

DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL CROSSING PROJECT – EXPENSIVE, UNNECESSARY, AND COSTLY TO THE ENVIRONMENT

The international crossing between Windsor and Detroit receives little attention in the media outside of Southeastern Michigan and Southwestern Ontario. This is unfortunate since between 23% and 28% of Canada/U.S. surface trade passes through the Windsor/Detroit crossing. It is one of the most important trade corridors in North America.

In 2004, a binational partnership between Transport Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) was formed to review border crossing capacity between southwestern Ontario and southeastern Michigan and to develop a 30-year strategy for the crossing. The partnership claimed the focus of the study was on transportation in general, not just highway transport.

The purpose of the project announced during 2004 was to provide for the safe, efficient and secure movement of people and goods across the Canada/U.S. border in the Detroit River area. The result of the study was the current proposal, which includes a new Windsor-Essex Parkway 10 km long extending between Highway 401 and a proposed new border services plaza in addition to a new bridge crossing. The *Windsor Star* called the highway, at \$1.6 billion, the most expensive highway in Ontario. The total for the combined Canada/U.S. project has been estimated at \$5 billion, although no official estimates are available. The U.S. portion of the cost is small by comparison at U.S. \$1.809 to \$1.814 billion. This new crossing is referred to as the Detroit International River Crossing or DRIC.

Existing bridge and tunnel crossings between Windsor and Detroit include the Ambassador Bridge (AB), a two parallel single-track rail tunnels, and the Detroit-Windsor vehicle tunnel. Also, the Blue Water twin bridges between Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan provide an alternative border crossing to the Ambassador Bridge, and represents a shorter route for travelers driving between London or points east and many locations within the city limits of Detroit.

The existing highway crossings had become congested in 2004 when the DRIC was proposed due mainly to slow border control processing. Lineups of trucks backed up along Huron Church road in Windsor, and long wait times at the crossing frustrated travellers to and from the U.S. The congestion produced air pollution in downtown Windsor from the parade of trucks, and millions of dollars in losses for trans-border businesses.

The provincial Environmental Assessment (EA) dealt only with the highway portion since the bridge, being international, is a federal responsibility. This EA was released in January of this year, was approved by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and then by Cabinet in August. Canada's federal government published its draft environmental Screening Report on the proposed new customs' plaza and bridge in July, 2009 and received comments on it until August. As of October 14, its final approval is pending. On the U.S. side, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was approved by

the U.S. Department of Transportation on January 14, of this year. However, the approval of the U.S. environmental report is the subject of at least two lawsuits.

Instead of looking at alternative modes of transportation such as rail, and taking into consideration available capacity at the existing crossings, the binational partnership proposed the construction of a new crossing and customs' plaza located within approximately one mile of the existing Ambassador Bridge and its plazas.

Objections to the project came from many sources. Since new highways are known traffic inducers, homeowners in certain parts of Windsor were justifiably worried about increased vehicle emissions even though traffic would be diverted from the Ambassador Bridge.

The City of Windsor, worried about the impact of the Windsor/Essex Parkway on its citizens, criticized the proposed Windsor-Essex Parkway for insufficient tunnelling and green space and proposed a solution called GreenLink that called for more of both – a recommendation that continues to be ignored by the proponents of DRIC.

Although Ontario's MOE upheld the EA for the project, according to press reports, bureaucrats in the Ministry levelled criticism at the EA process, notably in areas of air quality and human health.

The owner of the Ambassador Bridge is fighting a continuing battle to stop the DRIC arguing (correctly) that traffic at the crossing, which peaked in 1999 long before the current economic recession, does not justify a second bridge. Its permit application to build a six-lane replacement span to its 80-year old structure was set aside by the U.S. Coast Guard. AB has filed a lawsuit in Washington.

Transport 2000 Ontario's position regarding the DRIC project. Highway traffic demand does not justify the DRIC proposal. The year 2004 may be only five years ago, but it was a different era. In the light of current economic reality, the DRIC traffic projections, which used 2004 data as a basis, are over inflated and unrealistic. A \$5 billion project based on rosy traffic counts is not justified. Traffic on the Ambassador Bridge and Detroit-Windsor rail tunnels has decreased by approximately 34% since 1999, well before the current economic crisis. Traffic in the vehicle tunnel decreased by 50.4% for the same period. Traffic on the twin Blue Water Bridges declined by 17.6% since the year 2000 and in fact is experiencing lower traffic today than what it was immediately before the bridge became a two-span crossing in November 1999.

Contrary to what was observed in the past and still generally claimed by supporters of the DRIC crossing, border wait times are not significant. A random sample from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website shows wait at AB at five minutes for commercial vehicles, six minutes for passenger vehicles. For the Blue Water Bridge at Port Huron: five minutes for commercial; five minutes for passengers. From the Canada Border Services Agency website: AB commercial, no delay; passenger, no delay. Note that in Michigan, MDOT has just built a new \$230 million highway connection between the AB and Highway I-75. AB has enlarged its bridge plazas on both sides of the border and both plazas now have unused control booth capacity. Most trucks spend little time crossing the

Ambassador Bridge because of border services agencies' pre-clearance procedures implemented at the end of 2004.

Ontario's economy is changing. It is clear that the present economic downturn in Ontario's manufacturing sector is not short-term, and when the economy recovers, Ontario's business landscape will look very different from what it was five and ten years ago. Adding road and bridge capacity in the era of peak oil and climate change is yesterday's solution and no longer acceptable.

