



October 22, 2015

Mr. Scott Bennett, Director
Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department
10324 Interstate 30
Little Rock, AR 72209

RE: I-30 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages: Provide a safe, efficient, aesthetically pleasing, and environmentally sound intermodal transportation system.

Dear Mr. Bennett,

We have a growing concern about the integration and impact that the current design of the I-30 corridor will have on the future of our city and state as we plan the largest infrastructure project of this generation. This project will affect the function of our community for not just the immediate future, but will define the growth patterns for central Arkansas for the next generation as well. We ask for a more thorough consideration of the impact this project will have on our collective concerns, and that the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department look more closely into resolving these issues to help build upon one of the greatest communities in the south.

StudioMAIN is a member of the Stakeholder Advisory Group, and we have been following the development of the I30 corridor very closely since the first meeting in July 2014. We appreciate the hard work the design team has put into the project so far, and we know they are doing the best they can to get the community involved, but we are concerned there is not enough long term masterplanning happening in the process and the effect on those who will be most directly impacted by the project are not being given enough consideration.

As an organization of design professionals we are empathetic to the incredibly difficult problem of integrating a high traffic corridor within an urban area where the culmination of private and commercial interests, river, rail, pedestrian, bike, and public transit come together. Each of these aspects plays an important role in a healthy and functioning urban environment. To maintain the rapid growth and investment in this area, it is critical to consider the multiple layers of activity that contribute to its success.

We respectfully request that you revisit the stated goals for the I-30 corridor (enclosure: Image 1). These are noble goals that will benefit our community for generations. We need to take a hard look at our current proposed solution and determine if we are meeting those goals.

Keeping these goals in mind, there are several concerns we have, each with their related specific issues as to how the current design will affect the community, and how it will meet the goals. Listed below, and enclosed with this letter, you will find our stated concerns and references to planning images and information provided during the PEL study sessions.



I-30 Corridor Concerns

1. Need for long term comprehensive planning for our community.

a. Concern 1 – Issue 1, Need for an Integrated transportation plan

The AHTD and our local governing agencies need to work together to develop a comprehensive multimodal traffic system that collects traffic where it can move efficiently, and separates traffic as it slows down. This needs to happen as a collaborative masterplanning effort that takes the growth patterns of our communities into account and finds a way to work together to achieve a long term solution for our great city.

The current approach implies that the transportation system starts and ends at the edge of the agencies right of way. This is detrimental to the long term planning of our city. The fast moving highway system and slow moving local traffic needs to be masterplanned to direct positive growth patterns for our communities. If we do not collaboratively join these two systems with all modes of transportation the net effect is neither system will operate as well desired.

We need to think of our transportation system relative to a circulation system. We cannot enlarge the size of our major arteries without addressing how they affect the ancillary routes and thoroughfares. If we do not consider the integration of all systems, we create issues like the one we currently have at President Clinton/La Harpe intersection.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 1 – Issue 1

Work with the local governing agencies to develop a comprehensive masterplan to improve integrating with slower moving, multimodal street grid system. These improvements can be made over time, but will need to be planned to develop a system that is not a single agency defending their mission and right of way, but for the community and state as a whole.

b. Concern 1 – Issue 2, Involvement of Participating Agencies

There appears to be a divide, or lack of communication, with the governmental and nongovernmental agencies related to the long term planning of our central Arkansas communities. An example of this is the apparent surprise about the current design to those agencies, specifically Rock Region Metro. Also, during our Stakeholder's Advisory Group (SAG) meetings, and the Visioning Workshop, we do not have representatives from the related agencies there to participate. We understand they have been invited, but their lack of involvement indicates a flaw. The city, county and region need to have their Public Works departments, Traffic Engineering, Planning, Zoning and Transit Authorities participate so we can have a comprehensive solution to our community's long term growth that outlasts the impact of one individual in elected office, or a staff position.



Suggested Resolution, Concern 1 – Issue 2

Please speak with the elected officials and staff of each agency, and explain that this is the project will have the largest impact on the development of our community since the Interstate System was first installed. The long term planning and scale of this project requires direct attention from each agency, above and beyond their day to day operation.

2. East- West Connectivity

a. Concern 2 - Issue 1, Expanded width affecting connectivity.

