

# Opinion: Bypass won't solve Brent Spence Bridge problem

Jerry Wray, Mike Hancock 11:25 a.m. EDT September 14, 2015

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The so-called Northern Kentucky Interstate 71/75 Eastern Bypass needs to be recognized for what it is *not*: a substitute for the Brent Spence Bridge Corridor project. The Brent Spence Bridge Corridor project is a project to bring critically needed traffic congestion relief to an overburdened, 52-year-old bridge that has safety and design deficiencies, including reduced-width traffic lanes and an absence of emergency shoulders.

The proposal for an I-71/75 Eastern Bypass has been circulated in several forms for a while.

There is some variation, but the I-71/75 Eastern Bypass proposals present essentially the same idea – a four-lane bypass, 67 or 68 miles long, blazing through Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties in Kentucky, crossing the Ohio River on yet another new bridge, continuing in Ohio in Clermont and Warren counties, and connecting with I-71 and I-75 on the Ohio side.

Even with the most optimistic projections of traffic diversion offered by promoters of the so-called Eastern Bypass, the Brent Spence Bridge would still be carrying far more traffic than its designed capacity, and its safety and design problems would remain.

The Eastern Bypass is not a new, feasible or good idea. Its Kentucky section has roots in a previous proposal – a “Northern Kentucky Cross County Highway” – that was the subject of an engineering study in 1987. The study identified three potential alignments, ranging in length from 12 to 23 miles and in cost from \$115 million to \$230 million in 1990 dollars. Adjusted for 25 years of inflation, the estimated cost of construction alone for the study’s recommended alignment would be \$2.2 billion today and that doesn’t include Ohio’s portion. This does not even take into account the increased cost for right of way acquisition or the expense of overcoming the enormous environmental and terrain challenges.

The current estimated cost of the Brent Spence Bridge Corridor Project is \$2.6 billion, not the \$3.8 billion that has been referenced by supporters of alternative plans. Second, sixty-eight miles of new, four-lane highway constructed over challenging terrain in both Kentucky and Ohio – not to mention new bridges over the Ohio River and Licking River – could easily top \$5 billion.

The alternatives to replacing the Brent Spence Bridge are not quick, simple or a bargain. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Ohio Department of Transportation must continue to work to find a real solution that can bring not only traffic congestion relief, but huge economic benefits to both states – not an idea promoted by land developers for the sake of land development.