

REMARKS BEFORE THE MISSOURI HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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Good morning. I am pleased to be afforded the opportunity to address the members of the Commission this morning. My name is Daniel Serda, and I serve on the kcICON / I-29/I-35 Corridor Community Advisory Group on behalf of the Downtown Council, a private nonprofit membership organization representing more than 260 downtown businesses, entrepreneurs, property owners, and nonprofit organizations. I have been asked to speak to you this morning on behalf of the entire Advisory Group.

As you know, the members of the Community Advisory Group were appointed by the Mayors of Kansas City, North Kansas City, as well as public and private organizations representing both the urban core and the Northland, the areas that stand to gain the most – and that have the most at risk – in the project corridor. While each member represents a specific constituency, most of us also represent a broader range of public interests, as reflected in our multiple hats. We are drawn from varied professions and geographic areas, but are also active in varied civic initiatives that give us a broad sense of community perspective. Most members also have been involved in multiple stages of the planning process for the corridor, some for as many as 7-10 years. Several group members also serve on the River Crossing Committees established by the Greater Kansas City and Northland Chambers of Commerce, as well as the Committee established by the Mid-America Regional Council.

Individually, we do not necessarily agree on every issue. Collectively, however, as part of our experience over the course of the last six months, we have reached a surprising degree of consensus on a few key points, which I would like to share with you.

The first has to do with momentum, context and opportunity. Kansas City is at an opportune moment in its history. Downtown is in its third year of massive redevelopment, with some \$4 billion in public and private development underway and about to bear fruit. In the next twelve months alone, nearly 10,000 new office workers

will begin working downtown, and many thousands more will be drawn downtown on a daily basis by the spectacular new amenities under constructions. Thousands more already *live* downtown, or are seriously contemplating doing so in one of dozens of condominium, loft and residential conversion projects. New amenities, such as the Sprint Center Arena and Power and Light District and the planned East Village development, are or will be operating or under construction within the next two years. Major commercial and office tenants are no longer leaving downtown, but seriously looking to become part of the most significant urban renaissance that we will experience in our lifetimes. Growth in the Northland also continues at a rapid pace. New retail developments have recently opened at Briarcliff Village; new plans are being contemplated for the redevelopment and resurgence of several older communities in the Northland, including North Kansas City, Parkville, and Riverside; new public amenities, such as the North Kansas City Community Center, are new assets that enhance livability; and continued interest in a high quality of life continues to drive new residential development in Kansas City North, Liberty, and Gladstone.

With new growth comes new challenges, and one of the most profound is the question of how to facilitate movement, circulation, and access between and throughout the newly energized corridors that connect downtown and the urban core – the historic heart of Kansas City – with rapidly growing suburban areas to the north. This need – and the reality that transportation choices made today will have dramatic implications for how we live for the next 20 to 50 years – have made the Paseo Corridor the natural focus of a great deal of community concern, sentiment, and support for carefully evaluating and perhaps even rethinking transportation alternatives and the critical catalytic role that public investments can play in facilitating or discouraging private investment and decision making. As I mentioned before, many members of the Community Advisory Group have been involved in thinking about transportation needs in the corridor for the better part of a decade, and collectively, we take our responsibility in providing community perspective and focus to the project very seriously.

As a Group, we have identified a range of practical and conceptual concerns about this project, ranging from enhancing safety and efficiency in the corridor; improving the degree of local access into and out of the interstate system; simplifying the

ingress and egress of trucks into and out of the corridor; minimizing the disruption caused by construction; avoiding undue adverse impacts on the communities surrounding the corridor; focusing on the potential for a new bridge or bridges to serve as an iconic landmark for the region; and ensuring that the project is seen as just one element of a total transportation solution for the corridor.

In the eight months that we have been meeting, discussions within the Advisory Group have resounded over a consistent theme, one that does not have to do specifically with any of the concerns I just mentioned. That touchstone for our group has been – and will continue to be – the question of defining our role and responsibilities as an Advisory Group. These discussions are premised on the recognition that, as an *Advisory* Group, our role is not to make decisions, but to provide community perspective and guidance to MoDOT as staff and the Commission make their own decisions. We understand and accept this limitation to our role, but also take our responsibilities to the community quite seriously.

We believe that the Community Advisory Group model is an important one, and that our group's experience represents a significant opportunity for MoDOT and the Commission to build a reservoir of community good will that can be drawn upon in the future to build the citizen support needed to develop the resources necessary to enable MoDOT to move forward.

For this to be possible, however, the Group needs assurances – demonstrated in words but measured in actions – that our recommendations are made an active and meaningful part of the agency's decision making for the corridor. This means, first and foremost, that the Group must be engaged in identifying and evaluating priorities for the Corridor. MoDOT needs to look to the Group as the primary – but not the sole – source of community input and feedback. It also means that the Group needs to be engaged throughout the life of the project, not only in the early conceptual stages of project development, but also in the implementation and construction phases of the project cycle. The Advisory Group must be engaged in project oversight and coordination, to ensure that the project conforms to the Community's goals and vision.

Understanding and navigating this process is a new challenge for all of us, including MoDOT staff and the Commission. That being said, it also represents a tremendous opportunity. Over the next five years, the Commission will need public support to help implement the vision necessary to fund the transportation improvements needed throughout the state during the next decade. Much of our experience to date can be described as an exercise in relationship building – we are building new working relationships with MoDOT staff and the Commission, as well as among different constituencies in the community. The foundation for any solid relationship is, of course, built on trust and sustained by commitment. Our belief is that MoDOT’s long-term success will depend – to a large degree – on the trust and commitment reflected in implementing the community’s vision into MoDOT’s decision making.

In order to serve in this role, the Community Advisory Group must be provided with adequate access to information and opportunities to offer substantive input in order to ensure that its recommendations and community concerns are reflected in the final scope of the project. The Community Advisory Group should be involved in helping to develop the Request for Qualifications and Request for Proposals that guide selection of a design-build contractor, and helping to guide project oversight and coordination to ensure that the project – as actually constructed – becomes a distinctive example of what is possible through meaningful public participation.

In conclusion, we would like to commend MoDOT and the Commission for their willingness and participation in innovative methods to improve the I-29/I-35 corridor. We believe that it is important to let vision as well as mission guide the scope and design of this project. This project must be recognized as a unique opportunity for this generation to strengthen integral links between the established urban fabric of our city and rapidly growing areas north of the Missouri River. We believe it *can* become a project that is truly an icon for future generations.