

Dear Board Member,

A proposal that has been suggested as an alternative to the ODOT-KYTC Brent Spence Bridge (BSB) project has been making the rounds to a number of you. It is being advanced by Henry Fischer, a local home builder. Kentucky members of the OKI board have expressed an interest regarding OKI staff's opinion of the proposal. It is because of this specific interest by board members in this specific proposal that causes me to respond.

First, we need to commend Mr. Fischer for his dedicated effort to find a way to alleviate congestion on the BSB and the I-75 corridor. Though experts most closely involved with infrastructure development in the region do not agree with Mr. Fischer, he has put a lot of effort trying to solve infrastructure problems.

In making any comment about the Brent Spence Bridge, we must first understand that the project is completely in the hands (KYTC) and (ODOT). While the projects in our long and short term plans have OKI approval, the individual projects are "owned" by jurisdictions or government agencies.

In Mr. Fischer's proposal, he wants to not only eliminate the ODOT-KYTC Brent Spence Bridge project, but also eliminate the Through the Valley and the Mill Creek Expressway projects, which are ODOT projects. The only experts for these major infrastructure projects are the DOTs. They have been working on the projects for more than a decade, they have the engineers and other professionals to determine and design alternatives, they have the only state-wide travel demand models that can help determine economic impacts of alternatives, they closely work with the Federal Highway Administration on the project's development and they, alone, have the legal responsibility to follow all federal regulations that govern the project development and implementation.

Though OKI has provided the DOTs with information from our travel demand model, OKI is not actively making decisions about the technical aspects of the projects. Again, the project lies solely under the auspices of KYTC and ODOT.

Consequently, to meet the request of those members of the board in the most expert manner, I will present the DOTs analysis of Mr. Fischer's alternative. For the alternative to the Brent Spence Bridge, the information I will use is in the public domain, as it is contained on ODOT-KYTC Brent Spence Bridge Project website www.brentspencebridgecorridor.com. In addition, ODOT and KYTC have written a letter to Mr. Fischer that lays out the reasons they do not support his proposal.

The first major point to address is that the Through the Valley and the Mill Creek Expressway projects cannot be stopped. These projects, residing completely in Ohio, are major investments by ODOT that have begun construction or are in design for construction. To date ODOT has invested over \$1 billion and has another \$1.3 billion planned. Include the projects in the corridor from KYTC (\$37 million programmed and \$1.8 billion planned) and the combined total for programmed and planned projects is over \$4 billion. The projects are to reduce the horrendous congestion along the I-75 corridor. These projects are inexorably linked to the BSB project. They are a seamless infrastructure solution. Mr. Fischer cannot undo the construction that has started or delay the rest of the construction that has been studiously planned. As this corridor of projects continue to be built, the need for a new 67-mile interstate becomes even less necessary.

Regarding the Brent Spence Bridge, Mr. Fischer's proposal is to build a new, 67-mile interstate highway starting at Dry Ridge, Kentucky on I-75, crossing the Ohio River at New Richmond, going westward to Lebanon and linking back to I-75 at Middletown.

Mr. Fischer's proposal hinges on several factors, but, the cost of his proposal is of utmost significance. Mr. Fischer contends that his new 67-mile interstate highway will cost less than the new BSB project that ODOT and KYTC have devised. I am not sure if he means the cost of the BSB or of the BSB plus the Through the Valley and Mill Creek Expressway. However, Mr. Fischer puts the cost of his 67-mile highway at \$1.9 billion (he maintains a saving of \$3.8 billion will pay for his highway twice over). The state DOTs are the only experts with the resources to properly evaluate the cost of major infrastructure projects. Considering that the cost of the BSB project is roughly \$2.6 billion, the state DOTs rejected Mr. Fischer's claim that his project would cost \$1.9 billion. The website of these transportation agencies directly addresses the cost of Mr. Fischer's project in comparison to the current ODOT-KYTC plan. It states:

The BSB project is approximately 8 miles long at a cost of \$2.6 billion. A much longer route on new alignment would be more expensive than BSB. A bypass of this magnitude would have substantial environmental impacts. The BSB corridor project minimizes environmental impacts by constructing in an existing highway corridor.

