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THE WINDSOR STAR

WINDSOR STAR

Bridge funding one of three big bonuses in budget for Windsor-Essex, Francis says

Chris Thompson

If he didn't know any better, Mayor Eddie Francis says he might have guessed that Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Finance Minister Jim Flaherty had roots in Windsor after Tuesday's budget.

Francis said Windsor and Essex County scored a \$1 billion trifecta in the budget with \$631 million committed over two years to the Detroit River International Crossing, \$500 million over two years for the Automotive Innovation Fund, and potentially millions more in the form of retraining and apprenticeship investments.

"If I didn't know any better I'd think Flaherty and Harper have Windsor roots," said Francis.

"And I say that giving them the credit they deserve, because they (federal politicians) often don't get it. They are the first government to give money to the bridge, and that goes back to the parkway."

Flaherty made specific mention of a new bridge in his budget speech.

"Our investment in the new Windsor-Detroit crossing means Canadian goods will get to market faster, allowing businesses to grow, expand trade and help secure a prosperous future," he said.

The Windsor-Detroit trade corridor handles roughly 30 per cent of Canada-U.S. trade by truck, the government estimates.

Essex Conservative MP Jeff Watson said he was "10 feet off the ground" after learning the contents of the budget, which was confidential even to caucus until Flaherty rose in the House.

"It's a good budget for our region," said Watson.

"Budgets by their nature are secret documents. This is one of those things where you work hard in pre-budget and you try to move ideas forward and then it's kind of like Christmas, you wait to see what's under the tree."

Watson said the \$631 million commitment will allow the process to be fast-tracked on the U.S. side.

"It's presumably to include everything from land acquisitions, pre-construction, moving hydro locations," said Watson.

"There's a lot of work that has to be done on the U.S. side. So that's a significant investment that will really kickstart the project to get it from what at one time was a long-off idea to a much more imminent reality. Ten to 15,000 construction jobs are now on the horizon, instead of way off. That's going to be significantly welcome news for our region."

But Windsor West NDP MP Brian Masse said that while he's happy to see the new crossing project moving forward, there are too many remaining questions.

"I'm glad it's moving forward but this is related to exceptional circumstances related to having to finance the Michigan side, and one of the things I will be looking for is a repayment schedule and the rate of return, and the duration estimates for the allocation of funds," said Masse.

"Clearly what's happened is the Conservatives have been focused on a pipe dream in Keystone in Washington, spending all their attention on that, and not focusing on real physical infrastructure in terms of the Detroit gateway."

Masse said that for this and other reasons he will not be supporting the budget.

"I can't support this budget," Masse said.

"There's lots of reasons. They're backed into a corner of having to provide funding for the Michigan side of the border. It's come at a late cost."



Masse fears Canada stuck paying for DRIC's customs plaza in Detroit

Dave Battagello

Canada's transportation minister Lisa Raitt stated Wednesday the federal government expects Washington to pay \$250 million for its own customs plaza in Detroit for the new downriver bridge, despite concerns raised in Ottawa by local MP Brian Masse.

"Canada has committed to paying its fair share," she said in a statement to The Star. "Clearly the United States government is responsible for paying for its own Port of Entry and customs plaza.

"Canada will continue to urge the U.S. government to fund its Port of Entry."

But Masse believes the signed agreement for the planned \$2-billion Detroit River International Crossing project spells out Canada will pay for all plazas should funds not be secured from the U.S. federal budget.

In a letter he hand-delivered to Raitt this week, he cited Article IX Section 4 of the agreement which states "(Canada) would ultimately be responsible for land acquisitions, design, construction, maintenance and finance of a U.S. federal plaza unless U.S. federal agencies 'agree' to take on the responsibility."

Windsor West MP Brian Masse speaks at a news conference in Windsor on Feb. 14, 2014. (DAX MELMER/The Windsor Star)

"What if the appropriate U.S. federal agencies do not agree?" said Masse in his letter. "The omission of any dedicated funding for the U.S. customs plaza in the 2015 U.S. federal budget suggests that such agreement is not secured."

Canada has already agreed to pay the state of Michigan's share of the DRIC bridge project - roughly \$550 million - so Masse is concerned the number may jump up to \$800 million should the customs plaza in Detroit also be covered by the federal government.

While he supports construction of the DRIC bridge, Masse explained in an interview Wednesday he just wants transparency from the government if the U.S. customs plaza is also going to be paid for by Canada.

