



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

Advocating for Sustainable Public and Freight Transportation
Box 6418, Station "A" Toronto, ON M5W 1X3

March, 2014

THE NEW WINDSOR-DETROIT BRIDGE – A SINKHOLE FOR CANADIAN TAXPAYERS

On February 2, 2014, the Canadian government announced it will start buying land in Detroit to speed up building of the New International Trade Crossing – NITC, a planned bridge across the Detroit River between Windsor and Detroit. Re-announced in the Feb. 11 federal budget is \$470 million in new funding for the project that includes \$250 million for a border inspection plaza on the U.S. side. The NITC is to compete with the privately-owned 85 year-old Ambassador Bridge. This expenditure is the latest inducement by our government, along with an earlier promised loan of \$550 to Michigan since the Americans are reluctant to commit to this project. The reluctance is now official as the U.S. government has failed to put the cost of a customs plaza on the U.S. side into the federal budget.

Supporters of the NITC can no longer justify the over \$3 billion (U.S.) cost. The bridge was originally planned to accommodate a predicted future increase of traffic volumes at the busy Windsor/ Detroit border. However, since 1999, traffic volumes at the existing crossings - the Ambassador Bridge, the Detroit Windsor Tunnel (in receivership, but still operating) and the Blue Water Bridge between Port Huron, Michigan and Sarnia - have been falling.

Truck traffic was down 7.03 % on the Ambassador Bridge and 16.75% in the Detroit/Windsor Tunnel from 2012 to 2013. An exception is the Blue Water Bridge at Sarnia to which truck traffic is temporarily diverted due to construction of a new parkway to the yet unbuilt NITC. Car traffic at the crossing is slightly up in recent years but there is no indication that the automobile industry, the main driver of traffic at the crossing, will ever recover and provide the high truck toll revenues of the past.

A second justification that is often cited is the long wait times to cross the Ambassador Bridge. This problem can be easily fixed by adding more customs inspectors. The booths are never fully staffed although it is surely cheaper to add manpower than to build a costly, Canadian taxpayer-funded new bridge. Besides, the wait times are exaggerated since both countries' border agencies report "no delay" most of the time.

If the NITC is built, it will share decreasing traffic and toll revenues with the Windsor Tunnel, the Blue Water Bridge at Sarnia, the Ambassador Bridge and the planned Continental Rail Gateway, a new, state-of-the-art tunnel for double-stacked rail cars to be built shortly by CP Rail and Borealis Infrastructure.

Our over-optimistic federal government claims that toll revenues will cover Canada's \$550 offering to the Michigan government as well as the Canadian government's current commitment. Those tolls will never be sufficient to provide the U.S. with revenue to repay those gifts while Washington sits on its hands moneywise. That leaves the Canadian taxpayer on the hook possibly for generations.

The NITC is an unsustainable, road-based project that reflects outdated thinking. Upgrading the Detroit/Windsor crossing must acknowledge the current realities of industrial decline, climate change and expensive oil.

Despite reduced traffic, a new bridge is needed to replace the eighty-five year old Ambassador Bridge. Mr. Matty Maroun, owner of the Ambassador Bridge is eager to build a replacement span at his own expense. Let him do it.