

# Building New Bridges

## Cooperation Leads to Plan for Highway Structures

By Tom Schuman

**F**ormer Jeffersonville Mayor Dale Orem estimates he has given more than 300 speeches about the importance of the Ohio River Bridges Project to southern Indiana. There was talk about the need to more effectively move highway traffic from Jeffersonville to Louisville (and vice versa) as far back as the late 1950s, Orem says. “It continued in the 1960s. When I became mayor, I swore I wouldn’t let it die. I’ve been working on it for 21 years.”

One person he didn’t have to convince was Mike Sodrel, a New Albany native and the state’s newest member of Congress. Sodrel was a natural fit for the House Transportation Committee after operating bus and trucking companies in the region for a number of years. His family has been involved in the transportation industry since establishing a flatboat business in the 1860s.

“Nowhere is the old saying ‘time is money’ more applicable than the transportation industry,” Sodrel remarks. “That’s whether it’s just in time delivery or the fact that an idling vehicle sitting in traffic is extremely expensive.”

It may be 2020 before the first vehicles utilize the two new bridges that were announced by governors Frank O’Bannon and Paul Patton in July 2002. But a definitive plan is in place and optimism has replaced doubt and frustration.

The Ohio River Bridges Project takes regional cooperation to a new level, involving government, business and community leaders from two states, as well as congressional representatives. Working together is also important as Clark and Floyd counties plan for their future, and neighboring Harrison County seeks to rebound from a series of setbacks.

### It takes two

The Ohio River Bridges Project is comprised of a new downtown bridge just east of the existing Interstate 65 Kennedy Bridge; an east end bridge about eight miles from downtown, connecting the Gene Snyder Freeway (Kentucky 841) to the Lee Hamilton Highway (Indiana 265); and a rebuild of the Kennedy Interchange where I-64, I-65 and I-71 converge in downtown Louisville, an area known as Spaghetti Junction.

Depending on funding availability, the schedule calls for land acquisition from 2006-2008; utility relocation to begin in 2006 and be completed within five to seven years; and construction to take from 2007 to 2020. The project cost, in 2003 dollars, is \$1.9 billion. Reflecting the amount of construction in each state, Kentucky will pay \$1.3 billion and Indiana \$623.4 million.

**Downtown Louisville is the center of a regional economy that includes 23 Indiana and Kentucky counties.**



Sodrel notes that the actual schedule will be determined by the final highway authorization bill being negotiated in Congress, as well as state spending priorities. "Once we have a list with everything everybody would like to have, then we'll see what's possible."

Among the keys to breaking the longstanding logjam, Orem believes, was the involvement of two regional organizations. While Jeffersonville mayor, he worked to get votes on the public record from the Kentuckiana Regional Planning & Development Agency, which controls federal highway dollars for the region. That, he adds, helped get the highway departments from each state to begin working together.

Second was the March 2001 creation of the Regional Leadership Coalition (RLC), intended to promote awareness and raise solutions for issues in the 23-county area encompassing Greater Louisville and southern Indiana.

"The RLC (consisting of top civic and business leaders, with the two state's governors serving as honorary board members) became a very outspoken proponent of the bridges," Orem relates. "The RLC brought a business perspective to how do we move people, help our air pollution and make the quality of life better."

Sodrel adds, "We're talking a lot more about regionalism than we used to. It took awhile, but we need to view ourselves more as complementary than competition." Pointing out that companies on both sides of the river are likely to find a significant percentage of their workforce coming from the other state, he says, "We're mutually dependent on each other."

### Economic boost

The 130,000 cars a day on the Kennedy Bridge and the truck traffic that comes into downtown Louisville with the merging of the three interstates clearly demonstrates the needs in that area. The east end bridge will help alleviate those difficulties, as well as promote economic development opportunities in that area.

The Clark Maritime Center, located between the city of Jeffersonville and the new bridge, continues to grow as a steel center. Six hundreds acres at the former Indiana Army Ammunition Plant is being marketed for development as the new River Ridge Commerce Center.

"That could be the prime industrial park setting in the entire Midwest," Orem contemplates. "It will have the eastern bridge over the river, rail and interstate. The four-lane Indiana 62 will run in front of the property. This could be a tremendous asset for the entire 23-county region."

It may take another 15 years, but Orem is confident about the outcome.

"We've been through every single study man can do. The power structure is in place at the federal (congressional representatives) and state (governors and highway departments) levels," he points out. "Twenty years ago, we couldn't have said that."