"It's almost like we are playing poker with our cards facing the other way," he said. "If they don't pay for the plaza, we actually have to pay for it."

Raitt responded Tuesday during the question period in Ottawa to Masse: "We are committed to paying our fair share and we expect as well that the United States will pay and be responsible for its share. We will continue to talk with our partners in the U.S., and we will continue to work on this bridge."

"Her response didn't dismiss any of that," Masse said. "The issue is open for us having to pay."

"I think the questions I'm asking are reasonable in terms of our Canadian money. There has been a lot of push by the government to keep this project going, but that doesn't mean there shouldn't be transparency. People should know where the funds are going."

Raitt was in Washington last week where she met with U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson.

DRIC bridge backers have expressed fears unless funds are committed this year by Washington for the U.S. customs plaza in Detroit, the start of DRIC bridge construction will likely be delayed and its projected 2020 completion date will be



No local talent on New DRIC bridge executive teams

Some concerned region's voice will not be represented

Dave Battagello, The Windsor Star

There is plenty of financial expertise, but nobody local among nine people named Wednesday to oversee construction and operation of the planned Detroit River bridge.

"Having someone local would have been ideal, although this is a national infrastructure project and there is no question here they did draw from the nation," said former MPP Sandra Pupatello, now CEO of the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation.

"But this has been our border crossing for decades and there are many people here just as qualified and who have the credentials."

Michael Cautillo of Toronto was named as CEO of the new Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority (WDBA) - the managerial body for the Detroit River International Crossing.

He has been a consultant on the project the past eight years with the financial firm Deloitte and has extensive experience in working on major infrastructure projects, including Highway 407 during 23 years spent with Ontario's transportation ministry.

Mark McQueen, also of Toronto, has been named chairman of the authority which will grow up to five members. He is president and CEO of Wellington Financial and been involved with the Toronto Port Authority and Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

Caroline Mulrone Lapham, daughter of former prime minister Brian Mulrone, has been appointed as director within the WDBA.

The authority's fourth member is William Graham, president of South Winds Development, a land development company in the London area.

A fifth member will be added at a future date.

A binational six-member International Authority - three each from Canada and the United States - was also named Wednesday.

They have the responsibility of ensuring the Canada-Michigan agreement to build the DRIC bridge is followed.

That group includes Kristine Burr, a former assistant deputy minister with Transport Canada, and Genevieve Gagnon, president of Montreal-based logistics firm XTL Transport.

The third Canadian to be on that body has not yet been named, holding out hope by some it will be a local representative.

"The remaining Canadian appointment to the International Authority will be made by the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority," said Mark Butler of Transport Canada. "That appointment will be forthcoming soon.

"We are still looking at candidates for the final appointment to the WDBA board of directors and expect that vacancy to also be filled shortly."

Local MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor-West) called it "extremely disappointing" there is not a locally appointed person. He represents the riding where the DRIC bridge will be located.

"Nothing against any individual on the board, but you want to have someone with a rock-solid understanding of the burdens of the border in this community as it's related to quality of life," Masse said.

"If this crossing does not operate at 100 per efficiency that will spill out into this community. (The appointees) are completely void of all the history and meetings we've had in schools or churches in dealing with these border issues."

According to the job posting last November, the CEO of the new authority will earn between \$210,600 and \$247,700 and the chairman will be a part-time paid position. That salary will range from \$6,400 to \$7,500 with a per diem of between \$200 and \$300. Each member of the authority will also be paid a per diem for each meeting attended.

The bridge authority will oversee the construction, operation and maintenance of the bridge. That includes preparing the sites and managing the procurement process to select a private-sector partner that will carry out the work. The authority will also set and collect tolls.

Masse indicated at the very least someone connected to the Big Three automakers also should be in a decision-making role given how they are the primary users of the crossing and the economic importance of just-in-time delivery.

Among those interested to sit on the DRIC boards is Ross Clarke, a Windsor businessman who was among the first to promote the same Brighton Beach location for a bridge as leader of the former Mich-Can International Bridge.

He was also scratching his head Wednesday over the lack of anyone local being on either board, although he said it might be "resolved" when the final Canadian appointments to each authority get named.

"It is a bit of a surprise," he said. "I understand why they went Canada-wide for someone with qualifications to be (CEO), but the board is different.

"I was disappointed the government wouldn't see that someone who can provide local community input should be there."

