges adjacent to the Clark and K & I bridges
- Build new access connector for I-71 and I-64 for the east downtown-med center-arena-waterfront districts
- Build an elevated 'busway' along the waterfront connecting these two new local-access bridges

My guesstimate for this proposal would cost \$1.4 billion, saving \$2.7 billion (based on ORBP figures). It would spur economic development in west Louisville, east downtown, and southern Indiana.

This is doable within a 5 year timeframe, and without tolls. It also lessens the environmental footprint, and thus avoids an ROD complication. For more detailed information, click onto www.WiserDesigns.com/WiserDesigns

To continue on the current path will put at a great disadvantage our logistics-based economy and overall quality of life.

Most are familiar with the tale of 'how to boil a frog': slowly turn up the heat so the frog does not jump out. Hopefully, there is still time to alter this growth-threatening, extreme makeover and 'jump out' to a more reasonable, beneficial bridge solution which makes our metro community a much better place in which to live.

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