



CONNECTING NEIGHBORS

MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project

WELCOME

February, March, April 2009

Issue 9

In this issue of "Connecting Neighbors," the MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project newsletter, we're highlighting two important groups, the Gateway Steering Committee and the Gateway Leadership Team. Each plays an important role in keeping this \$230 million economic development initiative on track. Also, MDOT photographer Jim LeMay takes you to the Gateway construction site to see What's Happening Now. And find out why the Gateway information kiosk will soon be saying, "Beam me up, Scotty!" For more information about the MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project, go to www.michigan.gov/gateway.

Gateway Steering Committee: On the Job Since 1994

No one person, public agency or private enterprise could have conceived of, or carried out, the MDOT I-75 Gateway Project alone. Nor do such projects come together by accident. Instead, as is the case with all major infrastructure projects, building the Gateway has been an inclusive process requiring cooperation, collaboration and commitment from public agencies, private enterprise and the community.

"This process really got started in 1994 when a study was released showing that 8.2 million vehicles crossed the Ambassador Bridge annually, making it the busiest single border crossing in the country," said Andy Zeigler, MDOT Metro Region planner who has worked on the Gateway Project since its beginning. Representatives from MDOT, the city of Detroit, and the Detroit International Bridge Company came together to talk about future transportation needs at the border and the safety issues affecting the Mexicantown community. Everyone agreed that the existing infrastructure on the U.S. side needed improvement to provide more efficient access between the bridge and freeway system and to address safety and traffic issues on local streets.

Those assembled also recognized that an efficient border crossing was essential to maintain jobs, support business and contribute to Michigan's economic well-being. The initial group was soon expanded to include the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG). This group of individual agents, each with its own interests or jurisdictional responsibilities, joined forces to form the Gateway Project Steering Committee.

The purpose of the steering committee was to engage everyone in the project, to include them in the decision-making process and to keep them abreast of significant project milestones. Each member had a different interest, but also had something important to contribute to the project's success.

The group helped MDOT define the scope of the project and draft the request for proposals that would eventually lead to the selection of consultants. These consultants performed the environmental and planning studies required for FHWA approval in order to proceed with later phases of work.

As needs developed, the Steering Committee added members to include representatives from the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) and U.S. Customs. They were later joined by representatives of the city of Detroit Planning Commission and leaders from the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation (MCDC). At the time, MCDC was planning what would eventually become the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center and Mercado, a project that would be located in the heart of the proposed construction area. Other local community leaders were also welcomed to attend Gateway Project Steering Committee meetings.



The Gateway Steering Committee brings the community and public- and private-sector agencies together to ensure that everyone is included, engaged and informed. Attending the most recent meeting were (front row) Brenda Peek, MDOT; Leah Tapp, HNTB, Inc.; Ed Tatem, Parsons Brinkerhoff; Andy Zeigler, MDOT; Rita Screws, MDOT; Alex Bourgeau, SEMCOG; Ashok Punjabi, MDOT; Father Tom Sepulveda, Ste. Anne de Detroit; Matt Simon, HNTB, Inc. (back row) Kathy Wendler, Southwest Detroit Business Association; Sunny Jacob, City of Detroit; Matt Sosnoski, DIBC; Robert Davis, MDOT; Tom Lacross, Hubbell Roth & Clark, Inc.; Dan Loacano, Bagley Housing Association; Robert Reitze, U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security; Don Melcher, U.S. General Services Administration; Phil Lynwood, FHWA; Victor Judnic, MDOT; and Chris Gulock, City of Detroit Planning Commission.

As might be expected from such a complex project, Steering Committee members faced some significant challenges. At the top of the list were the events of Sept. 11, 2001. Suddenly this project – at America’s busiest border crossing – required even more scrutiny and substantial changes to address new international security concerns.

Another challenge was developing and maintaining a working trust between committee members and local residents – an element essential to the Gateway Project’s success.

Fifteen years later, the Steering Committee continues to meet on a regular basis. Some agencies have been represented by several different people over the years. Others have had consistent representation that has served to stabilize the committee and establish communication and trust.

SEMCOG Transportation Director Carmine Palombo is a longtime member of the group. “The Gateway Project is extremely complicated and is located in a very complicated area of our region,” he said. “Steering Committee members have helped to provide insights and tried to be sensitive to the needs of residents, motorists and the trucking community.”

Leadership in Action = Gateway Success



The cross-disciplinary approach to decision-making and problem-solving used by the Gateway Leadership Team keeps the project moving forward. Team members Paige Williams, Brenda Peek, Andy Zeigler, Robert Davis and Bob Ranck are pictured attending a recent meeting on site at the Metro Region office; other members are participating via conference call.

A core group of 10 people gathers once a week to discuss, debate and resolve a tightly packed agenda of complex issues and action items related to the completion of the Gateway Project.

