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River Fields unveils plan to solve traffic and safety problems at Spaghetti Junction

Today River Fields Board President James S. Welch, Jr. unveiled a plan which offers a solution to both the traffic congestion and severe safety problems at the Kennedy Bridge and Spaghetti Junction.

The plan, designed by two major national planning and design firms: Wallace, Floyd, Associates Inc. (Wallace-Floyd) and Cambridge Systematics, Inc. (CSI), includes a reconstructed Kennedy Interchange. The existing Kennedy Bridge would carry southbound traffic and a new bridge would be constructed immediately adjacent to the Kennedy to carry northbound traffic.

Skip Smallridge, a principal of Wallace-Floyd, explained that this design simplifies approaches into the interchange and onto the bridges.

"This plan eliminates the merging, the criss-crossing and the sharp curves that exist today," Smallridge explained. "By eliminating these, both the traffic congestion and safety problems are solved."

Welch pointed out that the new design minimizes impacts on downtown Jeffersonville and Louisville.

"[With this plan] Jeffersonville would still have access from I-65 at Court Street to their downtown area," Welch said. "The design ties in directly with Indiana's current plans to widen I-65 to the river."

On the Kentucky side, this new plan would enhance the waterfront by adding acreage to the Waterfront Park and providing additional parking areas under the ramps.

"Not only can the design be constructed almost entirely within the existing right-of-way," Smallridge said, "but by placing the ramps on viaducts, Louisville's downtown streets can be reconnected with its waterfront."

Welch told the press that the bridge studies conducted by the states of Indiana and Kentucky have shown conclusively that a bridge built in any location other than downtown would not divert enough traffic away from the Kennedy Bridge to ease rush hour congestion. The state of Kentucky's Spaghetti Junction study concluded that nothing short of a complete upgrading of the Kennedy Interchange, including a new bridge parallel to the Kennedy will solve the safety and traffic-flow problems of Spaghetti Junction.

Because of the information and the hard facts contained in each of the Kentucky and Indiana-sponsored studies, last winter the River Fields Board decided to support construction of a new downtown bridge.

Welch said he knows that proponents of an east end bridge want to believe that it would divert enough vehicles off of the Kennedy Bridge to solve the rush hour traffic congestion. He said that the studies done by state transportation professionals just don't support that assumption.

"We now know from the studies that the commuting time of only one percent of all regional rush hour traffic would be improved by a Gene Snyder bridge," Welch said. "It is simply not fair to build an east end bridge and then tell those commuters who must cross the Kennedy Bridge that their daily commute will be no better."

Robert LePore of CSI explained why a bridge in eastern Jefferson County would do little to relieve traffic congestion downtown.

"One problem, very simply, is that the Gene Snyder Freeway is too far out on the periphery to have any meaningful impact on the travel patterns of most people," LePore explained. "All of the facts clearly show that an eastern Jefferson County bridge will not solve the traffic and safety problems of Spaghetti Junction. Failure to address these problems would saddle this community with an increasingly difficult traffic problem with no solution in sight."

Welch linked traffic issues with economic development issues. "For economic development and jobs, we need good access to our already-built cities, to western, southwestern and southern neighborhoods and not just to the east," he said. "Improving access to a small portion of the community [by building a Gene Snyder bridge] while access across the overall region continues to suffer is absurd and hurts more citizens than it helps."

Welch concluded by calling for the community to come together and move forward on this solution.