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Bridges Authority tours Big Four Bridge, set to meet with more developers, contractors

Members of the Bridges Authority this morning toured the Big Four Bridge, site of a proposed relocated pedestrian walkway and bicycle path. Representatives of the bridges project team are also meeting today and tomorrow with several large developers and contractors to further discuss ways to cut costs and speed construction of the Ohio River Bridges project.

Removing the proposed pedestrian and bike path from the design of a new downtown I-65 bridge as a result of a separate project to complete the Big Four Bridge pedestrian and bike path was one of several cost-cutting design changes to the Ohio River Bridges project recommended in January by Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels and Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer. The three leaders also proposed rebuilding Spaghetti Junction in its current location and making the east end bridge and tunnel four lanes instead of six. The proposed changes could cut a half-billion dollars from the project.

All of the proposed changes are under review by the engineering team and will be examined as part of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) process.

Under an agreement signed in February, the states of Kentucky and Indiana and the City of Jeffersonville, Ind., will allocate \$22 million to complete the Big Four Bridge, creating a pedestrian and bicycle path between Louisville and Jeffersonville. The bridge could reopen to pedestrians and cyclists in early 2013.

Today's one-on-one meetings with major contractors and developers grew out of an Industry Forum held Feb. 16-17 in Louisville. The second day of the Forum was devoted to individual meetings with large, experienced firms, but more firms requested meetings than could be accommodated.

"The industry response to the one-on-one meetings shows just how strong the market interest is in this project," said Kerry Stemler, Authority co-chair.

Also at today's meeting, the Authority heard updates on several critical project development activities, including:

- In cooperation with the project sponsors, the Federal Highway Administration launched the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) process on February 15 with the publication of a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register.
- As part of the SEIS process, a series of public meetings will be held to explain the process, detail the proposed design changes under consideration and invite public input. Specific dates, times and locations have not yet been announced, but the schedule calls for eight meetings to be held in June.
- Wilbur Smith Associates has completed its time-of-day travel demand model that will be used to develop traffic and revenue forecasts. It will also generate key data for the NEPA analysis required to complete the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.
- A Letter of Interest was submitted to U.S. Department of Transportation for credit assistance under the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program.

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 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 thousands of new jobs.