

More backups down the road



I-375 DOESN'T work. It creates congestion where cars dump into westbound Jefferson. It constricts downtown Detroit and barricades pedestrians.

It is an example of destroyed transit infrastructure and sacrificed neighborhoods in the name of auto-only access. It carries less traffic than does Jefferson, but consumes four times the valuable urban real estate. It reflects the Michigan Department of Transportation's obsession with suburban interstate solutions forcing on an urban street grid.

MDOT's proposed extension makes a bad idea even worse. Extending I-375 closer to the river just pushes the congestion south to the ultimate pinch point — parking structure entrances. Imagine the backup on I-375 and I-75, the burden on commerce, the crash potential, the road rage — whenever a parking structure gate won't open. The tight horseshoe severs Franklin Street one block from the Renaissance Center. Direct access to the east side is gone, replaced by U-turns four blocks away. "Free flow" for cars means "no flow" for pedestrians.

General Motors Corp. asked MDOT for improved access to its world headquarters and riverfront parking garages. This insanity is MDOT's concrete response (pun intended).

This commitment to car-only access to our riverfront carries significant environmental impacts. Because of its "aggressive schedule," MDOT is not planning to do an environmental impact study or give anyone time to challenge its chosen alternative. MDOT's consultants never did the traffic analyses for the "unbuild" alternative: a pair of one-way surface streets with well-timed lights instead of the existing freeway. MDOT has ignored the impact of the 65 m.p.h. speeds on future riverfront residents and pedestrian access to the proposed Riverfront state park. MDOT does not want the community to press for other alternatives, including the visionary "unbuild."

Maybe MDOT's pavement-mongers are rushing this boondoggle because they fear that, with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments' leadership, the region might actually coalesce to develop a rational, and doable transit plan. Then MDOT would have to keep its oft-stated promise to help fund transit.

I-375 got its start with insensitivity and arrogance. It was built

not where it made sense for downtown, but where it met the least resistance — obliterating Hastings Street, the historic heart of the vibrant African-American cultural and business district from the '30s to the '50s. The archeological record of Black Bottom and earlier Jewish, French and Chippewa communities is likely intact, but MDOT wants to pave over it before we have time to find out.

MDOT wants to compound its decades-old mistake by spending \$60 million for the extension and ramps, plus an extra \$25 million for the surface street upgrades, thus committing to a future of auto-dependence. There's a better idea, inspired by President Richard Nixon's budget director Caspar Weinberger, suggesting that "tearing down freeways and replacing them with boulevards may become one of the great public works endeavors of the 21st Century." That's exactly what we should do with I-375.

The I-375 extension will eat up land and create traffic nightmares.

Converting the I-375 service drives to boulevards would supply ample capacity for traffic at pedestrian-friendly speeds, create new access points to the stadiums and Eastern Market, and honor the urban fabric. The space I-375 consumed would then create valuable land for development or parks.

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If you don't ask the right questions you will never get the right answers. Ask: "How does GM get single-occupancy cars to its parking garages as fast as possible at taxpayer expense?" The answer is: "An \$85-million driveway."

If GM, the City of Detroit and MDOT ask a different question — one that requires vision — they can radically alter the paradigm of Detroit's redevelopment: "How best can we invest transportation dollars downtown to facilitate access for pedestrians and transit, as well as cars, while reclaiming valuable land for green space or investment?"

The answer is to bury extend it.

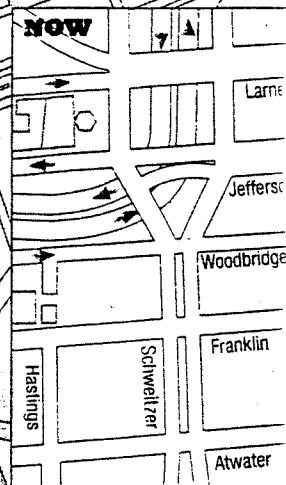
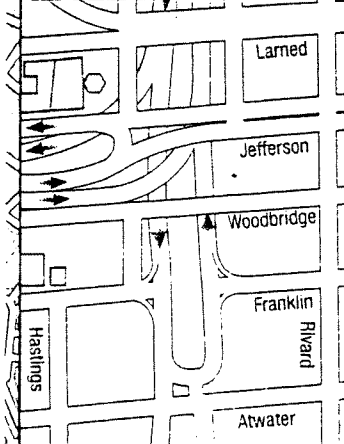
KAREN KENDRICK-HAN
Grosse Pointe Park is cofounder of Transportation Riders United in care of the Free Press E-Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit or via e-mail at kalkhands@...

Take part in SEMCOG's meet regional transit at Cobo Hall Thursday. Sessions are from 1 and 6-8 p.m. For more information contact Jennifer Evans at 313-961-4268:30 and 5 p.m.

SON OF I-375

MDOT plans to extend I-375 to south of Jefferson, tunneling cars into the parking areas for General Motors Corp. employees who work at the Renaissance Center. I-375, built in 1964, cut through the historic Black Bottom neighborhood which stretched from Gratiot to the riverfront.

AFTER EXTENSION



* Detroit F.

EXTENSION DETAIL

Estimated cost: \$1

Date of construction: 119,000 years

Estimated traffic: 119,000 vehicles

Source: Michigan Department of Transportation

Transportation Riders United

Tips for Testifying in Public Hearings

- Don't forget to introduce yourself
- Bring notes/ Do your homework
- Be clear and concise in raising your points
- Speak from your heart, but back it up with facts
- Give reasons for you position
- Offer solutions rather than just pointing out problems
- Stay focused
- Be polite and courteous regardless to the reaction to your testimony
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Keep it brief!!!
- Follow up by sending written comments to:

TRU's Preferred Alternative

- Is better, faster, cheaper!
- Treats the question of downtown access holistically!
- Establishes a modern commuter rail service between Oakland County and the RenCen to reduce the traffic flow into downtown *and* along the I-75 corridor (~\$70 million.)
- Terminates I-375 blocks north of Jefferson and allow it to emerge as surface streets that flow into the East Riverfront Area.
- Recovers real estate to be available for economic development and more parkland.
- Improves bus service to downtown.
- *Markets* bus and commuter-rail service to "choice" riders.

Send your comments to Jose A. Lopez
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Email: lopezjos@mdot.state.mi.us
Fax: (517) 373 9255

MDOT's Plan In A Nutshell Suburban-style horseshoe-curve

- Is the most expensive to build
- Wastes taxpayer money--\$100 Million
- Frustrates prospects for Commuter Rail
- Is hostile to access needs of pedestrians
- Is inefficient in that the "level of service" will rise from a projected "F" only to "D"
- Is oblivious to environmental justice concerns of those without auto access who gain nothing from this boondoggle
- Is antagonistic to Tricentennial Riverfront Park and GM's riverfront promenade
- Is incompatible with proposed riverfront residential and mixed-used development
- Fails to address noise impacts south of Jefferson

MDOT has not done its job. **It has:**

- Ignored the feasible alternative of establishing commuter rail from Oakland County to Downtown Detroit by:
 - Segmenting evaluation of I-75 and I-375 expansions into separate studies, and
 - Declaring public transportation improvements irrelevant to each.
- Scoped this study too narrowly by focusing only on pavement-based solutions.
- Refused to seek a good-faith, multi-modal solution that balances needs for public transportation, pedestrian and bicycle access as well as automobiles.
- Discounted & discouraged community input.