

## BRUCE R. WATKINS MEMORIAL DRIVE



Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri

City of Kansas City, Missouri  
Highway and Transportation Commission

Completed 2001

Project Type: Urban Freeway Reconstruct

### DESCRIPTION

Bruce R. Watkins Drive, a Missouri Department of Transportation project, is a 10.2 mile-long artery, which links downtown Kansas City to Southtown. The design and construction of this project included aesthetic design with environmental sensitivity, community engagement through public involvement programs, and the use of innovative and cost-effective mitigation techniques.

### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The project engaged multiple minority neighborhoods that had historically been negatively impacted by previous municipal actions. Multiple meetings were held with these stakeholders to prioritize issues critical to the community. The most critical concern raised by the community was physical separation from the city and separation of community assets such as churches and shopping areas.

### CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS APPROACH

The approach centered around the top issues identified by the public engagement process.

Solution #1- Maintain ALL local street crossings with main lanes depressed in a cut condition. Local street crossings are to be “flat” with no crown.

Solution #2- Architectural and Urban Design treatments and all structural elements including bridges, retaining walls, and rails to be reflective of community and region.

**CHALLENGES** This project was one of the early pioneers that helped establish a nationwide push for Context Sensitive Design/Solutions. The project was sued by the minority stakeholders in the early stages to reverse decisions made in a vacuum by the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT). Some of the initial proposals by MoDOT included a “double deck” facility with all pedestrian access occurring underneath the highway.

**OUTCOME** With the pressure of litigation forcing extensive public involvement, the project has become one of the nation’s earliest examples of establishing a “new way” for developing highways. The measurement for success of this project is the multiple accolades received by all project stakeholders including the City of Kansas City and the minority neighborhoods on the east side of the city, MoDOT, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

**FUNDING** Construction Cost: \$121 Million

**LESSONS LEARNED** This project went to litigation because MoDOT and the public were not working together. The costs associated with litigation and delay added millions of dollars to the cost of the project. Early, often, and continuous communication would have created a positive partnership early in the process. Unfortunately, the relationships became adversarial and MoDOT, today, is still working through image and integrity issues with the public. Establishing a partnership early with ALL project stakeholders would have created a positive working relationship and reduced the overall cost of the project.

**KEY WORDS** *Applicable Project Delivery Stages:* Administration, Planning, Design, Construction, Maintenance

*Applicable Transportation Professionals:* Highway Engineers, Structural Engineers, Landscape Architects, Historians

*Applicable Transportation Modes:* Highway, Transit, Bicycle, Pedestrian

*Transportation Topics:* Visual Quality, Environmental Justice, Safety, Mobility



**WEB LINKS** <http://www.kcmo.org/kcmo.nsf/web/home?opendocument>

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