

## Comments on Hoan Bridge Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations

As someone who has taught engineering management courses over the past thirty years to students working for some of the area's largest manufacturers, I have watched as Milwaukee industrial jobs have disappeared or gone overseas. As a member of the Milwaukee school board, I have faced the frustrations of trying to prepare a workforce that can contribute to this altered economy. Given the challenges facing Milwaukee, I believe strongly that the decision concerning accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians on the Hoan bridge should be driven by a vision of the long-term economic vitality of the Milwaukee region.

Unfortunately, the draft report does not address the larger economic impacts except obliquely. It estimates that the least-costly alternative--devoting a north bound lane to pedestrian and bicycle use would--would in twenty five years increase peak-period congestion. Apparently this congestion would reduce average speeds from substantially over the speed limit to slightly under the speed limit. Assuming the draft report's traffic projections come true, the question is what if any adverse economic effects would result. Would potential employers be discouraged from locating in Bayview or the south shore suburbs? One might speculate that a future distribution center, for example, would look elsewhere, but given the lack of buildable land such a project seems unlikely in the first place. In any case, it would appear that I-794, even reduced to two lanes, would still be among the least congested urban interstates around.

On the other side, it seems likely that opening the Hoan to bicycles and pedestrians would reinforce other efforts to build economic activity in Milwaukee. Let me mention four areas:

- Attracting high tech firms. Firms that depend on hiring engineers, scientists, programmers, and similar highly educated individuals often include the attractiveness of an area to the people they wish to hire as an important factor in their location decisions. An environment that is bicycle-friendly is a helpful factor. There seems to be a strong positive correlation between ratings of bicycle-friendliness and the density of high-tech firms. There is something about bicycles that is particularly attractive to this group. Several production and supply chain courses I currently teach include exercises on SAP, software used to run many of the largest companies and sold by the second largest software company. My university is a member of the SAP University Alliance an organization of universities around the globe, aimed at developing exercises that can be used to teach students about ERP systems. The University Alliance has standardized on Global Bike Inc a fictional company chosen because of the worldwide appeal of bicycles. Similarly, the largest software company, Microsoft, distributes customer relationship software built on its Outlook contact manager. It includes a sample database. Sure enough, the database is a bicycle company.
- Attracting industrial development. Probably the most successful recent development aimed at industry in Milwaukee was the Menomonee Valley project. It is telling, I think, that a trail runs right down the middle of it, a fact heavily emphasized on the Menomonee Valley Partners' website.

- Attracting and retaining retirees. A number of localities have concentrated their development efforts on attracting retirees, who are regarded as attractive because they don't put huge demands on infrastructure, particularly schools, and come with pensions, Social Security, and government-paid health care in the form of Medicare. In choosing where to retire, people are likely to be influenced by the availability of convenient and safe recreation. A recent article in the AARP magazine recommending places to retire mentioned the availability of bike trails and hiking opportunities in several of the profiles.
- Attracting tourists. The Hoan could be the centerpiece of a system of trails running from northwestern Indiana towards Door county. In recent years this system has been improved and expanded. The Interurban trail system was recently extended so that it connects Oostberg to Brown Deer Park. The Oak Leaf Trail covers the lake front in most of Milwaukee county. WE Energies has been constructing trails around the Milwaukee-Racine county line. Racine and Kenosha counties have recently paved all or parts of their trails. And Lake County in Illinois has improved the maintenance of the trail between the state line and the north shore Chicago suburbs. I could imagine a trail over the Hoan as the high point of this route, affording spectacular views of Lake Michigan, an experience that one would have to travel to San Francisco to reproduce.

There is no one panacea for the economic challenges facing this region. But it is absolutely essential that the decision on the Hoan Bridge support and enhance an overall strategy for development.

Bruce Thompson  
2837 N. Marietta Ave  
Milwaukee WI 53211  
(414) 332-5768