

Activist attempts to bring a European flavor to Detroit by trying to close I-375

In southwest Ireland, the most vigilant group in the coastal regions is the "Tidy Towns" committee. The ardent members make sure the merchants hang floral baskets from the roofs, they fight against widening the roads and they mobilize against the franchisers who want to suck business to plazas on the outskirts of town.

Bicycling through towns like Clonakilty, Bantry, Dingle and Kenmare, you find friendly faces, wide sidewalks and fresh-painted, multicolored storefronts. Everything looks so inviting you think you'll stay. Maybe park for a few pleasant decades.

Once the highways come, the Tidy Towns members know the sense of closeness and camaraderie among shoppers and merchants will go awry. They have watched what happened in England and the United States and want no part of what we call progress.

Here in Detroit, an activist named Karen Kendrick-Hands, co-founder of Transportation Riders United, is fighting with every legal and public relations tool at her disposal to stop the extension of I-375 from eating up land near the Detroit River. She suggests we can turn the clock back to a more genteel pace.

What little sense of community remains in the Rivertown area, on narrow streets where the streetcar tracks still pop through the pave-



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ment, she warns will be banished by the whizzing traffic.

Claiming that MDOT is trying to shortcut its environmental impact process to help General Motors Corp. get a fast road to its parking structures for its Renaissance Center workers, Hands calls the extension "An \$85 million driveway" for GM.

"We're committing to a future of auto dependence," Kendrick-Hands warns.

She suggests tearing down I-375 from Mack onward and replacing it with boulevards and mass transit routes that extend to the river. It would supply adequate room for traffic at pedestrian-friendly speeds.

Some of us, born and raised in Detroit, must go to Europe to experience pedestrian-friendly speeds. People have room to gaze up at the hanging flower baskets, engage a merchant in conversation, even buy items from a bake sale on Tidy Towns day.

In Tidy Towns, people don't throw McDonald bags out the window, they don't tear down historic buildings to make entrance ramps, they don't run so fast they never have time to know one another.

The initial leg of I-375, created 30 years ago, destroyed a vibrant Black Bottom community, a thriving group of stores, churches and taverns.

Look at any photos in the books about Paradise Valley and you'll find throngs of people enjoying the street life. Now, even a stranded motorist takes life in hand to stop outside a vehicle, lest a steel carriage ravage him.

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places to walk, outside the Renaissance Center, beyond Hart Plaza. If the casinos come to the riverfront, people need room to stroll from one place to another. It needs to be a community.

Kendrick-Hands suggests that more people take an active interest in transportation planning. Check

out the Transportation Riders United Web page at www.marp.org/tru.htm for an update of meetings and policies or e-mail her direct at kdkhands@voyager.net. Get involved.

Remember, if you don't ask the right questions, you will never get to the right answers.

Let's make Detroit a Tidy Town, where cab drivers are proud to call it home and trumpet its assets to tourists. A place where we can saunter on a street, not inside a museum like Greenfield Village.