The new highway width more than doubles the existing I-30 corridor, and unless it very carefully addresses all possible ways to travel east-west, this will further cut off growth of Little Rock to the East (see images 3 and 4 below for the Artist’s rendering). This is in conflict with one of the first goals of the study (see image 1). This width is determined by the anticipated traffic as calculated to be expected at 2041. With the growth of our cities, advancement of technologies, and repopulization of our downtowns, we have a great concern this 10 lane CD solution is overbuilding to accommodate people who work in our downtown but who do not live here, are less engaged, and treat our community with indifference. The commuters are not the people who will be most affected by the expanded bridge, it is the people living in the community within which these expanded highways are built who will be affected the most.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 2 – Issue 1

Focus on providing multiple crossings that allow for the ability to enhance driver, biker and pedestrian experiences. Work with local governing agencies to provide the following: lighting and signage for drivers, a separated lane or sharrows for bikers, a minimum 5’ sidewalk with pedestrian amenities such as trashcans, benches, bike racks, lamps and material improvements. At President Clinton Ave. crossing, work with the city of Little Rock to provide a pedestrian experience that will draw people from the River Market area to the Clinton Library that can include retail storefronts, park space or tourist amenities. The intent of the growth of the Clinton Presidential Library and Park was to connect East to West (see images 5-6).

b. Concern 2 – Issue 2, Lighting and Visibility

The expanded highway design is wide enough, that unless it is carefully addressed, there will be a ‘dark hole’ between the river market and the President Clinton Library and Park. There are numerous reasons why crossing underneath a long dark bridge will be bad for the community.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 2 – Issue 2

Allow natural light through the bridge as much as possible, and include artificial lighting under the bridge designed by an accredited lighting designer.

c. Concern 2 – Issue 3, Noise

A barrier to walking beneath a bridge includes the noise level of the traffic above. If the bridge is constantly whirring of tires and machinery, it will be a nuisance to local residents and visitors.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 2 – Issue 3

Consider noise attenuation measures to keep the noise away from the community below. Have the noise attenuation solution designed by an acoustical engineer to verify the noise is no worse, ideally improved, from the experience we have currently.

d. Concern 2 – Issue 4, Experience / Aesthetics

Every design element from the selection of the structural system to the finish of the concrete and light fixtures will have an effect on the aesthetics. Many of the aesthetic design decisions are fashionable, and we request all decisions remove the fashionable elements related to how the bridge looks. If there is a decision to make the bridge perform better from a connectivity, lighting, visibility, or noise standpoint that is the direction we request you pursue. If a finish such as stainless steel is more long lasting and maintenance free than a finish like painted steel, then we ask you incorporate the better long term solution. The cleanliness and simplicity of the design will speak to the aesthetics. We want this bridge to look as good for the next generation as it will the day it opens.

3. The spaces related to the bridge need to meet their highest and best use.

a. Concern 3– Issue 1, Areas under the Bridges

As expressed above, the experience of passing beneath the bridge needs to address all modes of transportation, be well lit, relatively quiet and well built. This also applies to the areas between the existing east-west connections at the streets. These areas need to be designed to meet their highest and best use and become a place for people and not parking.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 3 – Issue 1

Place a park, gymnasium or other installation that promotes people to the area (see example images 7-9). This will keep people in the area, and will give them pride in their neighborhood. If people feel connected to a place, they are more likely to take care of it. A community gathering area, a place for athletics, or a place for people to learn more about the community, like visitor's welcome center are all ideal improved uses of the space.

b. Concern 3 – Issue 2, Developable land

The areas where the existing circular ramps are located have an opportunity to become an enhancement of the city. These areas make sense to grow relative to their adjacent uses. To the west, River Market side, the area can become developable land and can improve the connectivity east and west. The area to the east of I-30, adjacent to existing parkland, can develop as improved parkland and become an amenity to the community.



4. Addressing Multi-Modal transportation

a. Concern 4 – Issue 1, Public Transit / Bike / Pedestrian

A growing concern is the I-30 corridor improvement focuses more on Mobility of the personal vehicle than it does on the other stated goals. This is exemplified by the reasons stated above, but also by the lack of integration of the elements related to bike/ped/public transit. We understand there will be no transit on the bridge, but it can be more cost effectively planned for the future now, than it will be to add it later. Making one of the largest infrastructure investments without the consideration of how transit can be accommodated is a failed lack of planning.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 4 – Issue 1

Work with community transit authorities to accommodate multimodal transportation options both East-West and North-South in the I-30 corridor. In the East-West direction, make a connection from the existing starter street car system east, to the redeveloping neighborhood and eventually the airport. Create a masterplan about how a larger transit system can reach the outer communities. Whether it is incorporated at first or not, Public Transit needs to be addressed as part of the larger transportation solution for our state.

b. Concern 4 – Issue 2, La Harpe/ President Clinton Avenue

The current design alleviates the ongoing problem the city of Little Rock has at the La Harpe/President Clinton Avenue interchange, which is the most dangerous intersection in the state for pedestrian and vehicular accidents. As traffic from the I-30 corridor, State Highway 10, and our growing River Market District concentrates in one location, there will be problems and we agree with the recommendation of to divide the traffic and alleviate the concentration. This will also allow the downtown portion of Little Rock to reduce the size of Cantrell Road and create an improved connection with the Arkansas River.