### Working together

Planning is not limited to the Ohio River bridges. Charles Garmon is leading the Southern Indiana Chamber of Commerce's Vision 2020 process, a long-range effort focusing on what Clark and Floyd counties – and potentially other areas of the region – will look like in 15 years.

The outcomes, of course, are impossible to predict. The course leading there will certainly involve a new look at the way cities, counties, schools and other entities work together. Louisville, Garmon says, has demonstrated on a larger scale the potential benefits since its city-county consolidation two years ago.

"Louisville has really been doing a fine job over there," notes Garmon, a longtime business leader in the area. He previously operated Key Communications in New Albany, and now, with his wife, owns and operates the Wooded Glen Retreat and Conference Center near Henryville. "People have seen what they did, and now maybe we can have local regionalism on our side of the river."



U.S. Rep. Mike Sodrel (R-9th District) jokes he didn't have grey hair when he first started working toward new Ohio River bridges in the early 1980s.



The Louisville merger hasn't had a great deal of direct impact on southern Indiana, but it has affected the mindset. "When we talk about it here, it is received a whole lot better. Prior to that, it was really a battle."

The Regional Leadership Coalition that has played an important role in advancing the bridges project would not have occurred in the early 1990s, Garmon asserts. The growth that is taking place in the region, to eventually be fueled by the new bridges, makes the visioning process even more important. "We have to be ready for it," he declares.



**Charles Garmon is working to improve local government efficiency in Clark and Floyd counties.**

## Financial resources

The primary reason for looking at government cooperation measures are the same in Clark and Floyd counties as they are elsewhere in the state: financial pressures on local units. If money is not a problem now for cities, counties and even school districts, it likely will be as the demands for services continue to rise.

"If we work together, how much more can we do?" Garmon asks. "If we pool our resources, can we can get more bang for our buck? Most agree that we could."

Garmon and the Vision 2020 committee have been seeking community input. The initial effort is focused on Clark and Floyd counties, but the hope is to expand to others in the region. Cooperation is important, he says, at all levels.

"Our local elected officials get together on a quarterly basis. When they get back to the office, sometimes it goes back to the way it was, but we'll eventually be able to overcome that," he believes.

## New developments

Gary Davis, a member of the Harrison County Council and vice president of the Economic Development Corporation board, supports the new Ohio River bridges but doesn't expect any direct benefits. His county, however, does have its own challenges and opportunities related to transportation.

"Anything that positively impacts southern Indiana is good," Davis offers. "If they were talking the west end instead of the east end for a new bridge," the impact would be far greater for the mostly rural Harrison County, which is looking for development along Interstate 64.

The I-64 interchange at Corydon provides a modern entryway into the community that served as the state's first capital and touts its history. A second interchange, at Lanesville, has seen little development due to the lack of sewer service.

"We're currently working to see what we can do out there," Davis explains. "We're working with an outside consultant on economic development strategy, pushing to validate whether Lanesville is a prime economic development opportunity. A site selection person we had in threw cold water on that, talking about how things are going east and south here instead of west."

In addition, a third Harrison County interchange west of Corydon is on the Indiana Department of Transportation's master plan. Davis says that would take the load off the current exit, improve the north-south traffic flow and provide improved access to an existing industrial park.

As some look to move away from the larger cities in the area, Harrison County has experienced strong residential development. The jobs have not been following, Davis allows, with some long-time providers of secure employment closing their doors.

## Bouncing back

Keller Furniture, a 110-year-old company, had two manufacturing operations in the county and more than 500 employees as recently as 2001, but was a victim of competition from China. Tower Automotive, a national company which primarily manufactured frames for the Ford Explorer, did not bid on a new contract for that role and has not been able to diversify its business. Oxford Automotive, which Davis says makes parts for Saturn, is in bankruptcy and may sell the local plant.

"A number of unfortunate things have happened in the past few years," he admits. "We're kind of facing an economic development disaster."

Some relief is on the way. Childcraft, which manufactures baby furniture, had its Washington County facility destroyed by storms and flooding in May 2004. It has purchased Keller's New Salisbury property and is in the process of moving operations there. While most of the workers will be coming from the existing operation, the addition does help restore some of the lost income tax revenue.

The second Keller facility, in Corydon, has been purchased by the local Main Street organization with preliminary talk of a hotel on the site when it is cleaned up. A recent newcomer has been Lucas Oil, a California-based company that actively promotes its oil lubricants and additives through the motorsports industry.

No matter what happens in coming years, Davis knows it is difficult for a city or county to have all the answers. Economic development officials in the region have enjoyed good relationships. He's confident others will "hop on board" to help promote future development in Harrison County.

