

Straight Talk On...

What is The Detroit River International Crossing Study?

It's a daunting challenge: find the best location and build an efficient and cost-effective border crossing system that will meet the current and future needs and priorities of the host communities, industry and multiple levels of government in both Canada and the United States – and have it open for traffic, all within the next seven years.

People ranging from the front line autoworker in Windsor to politicians at all levels agree on one thing: Windsor-Detroit needs a new border crossing, and we need it soon. Half of all cross-border truck traffic is local, and thousands of people in both Canada and the United States depend on the border to make a living and provide for their families. Safe, efficient cross-border trade is absolutely critical to the economies of both countries, and the local communities on each side of the border.

Ask almost anyone living in the Windsor-Detroit Gateway what the best solution is, and chances are they will have their own idea about how to solve the border issue. Chances also are, you could find as many people opposed to that same idea as who support it. As with anything in life, the best solution is not necessarily the easiest, nor do you ever get unanimous opinions.

So how do we analyze all the facts, take into consideration all the conflicting opinions, identify the engineering and technical challenges and factor in important issues like community needs, air quality, noise pollution, maintaining local traffic patterns, future growth in cross-border traffic, value for tax dollar, cultural and natural heritage sites etc?

It's called an Environmental Assessment process, and it is a proven, legislated process that is used throughout Ontario and Canada on both large and small infrastructure projects, ranging from something as simple as widening an existing road to something as complex as building a new bridge.

The task of gathering and evaluating all this information falls to the Border Transportation Partnership. Who are they? They are a dedicated bi-national team of leading engineers, planners, and policy experts from Transport Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, the U.S. Federal Highways Administration, and the Michigan Department of Transportation who are committed to getting the job done right and done on time by 2013.

Because the Windsor-Detroit area is so densely developed with both residential and industrial land uses, it is simply impossible to find a solution that will have no impacts. A "no impact solution" does not exist. Compromises will need to be made. However, not only is the EA process a legal requirement, but it provides an established planning framework to help decision makers do a thorough job of evaluating options in a way that actively involves the people most likely to be affected by the outcome. The Border Transportation Partnership is committed to working with the community to identify the solution that provides the best balance of transportation benefits with community impacts, when compared to other alternatives. Through the EA process, we will identify options, assess impacts, develop strategies to minimize impacts and recommend the best available option.

The DRIC study team encourages you to get involved in the process, become informed about the project, learn the facts, and if you have a question, don't hesitate to ask someone on the team! Visit our website at www.partnershipborderstudy.com or call the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's Windsor Border Initiatives Implementation Group office at (519) 973-7367.

Also be sure to attend one of our upcoming Public Information Open Houses, which will be held from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. on March 28 at the Ciociaro Club and March 30 at the Novelletto Rosati Complex. Come meet the team, and get to know more about what is happening in your community. You have a voice – we want to hear from you!