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The Bridges Project: United We Stand – Divided We Fall

Improve cross-river mobility and build it now: these two objectives most can agree on regarding the Ohio River Bridges project. After these two consensus points, though, there is significant disagreement as to how to achieve them.

One group champions a \$4.1 billion two-bridge, rebuilt spaghetti junction project that is paid for by tolling all new and existing bridges, and possibly spaghetti junction. Another group wants a light rail – mass transit solution. Still another just wants the east end bridge built while an opposing group seeks only the downtown bridge and has filed a lawsuit to stop the East End Bridge.

There are splinter groups to each of these factions: Will sprawl get worse? Is the Drumanard estate really that historic to merit a \$260 million tunnel? Will tolls culturally-divide the region? Hidden agendas, egos, NIMBY, contradictory traffic data, etc.: it's enough to make the most ardent civic booster disheartened and disgusted.

BUT, this community must move forward. Our economic vitality and quality of life are too important not to amicably resolve this strategic challenge in a rational manner.

As with any complex negotiation, not everyone is going to get what they want. With this in mind, here is what I view as a **reasonable alternative:**

- **Expedite the East End Bridge** (the 2003 “Environmental Impact Statement” proves that the East End Bridge would best resolve traffic issues, and all public polls to date have overwhelming community support for this bridge. Plus, it must be built first to avoid any major disruption for any subsequent construction of the downtown bridge)
- **Build a ‘Gateway’ connector** for I-64 & I-71 to east downtown without going through spaghetti junction
- Implement several **simple fixes to spaghetti junction**
- Build one (or two) **local access bridges** in the downtown area
- And, construct a **mass transit ‘busway’** along the waterfront and into southern Indiana.

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Funding would come from a variety of sources:

- **Modest toll** on the new East End Bridge
- **Tax Increment Financing** (TIF) on development zones that will directly benefit from this project
- **Private financing** for desired 'enhancements'

Federal and state grants

- **Value Engineering** cost reductions of design (bridge, tunnel, etc.)
- And, possibly a small **gas tax increase**

All of the above items can be done by 2016 for less than \$2 billion (maybe less than \$1.5 billion) dollars.

HOWEVER: let's do not stop planning for the new downtown bridge and rebuilt spaghetti junction. Continue with the engineering, site acquisition, and bid documents. Let's then evaluate for three years to determine how these initial improvements perform.

Is congestion properly mitigated? If not, then let's proceed to the next phase, and have the new downtown bridge and spaghetti junction completed as soon as possible! And, then, toll whatever it takes to pay for all of this.

As to the argument that the 'Record of Decision' (ROD) stands in the way of such an alternative, St. Louis proves otherwise as they are already underway with their similar phased project.

One more thing we can all agree on: Louisville is a great place to live. Let's do the right thing to make our region the best it can be. If we truly are the 'possibility' innovative city we think we are, then we can do this, for **'United We Stand – Divided We Fall'**.