But Clarke did applaud going in the direction of having a vast array of financial and economic experience on the team.

Since the Canadian government will be responsible for covering any financial shortfalls when the bridge is up and running, it will be crucial to have "financial controls" through the DRIC's planned public-private sector partnership to protect the interest of taxpayers on such a major project, he said.

The closest local connection on the executive team is on the U.S. side of the International Authority through Matt Rizik of the Detroit area.

He is a chief tax officer and top executive with Rock Ventures - the corporate entity under Detroit billionaire Dan Gilbert.

Also named by Gov. Rick Snyder was Michael Hayes of Midland, Mich., a former vicepresident for Dow Chemical, and Birgit Klohs, a CEO of the Right Place, an economic development group in the Grand Rapids area.

Both Snyder and Canada's Transport Minister Lisa Raitt used strong language Wednesday on how the DRIC bridge will be completed by its scheduled opening date in 2020.

"2020 is the timeline, but as I said to the new directors today, I'd be more than happy to be announcing that it's an earlier opening," Raitt said. "It's in their hands now to 'git 'er done.'"

Added Snyder: "The next step is land acquisition and larger request for quotations for proposals. This is moving along. I'm confident we are on a timeline to get this bridge built." dbattagello@windsorstar.com ILLUSTRATION: Nick Brancaccio, The Windsor Star / Transport Minister Lisa Raitt and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder announce executive teams for the Windsor-Detroit bridge project at a news conference Wednesday in Windsor. "This is moving along. I'm confident we are on a timeline to get this bridge built," Snyder said.; Nick Brancaccio, The Windsor Star / Mayor Eddie Francis, left, chats with Caroline Mulroney who was named a director of Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority by Transport Minister Lisa Raitt and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder on Wednesday.;



'Momentous' border deal announced

Goal is to clear check points, speed up travel

Doug Schmidt, The Windsor Star, Canadian Press

Anchoring one end of North America's busiest border crossing, Windsor and its economy could benefit big-time from Monday's "historic" announcement of a customs preclearance agreement between Canada and United States.

"It's going to facilitate both tourism and trade - it's a positive step forward," said Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce.

"The potential benefit here is that it positions Windsor as a trading and tourism hub," Marchand added.

About \$2 billion a day in trade - almost a third of total trade between Canada and the U.S. - flows through Windsor and Detroit via bridge, tunnel and rail. "This momentous occasion ... will advance the shared interest in perimeter security and economic competitiveness for our two countries," U.S.

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said at a signing ceremony in Washington D.C. The new deal could lead to wide-ranging changes at the border, among them: allowing armed customs agents to screen travellers on the other country's soil. It would take a pre-clearance customs system already in place for passengers at Canada's biggest airports and apply them to those travelling by car, truck, train, bus and ship.

The goal, under the 2011 Beyond the Border deal between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and President Barack Obama, is to clear border choke points and speed up travel in an era of tightened security.

Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney, who signed for Canada, said there were "a number of challenging hurdles" that had to be overcome but that the agreement respects the sovereignty and the laws of both countries.

"The more efficient you get (at the border), the less of a barrier it becomes for trade," said Essex Conservative MP Jeff Watson. The agreement will help speed up the flow of people, goods and services, which, he added, "is critical to our ability to compete."

Marchand said customs preclearance was something being pushed by the Windsor mayor's office when he was employed there back in the 1990s.

Back then, it was the sheer volume of border traffic; now, with less travellers crossing than in the years before the 9-11 terrorist attacks, it's the delays that come with stepped-up security requirements.

The business community is celebrating the agreement, which must still be formalized in legislation and then approved by Canada's Parliament and the U.S. Congress.

"It's dramatic, it's historic, it's a big day in Canada-U. S. relations," said Maryscott Greenwood of the Canadian American Business Council. "This agreement will facilitate travel and enhance cross-border commercial ties," said John Manley, president and CEO of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the senior voice of Canada's business community and representing 150 chief executives and leading entrepreneurs.

"The expanded pre-clearance agreement should help move goods across our border much more efficiently and securely," Canadian Manufacturers Exporters president and CEO Jayson Myers said in a statement.

While any real changes on the ground are likely still years away, Marchand said the initiative "dovetails nicely" with the

new international bridge on the horizon in Windsor. This area will get a competitive trading advantage due to the new border infrastructure and technology requirements being able to be built in, he said.

