



For Immediate Release

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***River Fields Files Court Challenge to Protect the Harrods Creek Bridge
Group Says Bridge Should be Opened Immediately***

Louisville, (May 31, 2009)— River Fields, a 50-year-old land and river preservation/conservation organization has asked the federal court to defer any construction of the Harrods Creek Bridge until the current legal action against the United States Coast Guard (USCG) has been decided. River Fields further contends that the bridge should be repaired and re-opened immediately.

There is no reason to keep the bridge closed while this legal conversation takes place," said Don Cox, an attorney for River Fields. "The bridge should be repaired and re-opened immediately."

This latest court challenge is only the fifth time in its 50-year-history that River Fields has been forced to initiate a legal action.

The current pending suit against the USCG alleges that the USCG failed to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act prior to approving an application by Louisville Metro for a permit to widen the historic Harrods Creek Bridge. The suit says the Coast Guard unlawfully relied on outdated and inaccurate documents making unsubstantiated statements about the project's impacts, including the statement that the project did not require a Coast Guard permit.

"Metro Louisville is violating federal law with this project," said Don Cox, an attorney for River Fields. "Someone has to hold the government accountable. If we don't, what will they do next time and the next?"

River Fields and numerous other organizations have repeatedly asked officials to open the Harrods Creek Bridge to traffic and to rehabilitate it in the fastest and safest manner. The simpler plan offered by River Fields is to reconstruct the existing railings and deck, repair concrete and add better signage. With this preservation option, the bridge could be opened in days, not months and at a cost to taxpayers of less than half the proposed \$2.3 million price tag for the bridge widening.

“Louisville has been forced to cut services and lay-off hundreds of employees. In these serious economic times, why would Metro not choose the cheapest, fastest and safest solution? The preservation option *is* just that,” said Dr. Hiram Polk of the River Fields Board of Trustees. “The one-lane bridge has a speed dampening effect on what is already a very curvy road. Increasing speeds by widening the bridge will lead to more accidents. Bigger is not always better.”

Gary Klein, a structural engineer with the Chicago-based engineering firm of Wiss, Janney Elstner Associates Inc., hired by River Fields, used the term “robust” in describing the structure. He said the bridge could be re-opened by repairing the damaged steel guardrails until a more permanent rehabilitation process begins.

“Another important concern is the economic harm that this project has on commuters and residents,” said Lee Cory, also of the River Fields Board of Trustees “Businesses and commuters are suffering needlessly. If the city follows the existing plan, the bridge will remain closed until, at least, the end of the year. If they following the re-opening option, it could be open in a matter of days.”

Metro has still not received construction-staging approvals from Kentucky’s State Historic Preservation Officer or the U.S. Coast Guard. The widening project cannot begin until these approvals have been given, with or without a lawsuit.

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River Fields is the largest and oldest river conservancy along the 981-mile Ohio River. For nearly 50 years, River Fields has utilized its resources to effectively protect, preserve and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the land and water around the Ohio River in our region. Through careful management of the corridor's resources, River Fields strives to create harmony between nature, history and the people who live here. River Fields owns land or holds conservation easements on 34 properties, totaling more than 2,200 acres, most of which is preserved forever. River Fields is one of the nation's few land trusts tackling regional advocacy work and land conservation.