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### **Bridges project industry forum planned for February; Global vendors, contractors expected to attend**

Louisville will host a two-day industry forum next month to solicit innovative concepts and cost-saving ideas for the Ohio River Bridges Project, it was announced this morning at a Bridges Authority meeting. Global contractors, developers, engineering and design firms, investors and technology providers are expected to attend the event.

"Forums like this are an excellent way to learn about best practices, cost-saving techniques and innovative construction methods," said Authority Co-Chair Kerry Stemler. "This is an opportunity to solicit input and ideas from prospective bidders."

The forum is scheduled for Feb. 16 and 17 in at the Kentucky International Convention Center in downtown Louisville.

Although major national and even international companies are expected to attend, Authority Executive Director Steve Schultz said the project is committed to partnering with state and local firms and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) for as much of the work as possible.

"The forum will give local companies and DBEs an opportunity to meet and develop relationships with global developers and contractors," he said. "The key to the success of any project of this magnitude will require teamwork among all these types of firms."

Stemler noted that a similar industry forum for a high-speed rail project in Florida attracted more than 1,500 attendees to Orlando in November.

"There is tremendous market interest in this project, and we should leverage that," he said. "After all, there aren't too many projects of this size and scope for global developers to focus on right now."

The forum will include a project display area and detailed presentations on the project's history, status and path forward. The second day of the event will include site tours on both sides of the river and one-on-one sessions with major industry players to solicit innovative concepts.

Also at this morning's meeting, Authority members were given an update on cost-cutting plans announced Tuesday by Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear and Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer. The three elected leaders proposed changes that could reduce the project's cost by more than \$500 million and still keep the two-bridge construction plan on track. The leaders also signaled their desire to keep the Sherman Minton Bridge (I-64) and Clark Memorial Bridge (US 31) toll free.

The cost saving could come from changes in three key areas:

- Rebuilding Spaghetti Junction in the existing location rather than moving it south;
- Reducing the East End bridge, roadway and tunnel from six lanes to four lanes, with the option to add two lanes later if traffic demand warrants;
- Completing the Big Four Bridge pedestrian walkway and bike path as an alternative to including pedestrian and bike paths on the new downtown bridge.

The Louisville-Southern Indiana Ohio River Bridges Project is one of the nation's largest transportation projects and calls for reconfiguring Louisville's Kennedy Interchange (Spaghetti Junction) and building two new bridges, one downtown and the other eight miles upstream in the metro area's east end.

When completed, the project is expected to reduce accidents by as much as 50%, cut travel time by more than half through Spaghetti Junction during rush hour and create more than 2,000 jobs per year during construction and nearly 1,000 jobs per year after completion. (Statistics are based on federally approved methodology.)