The environmental study that would be required for this project would be immense. Unfortunately, major infrastructure projects take decades to formulate and build. And, because of the impact of inflation over the many years needed to build such a project, the cost of Mr. Fischer's new 67-mile interstate highway could far surpass the current cost of the ODOT-KYTC BSB plan.

The next issue noted by Mr. Fischer is that OKI's travel demand model projects that his proposal would reduce daily travel on the Brent Spence Bridge by 38,000 vehicles. That is correct, but such a reduction, though significant, does not alleviate the critical problem of an overcrowded, unsafe BSB.

While the model shows the aforementioned decrease in traffic on the BSB, it also shows the BSB would still be vastly over its capacity; roughly 155% of traffic volume capacity. The model shows that traffic would still be heavily congested on the bridge. To what degree is this congestion going to affect the current BSB? Again, I turn to the state DOTs for their view of effectiveness of Mr. Fischer's proposal, as stated on their website:

Only a limited portion of traffic would utilize a bypass which would result in substantial traffic remaining on the Brent Spence Bridge. More traffic than it was originally designed to carry. The BSB corridor has existing safety and geometric deficiencies that remain even if a bypass would be constructed. The existing BSB along with other structures and the existing pavement will need to be rehabilitated and/or replaced in the future. These costs remain even if a bypass is constructed.

Interestingly, the cost of Mr. Fischer's proposal for a new 67-mile super highway, when combined with a ridership of less than 40,000, would mean it would probably have to be **funded by tolls**. Again, according to ODOT and KYTC:

A project of this magnitude could not be funded by state and federal allocations received by Ohio and Kentucky. Therefore, a bypass would also likely have to be tolled.

Though I cannot say for certain, tolls probably would be very high for an expensive 67-mile highway that carries a vehicle load only a bit higher than that of daily traffic on Colerain Avenue.

By implication, Mr. Fischer maintains that the BSB is safe. For over a decade, the state DOTs have said the bridge is functionally obsolete. It is not going to fall down, but it is not safe. Cars and concrete have fallen from the upper deck to the lower deck and inspection reports lowered the bridges rating from a B+ to a C-. However, the main point is that it is not safe to drive. To prove this point, KYTC Secretary Hancock wrote in the Enquirer this past October:

It is not healthy for anyone to make uninformed assertions about the safety of the existing Brent Spence Bridge.

We at KYTC encourage healthy public discussion about the project. Our only request is that this discussion be centered on the basic truth that the existing Brent Spence Bridge congestion creates driving conditions that are unsafe. Then, and only then, will the result of the public dialogue be responsibly productive.

The DOTs, the experts on major infrastructure projects, would be responsible for building Mr. Fischer's alternative, but, they do not support his proposal. They have the following objections:

- The proposal does not solve the problems surrounding the Brent Spence Bridge. Expenditures for improvements would still be necessary
- The proposal, while not solving the problems of the Brent Spence Bridge, would cost more to build than the KYTC-ODOT proposal, which does solve the problems of the Brent Spence Bridge
- The proposal could not be funded from state DOT funds and the new highway would likely be tolled. Considering the higher cost compared to the BSB and the significantly lower usage (only about 23% of the traffic on the BSB), those tolls would likely be much higher than the tolls contemplated for the KYTC-ODOT solution for the BSB
- Though the Brent Spence Bridge is not going to collapse, it is unsafe for the 60,000,000 trips that cross it annually

Also, open for discussion is whether there is support from those who would shoulder the impacts of the new 67-mile highway. Mr. Fischer's highway touches more than 1,000 parcels of private and public properties and requires two new interstate bridges. I would note, as OKI has met with the residents in regard to our KY 536 Study, they have expressed opposition to Mr. Fischer's plan because of its impact on their communities. There exists the real possibility other jurisdictions would not want a major, new interstate highway in their communities.

If you have any questions regarding this proposal or this summation by the KYTC and ODOT, please let me know.

Best regards,

Mark