

# Rail tunnel proposal pushes ahead

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**Dave Battagello, The Windsor Star** | Dec 06, 2012 | Last Updated: Dec 06, 2012 - 8:02 UTC

Plans for a \$400-million double-stack Detroit River rail tunnel are pushing ahead despite Ottawa's focus on getting the \$1-billion DRIC bridge built first.

"We think it's really critical to allow us to take advantage of opportunities to become a multi-modal hub," said David Cree, CEO Of the Windsor Port Authority, a partner in the project.

"With the new bridge and what the city has been doing at the airport, the only major thing lacking in this region is the ability to handle double-stack rail cars."

The existing rail tunnel was opened in 1910 and annually carries just under 400,000 rail cars and \$21.5 billion in trade. It was enlarged in 1994, but cannot be expanded further. It is unable to handle the growing fleet of double-stacked, three-metre high rail containers or multi-level rail cars.

An open house was held in Windsor a couple of weeks ago as part of the environmental assessment process for the rail tunnel project. Along with the port authority, the other partners are Borealis Infrastructure and Canadian Pacific Railway.

"In any discussions with industry in this area, they have indicated double-stack is critical for future years of growth," Cree said. "It's especially important to the automobile industry. They see this as critical in terms of their business."

"We are moving forward with the environmental assessment and we are on schedule to have that completed sometime in mid-2013."

The new rail tunnel would be constructed next to the existing one about one kilometre west of downtown.

Once the environmental assessment is complete, the rail tunnel proponents will seek permits on both sides of the border, including a presidential permit on the U.S. side and cabinet approval from the Canadian government.

CP Rail and Borealis, based on financial analysis, will not proceed with the project until government funding from either side of the border has been secured to pay for half the project's cost --\$200 million, Cree said.

Minister of State Steven Fletcher told The Star last month during the opening ceremony for Windsor's new \$5.6-million Via rail station that the federal government has no plans

to invest in the rail tunnel or other area railway projects in the near future - at least until the Detroit River International Crossing is well under way or completed.

"We have been really focused on the bridge first," he said. "Let's do that and then move on to other initiatives."

More rail investment locally is "further down the road," Fletcher said.

But Cree said he has seen encouraging signs during discussions between the proponents and various government officials on both sides of the border. The proponents have lobbied hard in the U.S., where there has been growing investment in rail.

"I think governments on both sides see the need and value for their respective national economies," he said. "We know the bridge is most important and all this has to be sorted out at the senior levels.

"We feel the willingness has been there to discuss (funding for) the project. We think the national significance is too important and the time for this is right."

Once construction is underway it will take about 18 months to complete the tunnel, which would be created using a custom-made boring machine. Cree guessed in a best-case scenario the tunnel would open sometime in 2016.

It has been estimated the rail tunnel project would create between 1,700 to 2,200 direct or indirect jobs during construction.

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