



Developing a hub

Is the regional maritime industry looking to maximize from the Gordie Howe International Bridge?

STEVE SALMONS, *President & CEO, Windsor Port Authority*

Just think about these numbers:

- \$5.7 billion project value spanning two nations
- 2,500 construction jobs
- 25,000 truckloads of concrete (lined up end-end, they stretch from Windsor to Chicago)
- 22,000 metric tons of Canadian and U.S. steel

- 5,000 metric tons of cabling—the weight of 2,500 Windsor-built mini-vans

By every measure and perspective, these are mega-project numbers and the very definition of economic prosperity.

The new Gordie Howe International Bridge (GHIB), adding a second bridge connecting the highways of Ontario and Michigan, at the busiest trade crossing in North America, is so much more than this. It presents an opportunity for immediate and temporary project benefits, as well as for the future prosperity of both Canada and the United States.

Here in Ontario, and Michigan/Ohio/Indiana, and beyond, we have a question to ask ourselves and answer:

What is the Gordie Howe International Bridge project?

Will the new GHIB be an economic lifeline, or economic bypass?

The Windsor-Detroit crossing has more trade crossing its international border than all other crossings in Ontario combined. In fact, more than 60 percent of the province of Quebec's trade with the U.S. travels through Windsor-Detroit. Each day, more than 10,000 trucks and 4,000 cars cross the border at this trade nexus. All this using just four lanes of capacity and at a single point of crossing—the Ambassador Bridge.

The need for increased capacity and redundancy of this critical logistical node is obvious. A second crossing, not a re-

placement, is essential.

The new GHIB will be the longest cable-stayed bridge in North America, and the largest infrastructure project in Canada. Spanning some 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) end to end, 853 meters (0.5 miles) pier-pier, the bridge will tower 72 stories into the sky, equal with the tallest buildings in Detroit and more than twice as high as the Ambassador Bridge. The largest processing plazas in Canada and the U.S. will connect the 401 in Ontario and the I-74, I-94 and I-96 in Michigan.

Scheduled for completion at the end of 2024, it is being built and fully funded by the Government of Canada.

Economic lifeline or economic bypass?

This once-in-a-century project (the current Ambassador Bridge opened in 1929) will more than double the international transportation capacity between Canada and the U.S. at the Windsor/Detroit border. It will cement this crossing as the most important, unparalleled trade link for a second century.

Port Windsor is a key component to this logistics linkage, in addition to rail and air facilities. It truly creates a one-of-a-kind integrated, international transportation hub on the U.S.-Canada border. But only if we choose to define that future as opportunity, and not simply a host.

As a point of illustration, The Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta is the busiest airport in the United States. It acts as the principle hub to a wheel-and-spoke air transportation system. But it is also the heart of a logistics industry surrounding the airport that has generated hundreds of new businesses, creating thousands of new jobs, all reliant on this hub.

At some point, someone said Atlanta

could be this hub for the continental United States. Being situated on the lower right side of the map, it made no geographic sense. But someone had the strength and courage to envision that future.

Unlike Atlanta, the Windsor-Detroit crossing has geographic advantage. Situated in the center of the Great Lakes, hours closer to the all-important Midwest U.S. market than any other Canadian urban center, it is fully served by road, rail and water—an economic planner's dream design.

Defining the future

And so, what is to be done to capture this advantage, to grab a hold and optimize this economic lifeline?

This community, and communities up and down the 401 corridors, need to begin to discuss and debate the development of a hub of hubs that is being made possible by this transportation infrastructure. We need to define the advantages and possibilities derived from an integrated network of roads, rail and marine.

We need to think of this in terms of an integrated network of international linkages with the U.S. because our economies are so intertwined—essentially one. More so, if we don't choose to develop infrastructure into growth, you can be sure the entrepreneurial spirit of America will.

Once again, I ask—economic lifeline or economic bypass? It will be too late in 2025, once the GHIB opens for operations, to begin this discussion. By then, trade networks will begin to form and reform. There will be those who today see this advancing opportunity and will be ready to grab the lead. In effect, 2025 may be too late to make up lost ground.

The answer is best sought out now. Today. That is how we will define our own future. ■