"Windsor-Detroit will become the pre-eminent trading area in North America - it's good news for the region," Marchand said.

While seeing the potential - although the details are still missing - local MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor-West) said that, "the reality is, nothing is going to change at our border for quite some time."

And at a time when both countries are cutting back on customs and border

"I'm not jumping operational spending, Masse wonders where, up and down on if any, of the necessary this one." new funding will brian masse be found.

"We have empty booths now and a lack of funding that, (if restored), could immediately shorten wait times," he said.

"I'm not jumping up and down on this one ... it's not a reality any time soon," said Masse. "What we need is action now."

Monday's agreement comes more than two years after a deadline set out in the 2011 Beyond the Border action plan. Among the thorniest issues in getting to this week, said Watson, was agreement on border officers being able to carry weapons on foreign soil, and then coming to an understanding of how each country's laws are applied to those customs enforcers.

American officers, for example, won't have powers to arrest in Canada, but they will have the right to detain until Canadian law enforcers arrive. Foreign agents must also respect the host country's laws, including, on Canadian soil, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

With about 210,000 passengers ferried across the border last year, Transit Windsor executive director Pat Delmore is hoping any changes will help speed up the travel process through the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel.

A customs pre-clearance pilot project was just recently completed at the Peace Bridge crossing, with U.S.-bound trucks going through initial inspection on the Canadian side. The results, expected in July, will help determine how pre-clearance might work in Windsor-Detroit.

The new agreement might also add momentum to efforts over the past several years to re-establish a commuter ferry across the Detroit River. dschmidt@windsorstar.com twitter.com/schmidtcity

online windsorstar.com Watch a video from the signing of the new border deal. ILLUS: Dax Melmer, The Windsor Star / Almost a third of the approximately \$2 billion a day in trade between Canada and the U.S. flows through Windsor and Detroit via the Ambassador Bridge, tunnel and rail, said Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chambers of Commerce.;

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Cyclists demand space on new international bridge

Doug Schmidt

Don't forget about us, cyclists are urging those who are drawing up bridge plans for the new \$2.1-billion Detroit River International Crossing.

"We don't get to build many bridges - we are firmly, strongly in support of installing bike lanes," said Darren Winger of the advocacy group Bike Friendly Windsor-Essex.(<http://bikefriendlywindsor.com/>)

"We did the research, and there are a ton of bridges with bike lanes ... we need to create enough space to make that happen," said Windsor West MP Brian Masse.

Winger and Masse are two local voices making presentations Wednesday on the second day of this year's Ontario Bike Summit in Toronto. Both see biking possibilities for the new DRIC bridge as an issue of importance beyond just the local region.

Masse said Detroit is "massively investing" in bicycle infrastructure, and with multi-use trails coming to the new Herb Gray Parkway with a connection to the Chrysler Greenway, as well as work underway on the Windsor Loop bike ring, "there is such incredible potential for social, economic and cultural opportunities."

Winger said that, with so many bicycling events now in Windsor and Detroit, like the Tweed Ride, Bike the Bridge and Tour de Troit, American cycling enthusiasts "are always asking me - what about the bridge?"

The tourism potential is huge, said Winger and Masse, among about 300 delegates at this week's summit.

"I think we're trending in the right direction - we could be the Amsterdam or Copenhagen of Canada," Winger said of Windsor's long-term potential. With the wineries and neighbourhoods like Olde Sandwich, Walkerville and Via Italia, all accessible to cyclists for much of the year, "why wouldn't we open it up to a potential five million additional users?" Masse asked.

"These are creative times," said Masse, who is hoping bridge planners see DRIC as a greater opportunity than just providing a new crossing for trucks.

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CBC.ca: Windsor

Windsor Detroit bridge officials talk bike lanes and cost overruns

Officials overseeing plans for the Gordie Howe International Bridge, on Thursday, addressed concerns about bike lanes, environmental protection and cost overruns of the multi-billion-dollar project.

Dozens of people voiced their concerns at the first annual public meeting of the Windsor Detroit Bridge Authority, which plans to have the new crossing between Canada and the United States complete by 2020.

Protecting Ojibway Shores is a significant concern, according to bridge authority president and CEO Michael Cautillo, who attended the meeting at Mackenzie Hall Cultural Centre.

He said more than 100,000 species of at-risk plants have been relocated and he said that neither of the bridge's piers will be built in the water, so the impact on the river will be minimal.

