

WEST GHENT CIVIC LEAGUE
Minutes of the May 7, 2009 Special Meeting re: Midtown Tunnel Expansion
7:00 p.m. W.H. Taylor ES

CALL TO ORDER at 7:02 p.m. by President Dan Neumann

INTRODUCTIONS AND OPENING REMARKS

Elizabeth River Crossing Group (ERC):

Geoff Seagal, Macquarie Capitol

Chris Guthkelch, Skanska

Fred Parkinson, Parsons Brinckerhoff

www.erc-info.com

VDOT: Ian Johnston

ERC Team presented video on Midtown Tunnel (MTT) Expansion project. Video focused on how 2nd tunnel would be built, sequence of construction, placement, etc. The project is in its conceptual phase right now. The Independent Review Panel (IRP) is still accepting public comment.

Comment can be submitted to the IRP through www.midtowntunnel.org

Mr. Parkinson presented aerial map demonstrating where the entrance would begin to the 2nd tunnel and what roads or properties would be affected. As presently conceived, project would not impact Redgate or Raleigh Aves.

Mr. Seagal discussed the process ERC has been through: Bids were solicited in the summer of 2008; ERC proposal was accepted by VDOT; 5 public hearings were scheduled (3 of which have already occurred); ERC was approved to move on to IRP phase; if pass through IRP, will move on to state transportation officials for review. If ERC is cleared to begin project, plan to break ground in late 2010; projected completion by 2015.

RESIDENT QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

- **Do the current plans require any residential or commercial buyouts?**

Not now. The plans are still in the conceptual phase though. We may need to acquire a few “corners” of commercial parking lots in industrial area of West Ghent.

- **How does the MTT expansion fit in with light rail?**

Project design will accommodate potential extra lane for light rail (by request) but there are no plans for connections and it would increase the project’s expense and therefore also increase tolls.

- **How will the MTT expansion affect traffic congestion?**

The 2nd tunnel will obviously help alleviate tunnel congestion, but we will want to make sure it doesn't increase congestion somewhere else. Only preliminary traffic studies have been done at this point – further studies are needed.

- **Won't tolls only increase traffic congestion?**

The proposal anticipates 100% electronic toll collection, either through EZ Pass or video license plate capture, so no slowdown.

- **Does the project take school crossing safety issues into consideration in anticipating a potential increase in traffic on Hampton Blvd.?**

Pedestrian safety will have to be a consideration – if crossing guards and crosswalks are insufficient, we may have to think about pedestrian walkovers.

- **If light rail is extended up Hampton (which is now being considered), how will that impact the project?**

We don't know yet.

- **Why is the MTT expansion considered a bigger priority for funding than the 3rd crossing (Terminal Blvd.), given the truck traffic problem on Hampton?**

VDOT considers this project a priority as well; hopes to undertake 3rd crossing soon.

- **Who will maintain the existing MTT?**

Skanska would maintain both MTT tubes as well as the downtown tunnel.

- **As this project is a private proposal and the ERC would now be responsible for maintenance, collection of tolls and retaining the profit, where do the existing funds that the state has been giving for maintenance go?**

Not sure, but they would likely stay in the area. It is up to the political leadership to decide how to employ the funds.

- **During the construction phase, what happens to the current traffic?**

Very little impact – all lanes will remain open.

- **Some of the traffic studies done 10-15 years ago indicated that a 2nd MTT crossing would increase traffic on Hampton Blvd. and that a 3rd crossing at Terminal Blvd. would in fact need to be built first to alleviate Hampton Blvd. traffic. The concern**

of many West Ghent residents is that this 2nd MTT crossing will crush Hampton Blvd., thus requiring reconsideration of prior plans to put a bypass through West Ghent (the “West Side Drive”). West Ghent residents fought for years to prevent this flyover from being built, as it would ruin the character of the neighborhood. Do the current plans include the possibility of a bypass through West Ghent?

The current plans do not involve any such bypass.

- **Is there a possibility of widening Hampton Blvd.?**

That is not being considered at this time.

- **What about traffic and tunnel studies that come out after these public meetings? Will the public have a chance to make additional comment once we know the results of these additional studies?**

The next 2 public meetings will take place May 13th and June 10th. There will be public forums and hearings at further stages of the process if the project makes it that far.

- **If this is a for-profit project, who determines the profit level for the next 50 years? How does the toll get set and are you taking into consideration that many residents pass through the tunnels every day or multiple times per day, thus making a \$3 or \$2 toll too cost-prohibitive?**

As this is a public-private project, the state can cap the profits and the state gets to set the toll and control the escalation of the toll.

- **Would only the MTT be tolled?**

No, the downtown tunnel would be tolled equivalently and the 3rd crossing would also be tolled if ever built.

- **When would tolls be put in place for existing tunnels?**

Tolls will be enacted only after completion of the 2nd MTT crossing in 2015.

- **Does the project design preserve West Ghent’s “back” entrance to the MTT?**

There are no plans to eliminate any of the existing ramps to the tunnel.

- **Would the Berkeley Bridge be tolled as well?**

No.

- **Are there any provisions for bike or pedestrian traffic in the tunnels?**

No.

- **Does the current proposal address a static traffic problem or an anticipated future traffic problem?**

It is meant to address both.

- **What was the original planned capacity of the MTT when it was built?**

Not sure about that, but current capacity is 40,000 cars/day. It is the most heavily trafficked 2 lane road in Virginia now.

- **What is the planned capacity of the MTT once the 2nd crossing is completed?**

Not sure; we need to come back with an answer to that. The planned capacity of both the doubled MTT and downtown tunnel is around 150,000 cars/day. Currently, the downtown tunnel takes 100,000 cars/day, so the capacity for the doubled MTT would probably be around 50,000 cars/day.

- **What toll rate is being considered? Would commercial trucks be tolled differently?**

The ERC initially proposed a toll in the \$2-\$3 range, but have heard loud and clear that this is too high. We need to rework the numbers and come up with a new proposed toll rate. The toll will be tripled for commercial trucks.

- **Has the environmental impact of the project been considered? The current study regarding the impact of dredging, etc. is several years old.**

We are relying on the environmental study done 2-3 years ago; if the plans expand we will need to study the additional impact of any expanded plans.

- **Will the current truck ban hours for Hampton Blvd. stay in place if these plans go forward?**

Yes.

- **What is the natural disaster plan for the expanded tunnel?**

All lanes would be reversed to lead out of the area.

MEETING ADJOURNED 8:26 P.M.