

# *Moving Louisville Forward*

February 26, 2009

## **Moving Louisville Forward: Near-Term Affordable Traffic Solutions**

**By Steve Wiser, AIA**

*Breaking News:* “The Sherman Minton Bridge is closed indefinitely”.



Fortunately, this was NOT the headline recently when a barge hit the bridge support on February 5th. The Sherman Minton was only shut down for three hours and our metro area dodged a major disruption. This demonstrates how fragile our transportation infrastructure is.

For a community whose major economic development advantage is a central accessible location, Louisville is at a serious disadvantage when it comes to our ground transportation system's inaccessibility.

Spaghetti Junction is at a standstill most days. Bridges are routinely blocked due to accidents. The recent gas price spike highlighted our limited alternative mass transit options. Construction regularly obstructs downtown streets. River Road west of Sixth Street is indefinitely closed. Commuting times have doubled over the past twenty-five years. And, when the arena opens in two years, Ring Road may be a fond memory compared to the urban gridlock that could result.

The \$4 billion dollar Ohio River Bridges project is expected to solve most of this, but when will this be completed? At the current pace, it could take decades. And, how will it be funded? Tolls? That's certainly not a popular method. Much effort has been expended on this enormous undertaking, and its progress should continue to ultimate implementation. In the interim, though, there has to be some near-term relief for our traffic nightmares.

Other cities haven't had the trouble we've experienced in getting bridges built. Cincinnati has 7 compared to our 3. Nashville has 9, with Pittsburgh 24, and St. Louis 6.

*Right:* Cincinnati has 7 bridges, while Louisville just has 3



## *Near-Term Affordable Traffic Solutions*

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Connecting to the federal highway system is one of the significant costs and delays to building a bridge. Environmental impact statement bureaucracy, land acquisition complications, federal and state funding restrictions, painstaking planning process, etc., have prolonged our bridge construction.

What if we built a bridge without tying into the interstate system? Why not construct a local-access only bridge? In fact, such a bridge was just completed. It is the new bridge over the McAlpine Lock and Dam that is viewable from I-64. The cost was below \$20 million and took less than 4 years.

## Comparative Historical Cost of Louisville Bridges

**Clark Memorial** cost \$4.7 Million in 1929. In 2008 dollars it would cost \$57 Million.

**Sherman Minton Bridge** cost \$14.8 Million in 1962. In 2008 dollars, it would cost \$100,428,071.



**Above:** The new bridge over the McAlpine Lock, built by the Corps of Engineers



Using this as a prototype, what if we built two local-access bridges: one that parallels the Clark Memorial and connects into First Street; and the other adjacent to the K & I Bridge.

As to the cost, these bridges would be wider and longer than the McAlpine bridge, but let's say they each cost \$60 million, or \$120 million total. This could be split affordably between Kentucky and Indiana. West Virginia has built several similar bridges for less than \$60 million each.

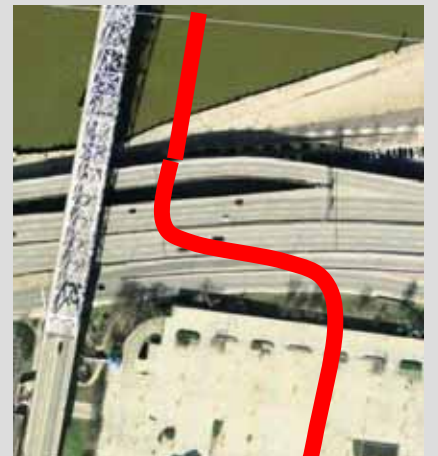
**Below:** Proposed Local Access Bridge (Red Line) to be built adjacent to the Clark Memorial Bridge



Separating commuters from cross-state traffic would greatly lessen the stress on both. There are some technical issues, but these are solvable and local-access bridges can be built now.



**A local access bridge was recently completed over the Ohio River between Pomeroy, W Va and Mason Ohio. It cost \$53.9 Million.**



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Next question: what about mass transit? \$770 million was the estimated cost seven years ago for a light rail system from the Snyder Freeway to downtown. Today, that price tag is probably closer to \$1 billion. While the feasibility of light rail is debated, perhaps there is another transitional approach.