Other work to preserve natural areas on either side of the bridge is also being considered.

"We're looking at landscaping, we're looking at green areas to try to minimize the impact of living beside a customs facility," Cautillo said.

He couldn't confirm the cost of the project would remain at the projected \$2.1 billion. Government officials have warned that the costs could double to more than \$4 billion because of the falling value of the Canadian dollar.

No matter what the final price tag, though, Cautillo said the successful bidder will have to absorb any cost overruns once they agree on a price.

Bike lanes

Several people at the meeting, including Windsor West MP Brian Masse, were pushing to include bike and pedestrian lanes.

"Having bike lanes and pedestrian access for crossings is the norm, to not do it is an anomaly," he said. "So, this is an important part of making the structure community friendly for all of us."

Officials say they want to include bike lanes on the bridge, but such a feature will be contingent on getting governments on either side of the border to agree.

Security and customs concerns must be addressed before bike lanes could be considered, explained Dwight Duncan, the interim chairman of the bridge authority.

"Ultimately, we're going to have to lobby both governments on either side of the border to accommodate customs and immigration requirements they would have," he said.

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THE WINDSOR STAR

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Complexity delays bridge project

Dave Battagello, The Windsor Star

Questions are being asked on why progress on the Gordie Howe International Bridge project has nearly come to a halt.

"We are getting close to seven months behind expectations of where this should be," said MP Brian Masse (NDP-Windsor-West). "I have been disappointed in (the Trudeau government's) response. There has not been a sufficient answer.

"The public and industry need to be reassured. People are asking 'what are they doing?' and 'what's happening with the bridge file?' It would be nice to hear from someone what is going on."

The long-awaited Detroit River international bridge project - that includes new plazas and a feeder road to link with I-75 in Detroit - got off to a flying start last year, with a chief executive and support staff of nearly 40 engineers, financial experts and legal advisers put in place with the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority (WDBA). A \$50-million early works project to prepare the customs plaza site in Windsor was launched a year ago by WDBA, a government-backed body assigned to oversee construction. The first stage of the bidding process to select a global consortium to build the project was also triggered.

Everything remained on schedule and moving at a quick clip until last fall's federal election and change in government. A short list of three consortiums, from the six which applied, was released in January, but over a month late.

The final bidding phase, known as Request for Proposals (RFP), was to follow within a few weeks. Six months later, the WDBA has not issued the RFP, with no explanation for the delay.

The Howe Bridge project falls under the responsibility of Canada's Infrastructure Minister Amarjeet Sohi. He responded to Masse in the House a couple weeks ago, but provided no answers about the delay, saying the RFP will be released soon.

A call this week to his office in Ottawa resulted in a response from Sohi's press secretary, Brook Simpson.

"Our government remains fully committed to building the Gordie Howe International Bridge," Simpson said. "Nearly 30 per cent of surface trade between Canada and the U.S. goes through Windsor, so this new bridge is vital to accommodate future traffic growth for this important trade corridor."

He would only say release of the RFP will be "in the near term."

Members of the local business community "from time to time" have sought an update on the status of the project, said Matt Marchand, chief executive of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber.

"International infrastructure projects are complex, and things take longer than we hope," he said. "The Windsor-Essex chamber is 100 per cent in support of the project. We need it and look forward to it being completed sooner rather than later."

The project had remained on schedule last year under the Harper government, which appointed Mark McQueen, president of a Bay Street investment firm, to be WDBA chairman. McQueen stepped down shortly after Harper was defeated in the October election. The new Trudeau government appointed longtime local Liberal MPP and former Ontario finance minister Dwight Duncan as WDBA's interim chairman a few weeks later and he still remains on the job.

"In my experience, it falls to the chairman to push government bureaucrats to give WDBA the tools it needs to build this

much-needed bridge," McQueen said Wednesday.

The Howe Bridge "is at risk of never being built" because "bureaucrats can't stop back-seat driving," he said. "If it was up to Treasury Board, they wouldn't have let my board issue the (first stage of bidding) last summer or start construction of the Canadian customs plaza."

He has offered to assist Duncan in whatever way possible, but has never met him or been contacted.

A call Wednesday to Duncan for an explanation for the ongoing RFP delays or why the project appears stalled was deferred to WDBA chief executive Michael Cautillo.

He released a statement that described the Howe Bridge project as a "significant undertaking" involving many partners on both sides of the border.

