

DRIC: THE OTHER CHOICES

by Dr. Dietrich Bergmann, PhD, PEng.

Dr. Dietrich Bergmann of Ann Arbor, Michigan is a licensed professional engineer in Michigan and California. He specializes in ground transportation systems planning and design.

There are at least three non-mutually exclusive alternatives to DRIC. Their implementation delays the need for DRIC, perhaps for decades.

A trans-border traffic management system should be installed without delay across southern Michigan and southwestern Ontario to guide auto and truck drivers to the border crossing with the least traffic delay. A DRIC study report states that improving border crossing information in Southwestern Ontario and across southern Michigan will defer the need for DRIC by six years, even given the study's optimistic and as yet unrealized traffic growth forecasts. The two bridge choices are the Blue Water Bridge at Sarnia, and the Ambassador Bridge at Windsor. Detroit to Toronto is almost equidistant by either route.

The DRIC study has revealed that the passage of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement in 1988, and NAFTA in 1994, have facilitated growth in the number of Windsor-area residents who work in the USA. The study also revealed that, as a result, weekday auto travel from the US to Canada now peaks between 4 pm to 7 pm. Authorities should evaluate the construction of a new Detroit River tunnel between the Detroit and Windsor city centres to be used exclusively for an express public transport service that, with connecting public transport services on each side of the border, will encourage Windsor residents who work in the US to use public transport in lieu of an auto. This tunnel also will help reinvigorate the downtowns of Windsor and Detroit.

The DRIC travel demand report states that 44% of the truck traffic using the Ambassador Bridge is divertible to intermodal rail for the reason that the Canadian trip end is in or east of Toronto. Double-tracking railroad facilities on the Toronto-Detroit-Chicago and Cincinnati routes probably will require an investment that is less than the \$5 billion investment in DRIC and also will permit the railroad industry to offer increased intermodal service to absorb the truck traffic growth as projected in the DRIC study. In addition to the several styles of intermodal rail service presently or recently provided between Toronto and Detroit (i.e., container-on-flat-car; trailer-on-flat-car; Canadian Pacific's Expressway; and Norfolk Southern's Triple Crown Roadrailer Service), a "Rolling Highway" service should be offered to attract owner-operator truck drivers to intermodal rail. Such a service already is provided on several routes in western Europe, e.g., between Freiburg, Germany and Milan, Italy.

Recommended Actions:

- Terminate the DRIC plan.
- Develop a Southwestern Ontario/Southeastern Michigan cross-border traffic management system.
- Begin evaluation of a public transit tunnel between Windsor and Detroit.
- Work with railroads to improve their Ontario/Michigan/Ohio/Indiana/Illinois facilities to make intermodal the prime cross-border freight transportation option for truck traffic. ■