Louisville's auto dependence isn't going away anytime soon. The next generation though is seeking other options, especially after the \$5-a-gallon gas-sticker shock last summer. Perhaps we can leverage this dilemma into a major economic development opportunity.



*Above: Red line indicates route of 'busway' along waterfront, which runs from downtown to western Louisville, then across a new local access bridge adjacent to the K & I Bridge. Buses would exit the busway and circulate within street grid (refer to Red arrows above)*

Western Louisville has several desirable characteristics: densely populated; a large percentage of non-car owners; and, a high number of residents who work downtown or at the medical center; in other words, a good demographic base for a rapid transit system.

What if a 'bus-only' roadway were built between downtown and western Louisville, along the waterfront? There would be few obstacles, making it an extremely quick trip. Buses could exit the eastern terminus, dropping off passengers in the medical center or downtown,

and then get back on this limited-access roadway for a fast return trip to west Louisville.



A former railroad easement already exists to facilitate this construction, and it can be elevated with precast concrete spans to avoid flooding problems. The buses can have a GPS tracking device to allow waiting passengers to monitor the estimated-time-of-arrival at their bus stop, or via their wireless laptop, a very user-friendly incentive.



*Busway along former railroad easement along waterfront*

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Park and ride garages could be placed on the Indiana side where these same buses could cross over on the new local-access only bridges.

Another positive side economic benefit would be as a tourist attraction, since this busway would run adjacent to the scenic Portland Canal. And, in the Shippingport district, just west of Ninth Street, a major visitor magnet could be positioned such as a botanical garden or outdoor sculpture park.



*Above:* New local access bridge that would contain a dedicated 'busway' lane. A Park-and-Ride garage could be built at southern Indiana terminus to allow Hoosiers to park car, then take bus to downtown Louisville. This busway and new bridge would also alleviate traffic congestion from the large attendance at the new arena, theaters, and other venues in the Fourth & West Main street district.



*Above:* In Shippingport district, a major visitor attraction, like a botanical garden or sculpture park, could encourage westward development of waterfront and use of busway to access this area.



In addition, it could help alleviate congestion resulting from large crowds at the new Arena, Kentucky Center for the Arts, Actors Theater, Convention Center, Galt House complex, and major downtown events like Thunder.

This busway proposal would be less than 3 miles in length. The buses would be of a regular design for ease of maintenance and serve other routes when needed. And, they would operate on natural gas.

As to cost, let's say it may be in the neighborhood of \$100 million. How to pay for it? Well, there might be some spare change left over from the federal budget, but let's don't count on it. There will be revenue from fares, yet this probably won't cover most of the expenses.

## *Louisville has a 'Park Free at the Front Door' Mentality*

For mass transit to success, it must

- be **FASTER** than driving;
- be more **CONVENIENT** than using a car;
- be **INEXPENSIVE**; and
- be **FRIENDLY**



*Louisville once had an extensive network of trolleys, inner-urban trains, and electric buses. The rail-based trolley made its last run on Derby Day, 1948.*

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There is another demographic of western Louisville that could help a funding solution. Housing costs are almost half of the community average. Since the city uses TIFs (tax increment financing) for major public improvements, what if the west Louisville area, which will directly benefit from this system, becomes a TIF district and any property value increases facilitated this construction?



**Above:** Property values in west Louisville are one-half that of the rest of the metro area and value increase could help pay for the busway



**Above:** The new arena is being financed via a TIF district

Neither the local-access bridges or busway transit would compete with the massive Ohio River Bridges initiative, but work together in a compatible manner. They will, though, provide an immediate relief valve for

our crowded interstates as well as some welcomed economic development spin-offs. And, we won't have to worry as much if some catastrophe, like a barge collision, shuts down a bridge for an extended period.

Our competitor cities are building innovative, creative transit infrastructure to strengthen their growth and success. It's past time for Louisville to get moving and implement our own doable alternative transportation solutions.

Let's not only make Louisville the "Number 1" livable city in American, but the most accessible as well!

*(Steve Wiser is a local architect and author of the book "Louisville 2035" which offers a future vision of the city in 25 years. He can be reached by email at [WiserAIA@Hotmail.com](mailto:WiserAIA@Hotmail.com) or visit his website: [www.WiserDesigns.com](http://www.WiserDesigns.com))*



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