

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - January 6, 2005

The truth about whether the ICC will reduce traffic congestion

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Of the two build alternatives, Corridor 1 is the better of the two. From a transportation perspective, it will improve travel times between locations along the corridor and do little elsewhere.

Many ICC supporters point to it as relieving beltway congestion, but the DEIS does not support that conclusion. The beltway congestion will increase by 1% west of US 29 with the ICC compared with the 2030 no-build and only reduce congestion 1% or 2 % at I-95 and US1. These numbers paint a grim picture since most everyone agrees that the beltway is congested today and the projected congestion for 2030 without the ICC will be 3% worse between US 29 and I-270 and 17% worse at I-270, I-95 and US1. (pages IV-316/IV-317).

Another contention of ICC supporters is that the ICC will reduce traffic on local arterial roads, but the study does not support that conclusion either. Supporters point to the study conclusion that the ICC will reduce the traffic east of MD 97 by a range of 2% to 12%. They fail to point out that the ICC will actually increase traffic by 0.2 % on the east side of I-270. Supporters also fail to indicate that these savings are compared to the 2030 no-build alternative. The study indicates that arterial traffic will increase in the range of 14% to 38% between now and 2030. Even with the ICC "improvement", the arterial roads will still have 8% to 32% more traffic in 2030 with the ICC than today. For those of us who drive the local roads and know they are already congested, we ask, "Where is the improvement?" (pages IV-316/IV-317).

(The DEIS measures congestion in three ways: level of service (LOS), intersection volume to capacity ratio (v/c) and traffic volume. LOS is like a report card grade from high school where an "A" is good or no congestion and "E" is failure or congestion. The LOS actually contains a LOS of "F" that indicates that not only are you congested but very congested. A v/c is the same idea as LOS except it expresses congestion as a number, not a letter. An LOS of A translates to a v/c of less than 0.7, an LOS of E is 0.9 to 1.0 and a v/c above 1 is an LOS of F).

Since most congestion on arterial roads occurs at intersections, a more useful measure is intersection congestion. The DEIS estimates v/c and LOS data for 44 existing intersections. Six of these were assumed to have grade separated interchanges built. Of the 38 remaining intersections, 19 are congested today (LOS of E or F). An additional 14 of the remaining 19 would be congested by 2030 under the non-build alternative. (pages IV-334 thru IV-341)

Supporters of the ICC contend that building it would reduce v/c at 10 of 39 intersections for the PM peak period by 10% or more and 19 of the remaining 29 would have a lesser reduction. They don't tell you that for nine other intersections the ICC makes the congestion worse. (At one intersection the v/c is unchanged.) The supporters also don't tell you that of the 29 intersections with less congestion, three were not congested to begin with and only six of them will reduce the v/c enough to actually result in an LOS other than E and F. Thus, the \$2 billion ICC will eliminate congestion in only six intersections during the PM peak period. (pages IV-334 thru IV-341)

ICC NOT WORTH THE COST!

The cost estimate to construct the proposed ICC is \$1.8 - \$2.2 billion. Some of this will be financed by state bonds which would be repaid through ICC tolls. A large portion of the remainder would be financed by GARVEE bonds which use future federal payments to repay. The financial charges on the GARVEE bonds

have been estimated to be another \$1.5B over 15 years. Thus the total cost of the ICC and financing is \$3.3B to \$3.7B.

Considering the high cost of the ICC and financing, we must ask whether building the entire ICC is the best use of funds to reduce congestion. We think not!

We agree that parts of the ICC are needed – west of Muncaster Mill or MD 28 and between US 29 and I-95. Most of the intersection congestion and the largest traffic volumes are west of MD 97. We also feel that many projects other than those in the CLRP are needed to address current and future congestion. The County Council and MCCF have identified many other needed projects.

Building the two MCCF recommended ICC segments would reduce the overall ICC cost to approximately \$675M. In addition, the road could be built without any borrowing, a savings of another \$1.5B. Thus the total cost would be reduced \$2.2B, or about 80%.

The remaining funds could be used for transit and more grade-separated interchanges. The transit improvements would provide citizens with an option to driving. Widening existing roads and building more grade-separated interchanges would address the delays at the most congested arterials. We would focus the road improvements along MD 28/MD198 and Randolph Road/ Montrose Parkway to create two east-west corridors in addition to the beltway. The two new corridors would not be high speed but the number of signalized intersections would be less and resulting delay much less since all the existing congested intersections would be eliminated.