



Brent Spence – For Whom the Bridge Tolls

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On June 20, 2012, the Federal Highway Administration approved a cost savings plan to construct two Ohio River Bridges in Louisville. The plan will save more than \$1.5 billion and cut construction time in half. One component of the plan is the use of tolls as a financing mechanism.

In Northern Kentucky, there is a growing sense of urgency that our community -- on both sides of the river -- needs to put in place a plan to deal with the Brent Spence Bridge **now**. Built in 1963, the Brent Spence Bridge carries more than 175,000 cars each day -- more than double the number it was built to accommodate. The bridge has one of the highest crash rates in the nation. Over the last decade, three people have died helping stranded motorists on the bridge, and emergency workers respond to more than 650 incidents on the bridge each year.

Consider the economic development issues, as well. Louisville is leaving our community in the dust. With consolidated metro government, a vibrant airport and a community-wide commitment to build not one but two bridges, Louisville will be better equipped to attract new business than Greater Cincinnati. One billion dollars in freight crosses the Brent Spence Bridge every day. Fifty percent of the nation's population lives within a day's drive of our area. Any business that manufactures or transports goods should call our region home. An obsolete bridge makes recruiting/keeping these businesses difficult.

Doing nothing on the Brent Spence Bridge is not an option. The federal government simply does not have the money to pay for mega-infrastructure projects like the Brent Spence Bridge. If Kentucky devoted its share of federal highway funds to the Brent Spence Bridge and the Louisville bridges, there would be no money left for **any** other road projects in the whole state. No one seriously believes that the gas tax will be increased any time soon. That leaves us with tolls, which are the least offensive way to pay for the Brent Spence Bridge.

A toll is a user fee -- not a tax. If you don't cross the bridge you don't pay the toll. Toll technology has advanced to the point where motorists do not have to wait in line to throw coins in a basket. High speed cameras photograph license plates, and locals can use a transponder on their dashboards to "pay" the toll electronically as they pass (at normal speed) through the tolling area. Frequent users (*i.e.*, local commuters) can be given a discount over motorists from outside the area, and of course residents of Greater Cincinnati have many other options to cross the river that are not tolled.

In a vacuum, no one favors tolls. Without tolls, we cannot rebuild the Brent Spence Bridge -- it is that simple. If we don't rebuild the bridge, our area's economy collapses and lives will continue to be put seriously at risk. Is that what we want for our children?

The views expressed are not necessarily those of DBL Law.