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Officials list problems with plaza study

In formal responses, local officials have raised more than 50 objections to the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed \$433 million expansion of the Blue Water Bridge border-inspection plaza. A sampling of their concerns:

- The impact statement does not adequately justify the project's costs or evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives.
- It fails to justify the expansion of the plaza from 18 to 65 acres. Officials note a similar plaza being planned at the Peace Bridge in Buffalo, N.Y., requires only 39 acres. The two bridges carry similar volumes of traffic and are both located in urban environments.
- It does not provide fair compensation, or mitigation, for the costs incurred by the community. Officials say 25 cents from each bridge toll should be shared with local government.
- It unnecessarily delays improvements to the 2.2-mile "connector" between the plaza and the junction of Interstates 69 and 94. The bridge over the Black River is regarded as one of the most dangerous roadways in Michigan.
- It provides little information on how much average delays at the border would be reduced, or even if they would be reduced. Officials pointed to a 2006 letter from the director of the Michigan Department of Transportation, who complained that U.S. Customs and Border Protection had steadfastly refused to commit to staffing minimums at inspection booths on the plaza.
- It lacks basic information such as average delay times at the Blue Water Bridge. Local officials said they requested this data and were told the information is protected for reasons of national security. However, identical information was provided to New York's congressional delegation and shared with local officials in Buffalo.
- It appears to grossly overestimate future traffic levels on the Blue Water Bridge. Local officials said MDOT has a well-documented history of overestimating traffic at the Port Huron crossing.
- It rules out "reverse inspections" and thus leaves the crossing vulnerable to terrorist attack. Officials said reverse inspections remain under consideration in Buffalo in the hope that a new presidential administration in 2009 will not take such a reckless approach to combating terrorism.
- It does not address basic questions of traffic flow on city streets, including the intersection of Pine Grove and 10th avenues. Another issue is whether the federal government has a secret plan to close 10th Avenue and other surface streets beneath the bridge after Pine Grove Avenue is re-routed west of the plaza.
- It does not explain how Port Huron will be compensated for rights-of-way and other city property being absorbed by the plaza.
- It does not adequately address sewer issues, including runoff from the plaza. It appears MDOT was

unaware that two large pipes now carry runoff from the plaza directly into the Black River.

- It does not mention the proposed casino-hotel at the Thomas Edison Inn or how it might affect bridge traffic and national security. The hotel would be built beside the bridge with its upper floors looking down on the roadway.
 - It does not adequately address local concerns about air pollution and noise.
 - It appears to understate the losses in tax revenues for local governments and the Port Huron Area School District.
 - It indicates \$150 million of the \$390 million in construction funding will come from private sources, but it does not identify these private sources or explain the reason for their interest.
 - It fails to spell out where the livestock inspection and quarantine facility will be located, nor does it deal with issues such as the disposal of animal waste. City ordinances prohibit putting such a facility in Port Huron.
 - It does not adequately address emergency routes for ambulances and fire trucks during construction.
 - It lacks a balanced discussion of how travelers from Canada who stop at the Michigan Welcome Center would be required to travel 12 to 14 miles to visit Port Huron or Fort Gratiot.
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