c. Concern 4 – Issue 3, 2nd and 4th street

The current design of splitting highway traffic through downtown Little Rock is an improvement, as the distribution of traffic will create less congestion. We are concerned the treatment of 2nd and 4th streets will become mobility focused and less concerned with integrating with the existing conditions of the street grid which are utilized by pedestrians and vehicles alike.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 4 – Issue 3

Work with the City of Little Rock's agencies and property owners to maintain the integrity of the street grid system and its multitude of traffic options. Be mindful of the treatment of the lane widths, timing of the stop lights and treatment of the street edges to accommodate for future growth. If the lanes are wide, timing of the lights allow speeding, and the sidewalks are narrow, accidents will occur.



5. Scale of the project relative to cost to make it community responsive

a. Priorities of achieving the stated goals.

There have been many cost projections discussed from the beginning of the project, by many different agencies, but one item has remained consistent, the cost to make the improvements listed above can be accomplished with 2-5% of the overall construction cost. This expense will either destroy the growth of our community, or encourage it to flourish.

Suggested Resolution, Concern 5 – Issue 1

Consider all options related to how the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department can integrate the Highway system into a community friendly, multi modal transportation system, and not only a highway system. Take the time to vet all possible project partners and funding options, whether it affects the overall timeline of the project or not. It is better to consider all options and comprehensively plan for the long term growth of great state of Arkansas.

As planners we have a duty to protect the life, safety and welfare of our community and the people that occupy spaces we design. The current design is focused overwhelmingly on the driver of the highway, who is not the only user of this space, since this space goes through the largest urban area within our state. AHTD has an opportunity to create an exemplar urban interstate connection that could become a model for other urban areas suffering from the same issues. We need to collaborate and advocate for the best planning possible in order to become the best community we can. This highway system is a reflection of the values of each one of us as a person, as individually we create the community we live in. We request the AHTD revisit what goals are important to the community, to solve a current problem of traffic congestion at our rush hours, and plan for the diverse growth of our community and state for the next generation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris East".

Chris East, AIA, LEED AP
Cromwell Architects & studioMAIN President
501.372.2900 | ceast@cromwell.com

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Joe Stanley".

Joe Stanley, AIA
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Principal Architect
Rogue Architecture
Historic District Commissioner
City of Little Rock


Robin Loucks
Downtown Neighborhood Association

Keith Canfield
Principal, Creative Instinct
Commissioner LR Parks and Rec.

Enclosure: (1) PEL reference images and concept examples.

Cc: Arkansas State Highway Commission, Mayor Mark Stodola, Mayor Joe Smith, Judge Barry Hyde, Metroplan, Garver Engineers, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

STUDY GOALS



Improve opportunity for east-west connectivity	Enhance mobility
Improve local vehicle access to downtown Little Rock and North Little Rock	Connect bicycle/pedestrian friendly facilities
Accommodate existing transit and future transit	Minimize roadway disruptions during construction
Minimize river navigation disruptions during/after construction	Follow through on commitment to voters to improve I-30 as part of the Connecting Arkansas Program
Optimize opportunities for economic development	Avoid and/or minimize impacts to the human and natural environment, including historic and archaeological resources
Sustain public and agency input and support for the I-30 corridor improvements	Improve system reliability
Maximize I-30 cost efficiency	Improve safety

Study Goals listed in no particular order. Study Goals developed in coordination with Project Partners (Cities of Little Rock and North Little Rock, Pulaski County, and Metroplan), the Technical Work Group, and the public.

CA0602
Interstate 530 – Highway 67




Image 1. Stated Goals for the I-30 Corridor Improvement

River/Downtown Bridge

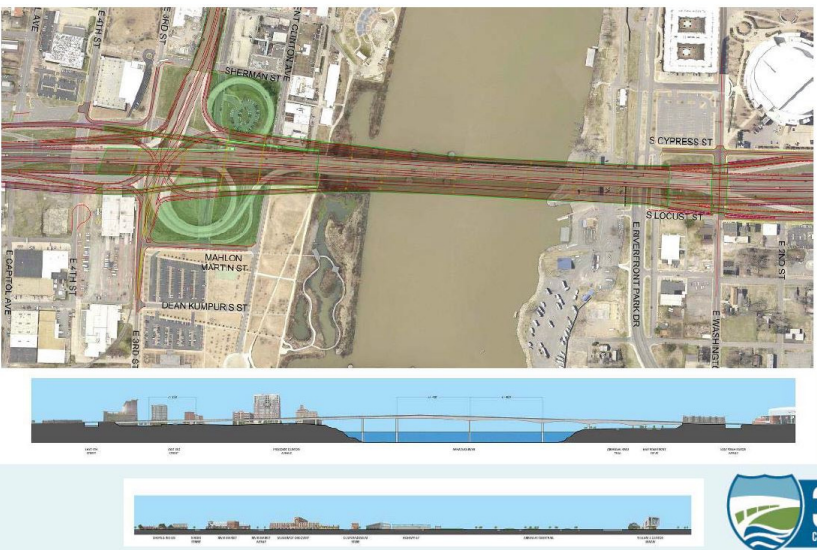


Image 2. Current Downtown Little Rock / North Little Rock and River Bridge Expansion

Note 1. The amount of land in shadow underneath the bridge expansion, more than double what exists today.
 Note 2. The areas in the right of way are shown green to indicate vegetation or parkland, is this the AHTD's intention or will it become parking?