The Michigan government has voiced serious reservations about the need for the DRIC. In its budget passed a few weeks ago, the Legislature ordered the MDOT to submit an investment grade traffic study by May 1, 2010 to provide traffic projections for the ensuing ten years. The projections are to take into account projected infrastructure modifications, expansions and improvements. In other words, if alternatives to the undertaking were implemented, such as the proposed rail tunnel, what would the traffic projections look like? It announced that it is the intention of the Legislature to adopt or reject the project by June 1, 2010.

There are realistic economic and environmentally sustainable alternatives to the DRIC. The Ontario Ministry of Transportation should promote the use of the Blue Water Bridge as an additional crossing venue. Traffic on the Blue Water Bridge today is less than it was immediately before the opening of the second span in November 1999. Even more interesting is the fact that the traffic forecast consultant to the DRIC study team, in a report dated September 2005, stated that the need for a new international crossing solution would be deferred by six years if the public were aware of the travel times associated with using the Blue Water Bridge. The use of Intelligent Transportation Systems and other signage in the area recommending the Blue Water Bridge alternative are feasible and preferable alternatives to the DRIC highway project.

The governments of Ontario and Canada need to take steps to stimulate Canadian-U.S. intermodal rail across southwestern Ontario. Intermodal rail services already exist between Toronto and the U.S. via southwest Ontario. However, they are a small fraction of what they could be. The DRIC project's travel demand consultant in its September 2005 report stated that 44 percent of the truck traffic across the Ambassador Bridge was divertible to intermodal rail. That report then identified several existing infrastructure and other problems to explain why the truck traffic would not be diverted.

In Europe, governments build intermodal terminals as a strategy to remove trucks from roads to reduce congestion, pollution and noise. In Ontario and Canada we should view the development of intermodal transportation infrastructure as a way to avoid having to spend greater sums of money on highways. The Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal has completed its draft EIS and the final EIS is to be released in the near future.

Also, because the fuel consumed during the transport of highway trailers via intermodal rail typically is not more than 25% of what it is when transported over a highway, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and pollutant emissions also stand to be not more than 25% of what they would be if moved by truck.

Second Rail Tunnel: Sam Schwartz Engineering was retained early in the DRIC process by the City of Windsor to provide an approach on how to address commercial and passenger issues at the crossing. A new rail tunnel to accommodate “double-decked” (technically, double-stacked, 9ft. 6in. high-cubed container) trains was their first recommendation. Now CP, joint owner with Borealis of the current rail tunnel, is asking for government funding to implement this recommendation. Although these high containers represent 5 to 10% of CP’s traffic, they are becoming standard with European shippers, so a new rail tunnel will increase shipments and allow CP to access a market that they are currently unable to compete for. The \$400 million cost is a fraction of our estimate of the \$5 billion cost of DRIC. The existing tunnel pair can easily be converted to passenger rail, but there are challenges, not insurmountable, in re-aligning existing rail traffic and in relocating a new passenger railway station in Windsor. On October 19, 2009 it was announced that the EA work will begin this year on the nearly \$400 million freight rail tunnel to carry large capacity rail cars between the cities of Detroit and Windsor. The proposed rail tunnel will be located parallel to the existing rail tunnel under the Detroit River.

High Speed Rail: HSR in Canada may look impractical at this time, but it is inevitable considering what has and is still happening in the rest of the world and taking into consideration the present U.S. government’s commitment to HSR infrastructure. The city of Windsor is in an excellent position to become an international link in the planned Chicago-based HSR hub-and-spokes network extending out to Detroit, Cleveland, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Omaha, Minneapolis, etc. When HSR comes - and it will, the Windsor-Essex Parkway will be redundant.

The Canada Border Services Agency has improved the efficiency of border processing for freight movements at the Pearson Airport and at the Detroit/Windsor international crossing among others. In addition, it expanded border services for Amtrak trains between Vancouver and Seattle to expedite passenger travel in anticipation of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games. Doing the same for a now non-existent passenger train at the Detroit/Windsor crossing would help the cause of environmentally friendly passenger crossings at that border.

In conclusion, the DRIC studies have been done and those studies and subsequent events show that the DRIC project is inconsistent with Ontario’s economic development and environmental goals for the future.

We ask the Ontario Legislature to direct the Minister of Transportation to do the following:

- (1) Terminate work on the DRIC highway project;
- (2) Re-allocate funds presently allocated to the DRIC project to the development of enhanced intermodal rail transport solutions for the movement of freight between Canada and the U.S. across southwest Ontario;
- (3) Direct the Ontario Minister of Transportation to commence work, in cooperation with Michigan’s Department of Transportation and railway

companies on designing an intermodal rail transport solution for the movement of freight presently moving via Highway 401 and the Ambassador Bridge between the Greater Toronto Area and the U.S.; and

- (4) Concurrent with the work on intermodal rail, identify ways that higher speed intercity rail services can be developed between the Greater Toronto Area and Windsor/Detroit on the same southwestern Ontario routes to be used for enhanced intermodal rail transport services;

Our views in general are shared by other NGO's, on both sides of the border. We have joined in a coalition with nine other Ontario and Michigan organizations including U.S. and Canadian Sierra Clubs in joint statements that object to the DRIC. These were presented to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment on May 29, 2009, and to the Michigan Legislature on September 17, 2009. Copies of those statements are available on request.

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This report will be sent in the form of a letter to all members of the Ontario Legislature and to the Ontario and Michigan media.