That group is called the Gateway Leadership Team.

“Recognizing the positive impacts that the Gateway will have on the community once it has been completed is the driving force for these team meetings,” says Greg Johnson, MDOT Metro Region engineer.

Johnson created this cross-disciplinary team of engineers, planners and communication professionals to work directly with MDOT Resident Engineer Victor Judnic. Judnic is in charge of day-to-day construction of the Gateway Project. The team provides him with immediate and timely executive level decisions needed to keep this massive construction project moving.

“Our main purpose is to assist with issues that are larger than construction,” said Johnson. That includes challenges that may impact the project overall or situations that may affect the community, other key constituency groups or local government.

Immediate issues have ranged from proposed permanent signs for the completed project to strategies for working in concert with the community and with county, city and state agencies.

Some key accomplishments of the group include the creation of a DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) Resource Center located in the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center designed to assist

local companies doing business with MDOT; the initiation of an outreach program using state-of-the-art interactive information kiosks (see story on page 5). The first accident-investigation sites – designated areas that allow police to quickly remove vehicles from the roadway in order to alleviate post-accident traffic congestion. Additionally, the team forged stronger partnerships with local transit agencies SMART (the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transit) and DDOT (the Detroit Department of Transportation), and spearheaded the development of the state’s first HOV lane along Michigan Avenue in Detroit.

In addition to Greg Johnson and Victor Judnic, team members are: Deputy Engineer Bob Ranck, Detroit Transportation Service Center Manager Rita Screws, Planner Andy Zeigler, Development Engineer Paige Williams, Communications Representatives Brenda Peek and Rob Morosi, Traffic and Safety Engineer Matt Smith, and Senior Advisor Robert Davis. Occasionally, other MDOT staff with project-related expertise joins the discussion.

Davis, who serves as group facilitator, says team meetings lead to expedited decision-making on issues important to our key stakeholders. The group also provides strategic direction and coordination with other projects along the I-75/I-96 corridor to minimize impacts and maintain mobility.

Agenda headings are the same from week to week – Immediate Issues of the Day, Review of Action Items from the Last Meeting, Ongoing Activities and General Issues – but that’s where the similarity ends.

“With every week comes a different set of challenges that spur lively discussion and debate,” noted Rita Screws.

What's Happening Now

With photographs by Jim LeMay

The Gateway Project is now 75 percent complete. On a late February visit to the site, crews were focusing on two structures: the Bagley Avenue pedestrian bridge and a new exit ramp leading from the Ambassador Bridge Plaza to the freeway system.

When the Gateway Project is complete, commercial traffic exiting the Ambassador Bridge will no longer travel on local streets. Instead, trucks will exit the bridge plaza on a new elevated ramp over I-75 to get to I-75 or I-96. The net result: safer streets for community residents and a safer and more efficient bridge-to-freeway connection for commercial traffic. The first six photos show a structural steel beam raised by crane and placed into position, and crew members joining steel to the concrete piers that will support the ramp.

At the Bagley Avenue site, carpenters in the last photo prepare for the placement of the suspension cables that will be a central feature of the new pedestrian bridge over I-75. The grey cylinders, to which the cables will be attached, are called cable stay connection tubes. The bridge will spur economic development in the community by providing easy access to area businesses, restaurants and the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center.





GATEWAY KIOSK TO SCOTTY: BEAM ME UP!

The Gateway kiosk, MDOT's high tech, mini information ambassador, traveled to Detroit's North American International Auto Show in January where thousands of visitors learned about detour routes, freeway-to-freeway connection points, and other project details. Following its weeklong tour at Cobo Hall, the kiosk moved to Lansing for three days and was viewed by over 200 MDOT employees at the 2009 Highway Operations and Mobility Conference. The kiosk will next travel, at warp speed of course, to the Detroit Science Center to be a part of the "Star Trek" exhibit in Detroit. Gateway team members hope that tons of school-age visitors and their parents will check it out there.

The goal of the Kiosk Outreach Program is to bring the story of the Gateway Project, and its long-term economic and safety benefits, to metro area residents and visitors. The kiosk is available for placement in local community facilities such as libraries and city halls, special events, conferences and other locations where it can be viewed by the public. For more information, call 248-483-5100.



Thousands of Detroit North American International Auto Show visitors learned about the Gateway Project from the interactive information kiosk on display.



The Welcome Center *IS* Open for Business!!

Recently, several news outlets incorrectly reported that the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center was no longer open for business. Nothing could be further from the truth! The welcome center is open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and offers information on attractions and events locally and throughout the state. The welcome center is located at 2835 Bagley Avenue in southwest Detroit. For more information call 313-962-2360.



The Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center offers information on local and statewide attractions and events.

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