Sketch



Image 3. Current Aerial of downtown Little Rock on/off ramps

Sketch

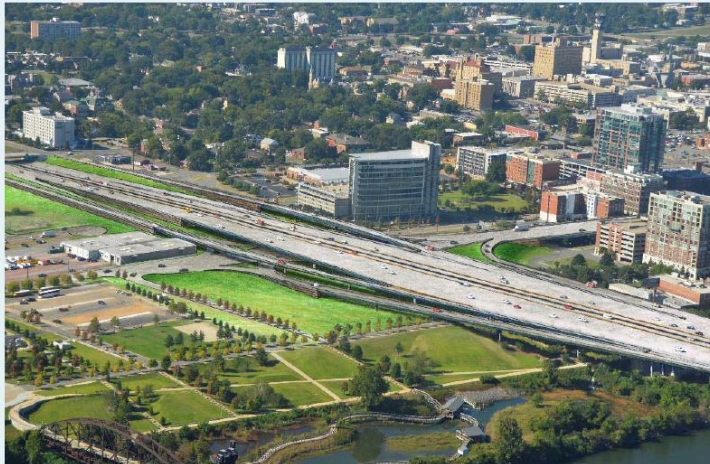
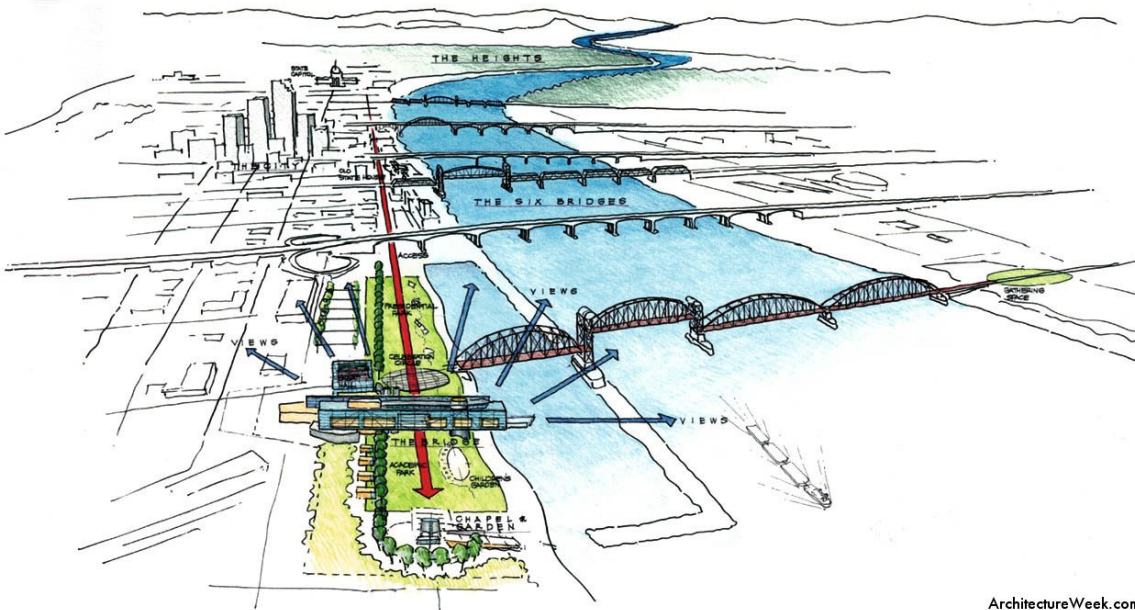


Image 4. Artist's rendering of new bridge corridor

Note 1. The amount of width added to the bridge as a barrier to east-west connectivity.

Note 2. The number of connections east-west is reduced in half.



ArchitectureWeek.com

Image 5. Original Design Drawing of the Clinton Presidential Library, and its intended connection with downtown.



Image 6. Example of storefront retail under a bridge

Note 1. The integrated design of vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic

Note 2. The height of the bridge



Image 7. Example of a climbing wall under a bridge



Image 8. Example of a pedestrian amenities and retail under a bridge



Image 9. Example of a park under a bridge