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources: Dale Orem, former Jeffersonville mayor, at (812) 981-7707**

**U.S. Rep. Mike Sodrel, Jeffersonville district office, at (812) 288-3999**

**Charles Garmon, Wooded Glen Retreat & Conference Center, at (812) 294-3770**

**Gary Davis, Harrison County Council, at (812) 366-3354**  
**Ohio River Bridges Project at [www.kyinbridges.com](http://www.kyinbridges.com)**



## Clark County

(State ranks in parentheses)

Population (1990) 87,774 (16)  
 Population (2003) 99,482 (17)  
 Population (2010 projected) 101,969 (17)

Adults (25+ in 2000 census) 64,389 (17)  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher 79.9% (58)  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree 14.3% (32)

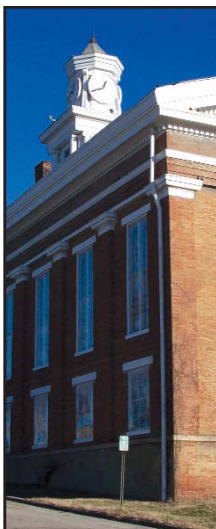
Per capita personal income (2002) \$27,541 (21)  
 Median household income (2002) \$40,301 (45)

### Cities and Towns – 2003 Population

Jeffersonville – 28,025    Charlestown – 5,927  
 Clarksville – 21,237    Borden – 810  
 Sellersburg – 6,140    Utica – 633

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Clark County	10,750	21.4%
From Floyd County	5,224	10.4%
From Washington County	1,560	3.1%
From Harrison County	1,376	2.7%
From Scott County	866	1.7%
From Kentucky	780	1.6%
Out of Clark County	24,660	38.4%
To Kentucky	16,582	25.8%
To Floyd County	4,591	7.2%
To out of state	1,011	1.6%
To Jefferson County	775	1.2%
To Harrison County	530	0.8%



## Floyd County

(State ranks in parentheses)

Population (1990) 64,404 (22)  
 Population (2003) 71,148 (22)  
 Population (2010 projected) 71,992 (20)

Adults (25+ in 2000 census) 46,909 (23)  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher 82.4% (26)  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree 20.4% (15)

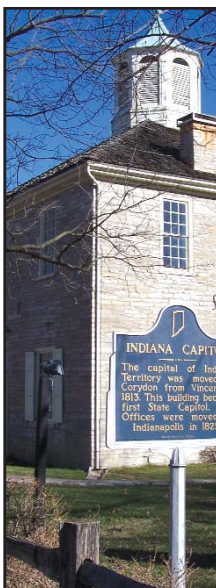
Per capita personal income (2002) \$30,865 (7)  
 Median household income (2002) \$44,452 (22)

### Cities and Towns – 2003 Population

New Albany – 36,973  
 Georgetown – 2,415  
 Greenville – 586

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Floyd County	8,808	25.0%
From Clark County	4,591	13.0%
From Harrison County	2,073	5.9%
From Washington County	889	2.5%
From Kentucky	466	1.3%
From Scott County	223	0.6%
Out of Floyd County	20,575	43.7%
To Kentucky	12,647	26.9%
To Clark County	5,224	11.1%
To Harrison County	921	2.0%
To out of state	680	1.4%
To Jefferson County	492	1.0%



## Harrison County

(State ranks in parentheses)

Population (1990) 29,890 (48)  
 Population (2003) 35,706 (44)  
 Population (2010 projected) 38,203 (42)

Adults (25+ in 2000 census) 22,457 (44)  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher 80.3% (52)  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree 13.1% (41)

Per capita personal income (2002) \$25,564 (35)  
 Median household income (2002) \$44,606 (21)

### Cities and Towns – 2003 Population

Coyrdon – 2,720    Crandall – 131  
 Palmyra – 691    Mauckport – 83  
 Lanesville – 618    New Middletown – 77  
 Milltown – 410    Laconia – 29  
 Elizabeth – 137    New Amsterdam – 1

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Harrison County	3,033	17.5%
From Floyd County	921	5.3%
From Crawford County	728	4.2%
From Clark County	530	3.1%
From Washington County	325	1.9%
From Kentucky	204	1.2%
Out of Harrison County	9,710	40.5%
To Kentucky	5,310	22.1%
To Floyd County	2,073	8.6%
To Clark County	1,376	5.7%
To out of state	272	1.1%
To Crawford County	149	0.6%

Jeffersonville's Clark Maritime Center, New Albany's Town Clock Church and the site of the first state capitol in Corydon.