

TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

Advocating Environmentally, Socially & Economically Sustainable Transportation
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A CHECKLIST OF TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES TO THE DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL CROSSING PLAN (DRIC)

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Travel demand forecasts by the DRIC team looked 30 years into the future and stated that from 2004 to 2035 at the Detroit and St. Clair River crossings combined, passenger car traffic will grow at 57%, and truck traffic at 128%. It did not take into account depleting oil resources and climate change. The forecasts were made before the current economic downturn which reflects, we believe a fundamental change in the North American economic landscape. The DRIC proponents continue to promote their plan believing that economic activity will recover and grow.

Foretelling the future is hazardous at any time, and with manufacturing having gone to Asia and with the meltdown of the North American motor vehicle industry those very high forecasts are rash in the extreme.

For Ontario, Michigan, Canada and the U.S. to build this infrastructure project at an estimated cost by the proponents of \$4 billion and by the Windsor Star (Windsor Star, February 17, 2010) of \$5 billion public money is wasteful and irresponsible.

For all these reasons, we urge that the DRIC project not be built, and that existing infrastructure be updated and improved to reflect current environmental and energy supply challenges. In other words, sustainably.

To achieve this goal, we recommend a basket of alternatives, some of which the proponents examined and determined they would be insufficient to meet their high, and we believe, unrealistic travel demand forecasts:

High Speed Rail: The Chicago, Detroit/Windsor (and on to Toronto) route is part of President Obama's \$8 billion planned high speed rail network. Windsor and Detroit are strategically located here and would benefit economically when, not if, this network is built. \$4-\$5B would go a long way to bring high speed rail to Southwestern Ontario.

Passenger rail: Until recently a combined Amtrak/VIA train ran from Chicago to Toronto through the St. Clair Tunnel between Sarnia and Port Huron, Michigan and on to Kitchener and Stratford. Time-consuming inspections by the border services agencies of both countries destroyed that service. In contrast, freight train inspections are very efficient so a speeded-up passenger rail inspection

system should be implemented and that passenger rail service restored and moved to the Detroit Windsor Tunnel to serve a large market.

New rail tunnel: A large, high clearance rail tunnel to accommodate double-stacked containers is moving forward. According to the Windsor Star, Jan. 25, 2010, owners of the 100 year old Windsor-Detroit rail tunnel, CP Rail and Borealis Infrastructure plan to build an adjacent tunnel to accommodate larger double-stacked railway cars and possibly high-speed cross-border passenger service. The cost is estimated over \$400 million. It is possible that the existing tunnel could be used for passenger rail. It would involve realigning track and building a new VIA station in Windsor which is badly needed. The old tunnel could be used for passenger rail and possibly high speed rail.

Old CN Rail tunnel between Port Huron and Sarnia is closed. The possibility of re-commissioning it should be explored. We suspect it could be reopened and rehabilitated for a fraction of the cost of building a new tunnel. That might possibly be worth doing for the purpose of handling traffic that does not require high or wide clearances for example, single-level container and passenger trains.

Urban Transit: Although separated by a river and a border, Detroit and Windsor should be treated as one city region. According to a DRIC study, the number of Windsor area residents who work in the U.S. has increased from 2,500 to 7,000 between 1991 and 2001. Although many destinations in Detroit are scattered and difficult to serve by transit, a large contingent of Windsor residents work in hospitals in or close to downtown Detroit. Light rail downtown to downtown through the Windsor/Detroit vehicle tunnel or in a separate tunnel is doable. An efficient public transit system would not only reduce the number of intercity car trips, but would revitalize the downtowns of both cities.

Bicycle Lanes: They are becoming standard features of every progressive city. The new Ambassador Bridge could act as a good corporate citizen and feature such a service on its new span if built.

Ambassador Bridge Second Span: The Detroit International Bridge Company wants to build a six-lane replacement bridge at its own expense and close its 80 year-old four lane structure. The company is not popular in areas of Windsor for three reasons: It makes millions in profits by offering a heavily used public service, an unusual situation. All other international crossings are public and revenues flow to governments. Huron Church Road in Windsor that leads to the bridge carries a parade of noisy, emission-spewing trucks. AB has been buying up properties at the Windsor waterfront for plazas for its proposed new bridge, angering communities in the city. However the DRIC is no better. Its Windsor/Essex Parkway is planned to be built through long stretches of existing neighbourhoods and parkland on the Windsor side. Furthermore its route is a threat to the poor Delray neighbourhood in Detroit. (In one of its many reports,

DRIC admitted that its new highway would not reduce pollution in Windsor). The AB plan is a better deal for taxpayers. Truck traffic on Huron Church Road will be reduced when sustainable alternatives to the plan are implemented. Furthermore, mitigation measures, such as burying the road are possible.

Freight Transportation: The solution to excessive truck traffic through Windsor and over the Detroit Windsor crossing and everywhere else in North America is not to increase capacity for the simple reason that increased capacity invites more trucks. The solution is to put more freight on rail, intermodal rail/truck transportation and short-line rail. On November 4, 2009, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation representing Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, announced a study "...that will profile the current status of freight transportation in North America and look at opportunities for improving its environmental sustainability, including appropriate infrastructure development along trade corridors." If the Commission does its job properly, its report, due later this year will provide the proper guidelines for efficient and environmentally-friendly freight movement at the crossing.

Truck Ferry: In its 2005 report to the City of Windsor on how to address traffic issues related to the Detroit/Windsor crossings, the Schwartz Report (www.citywindsor.ca/001429.asp) recommended the extra capacity and attractiveness of the Truck Ferry. The Ontario EA section on alternatives to the DRIC describes the ferry as transporting oversize shipments and hazardous goods across the Detroit River but is not restricted to these two markets. It states frankly that the ferry is currently operating at about 25 per cent capacity and could increase to take several hundred trucks per day across the border.

Transportation demand management: This is another measure that the proponents examined but did not consider sufficient to meet future needs. Using incentives to shift, reduce or divert traffic is used elsewhere and will optimize the use of the current crossing. One measure easily implemented is the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) that can divert traffic from the Detroit crossing to the nearby Blue Water Bridge at Sarnia.

A memo to politicians who like to boast about how many jobs an infrastructure project will create: Sustainable infrastructure also creates jobs.