

# New Bridges: No Laughing Matter

By Steve Wiser, AIA - April 5, 2009

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Courier-Journal printed an article on the front page of the Metro section which discussed inaction on the \$4 billion Ohio River bridges project. On the back page of this same Metro section, there was another bridge article. It featured how a new bridge was being prepared upriver at Madison, Indiana, for a cost of \$55 million. This was not an intentional April Fool's Day joke.

New bridges are routinely being built across the Ohio River at a reasonable cost and schedule. West Virginia has built several bridges for less than \$54 million each. Near Owensboro, the Natcher Bridge cost about \$55 million. Cincinnati has seven bridges to our three.

The massive Ohio River bridges project is a vital initiative which needs to continue and achieve its ultimate completion. But, in the interim, another alternative should be considered and implemented.

Local access bridges, like at Madison, Owensboro, and West Virginia, are affordable options as opposed to connecting to the more complicated federal highway system.

In fact, a local access bridge was recently built here in Louisville at the Portland Canal. It cost \$16 million and construction took less than three years.

The Clark Bridge is 80 years old and needs to be scheduled for replacement. These two new local access bridges would facilitate this. Plus, they will help avoid a major disruption should an existing bridge be closed for a period of time. The barge collision with the Sherman Minton on February 5<sup>th</sup> demonstrates the vulnerability of our limited bridge system.

Besides these two new bridges, another component to improve metro transportation would be to build a 'busway' between these two bridges. A busway is an elevated roadway that would only be used by high-occupancy-vehicles.

Buses would circulate from New Albany and Portland, to downtown, the medical center, and Jeffersonville / Clarksville. It would also help alleviate congestion from the arena, Kentucky Center for the Arts, hotel district, and other venues. Perhaps a new major visitor attraction could be built in the dormant Shippingport district and the busway could allow quick access to it.

The metro region has been planning new bridges for decades, and it may take decades more to achieve them. The current dark humor is that you need to put a clause in your will to have your cremated ashes transported across the new bridge when it is built long after you are deceased. Personally, I don't want to wait till then.

Let's move this community forward by building a realistic, affordable transportation system now.

*(Steve Wiser is a local architect and author of the book "Louisville 2035". For more information on this proposal, email Steve at WiserAIA@Hotmail.com)*