"It is one of Canada's largest infrastructure projects and will impact the economies of Windsor-Detroit and indeed Canada and United States," Cautillo said. "The procurement process reflects these complexities. We are taking the time required to ensure that the procurement process is done right."

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder had been a major driving force on the Howe Bridge project before his attention was diverted to the Flint water crisis. Michigan lawyer Andy Doctoroff, Snyder's senior adviser on the project, bristled at any suggestion it is behind schedule.

"I am not concerned," he said Wednesday. "There has been phenomenal progress on the RFP. There is no delay and consistent progress is being made."

"The RFP is an extremely complicated document and tons of things have to be resolved. The progress being made is measurable and the project is in good shape."

The Michigan Department of Transportation is handling property acquisition in Detroit to make room for the bridge plaza. Doctoroff would not provide numbers on the percentage acquired to date other than to say "many."

Despite the project's slow pace, "the goal remains 2020" for the bridge to open, he said.

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Hurdles to clear before any bridge work starts

Contractor vows to get going on truck plaza, city says other issues must be dealt with first

Dave Battagello

With the unveiling this week of a \$50-million tender awarded Windsor contractor TCI Titan Contracting, the Ambassador Bridge company vows to get going - possibly in a month - on construction of a new truck inspection plaza for its twin-span project.

But city officials said Thursday there is still much to be done before any bridge work in Windsor can actually be launched given the multitude of permit requirements and utility relocations required first.

"It's fair to say we are at the beginning stages of the process," said city chief administrative officer Onorio Colucci.

"We have had planning meetings (with bridge officials) but nothing substantive. We are quite a ways away from fulfilling requirements as it pertains (to the federal government permit)."

Transport Canada six months ago, when it issued a permit to allow for a twin span, provided a checklist of requirements the bridge company must fulfil before any construction can begin.

Among them was providing concrete plans for a demolition of the existing span, construction of a new fire hall on Windsor's west end and acquiring a section of Huron Church Road from the city.

"Where is their plan for all this?" said local **MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor-West)** who issued a letter Thursday to federal Transport Minister **Marc Garneau** demanding answers.

"There is chaos out there." **Transport Canada** said in an email "specific conditions must be met before construction of the replacement bridge can begin."

"The **Canadian** Transit Company has not yet provided **Transport Canada** officials with documentation confirming they have met these pre-construction conditions," said ministry spokeswoman Annie Joannette.

City of Windsor officials detailed a list of things still to be completed before any bridge company construction can begin.

All abandoned water lines, sewers and gas lines that once serviced former residences in the Indian Road and Mill Street district where the bridge company plans to build its new 9.5-acre truck inspection plaza have to be removed first from the ground, said city chief building official John Revell.

Under the approved twin-span plan, a section of Huron Church Road that travels under the current bridge must be obtained from the city, shifted and reconstructed.

Discussions to build a new fire hall on the west end have only just started, Revell said.

Preliminary meetings have been held with bridge officials that have "so far been a good experience," Revell said.

Colucci listed two comprehensive planning meetings, plus a couple "side meetings" with various departments as having taken place to date with officials from the bridge company. But any talk of bridge construction starting in Windsor in a month "is not realistic in our view," Colucci said.

"Everyone is co-operating, but we are in the very early stages of the process," he said.

"There are matters related to city infrastructure that need to be resolved."

Should the bridge company attempt to launch construction without proper permits, "we will deal with issues as they come

about," said Colucci.

He added, however, that "we have been working in a spirit of co-operation and hope that continues."

Bridge officials did not respond Thursday to messages from the Star, but the president of Titan Contracting - retained by Ambassador Bridge owner Matty Moroun - indicated his firm will start construction in about a month if all permissions are in place.

Titan has been hired to build a new truck inspection plaza just west of the current bridge exit in Windsor, construct a new two-storey, 60,000-square-foot **Canada Border Services Agency** secondary inspection building on site, new inspection booths, handle all utility relocation, plus create a greenspace buffer between the new plaza and nearby homes.

"Our goal is to complete everything in two years from start to finish," said Art Ussoletti, president of Titan Contracting. "It's aggressive, but that's the goal everybody is trying to work towards."

His company has been busy lining up construction workers and skilled trades people to get the plaza project off the ground, he said.

Ussoletti expects anywhere from 500 to 1,000 workers will at some point be on site working on the bridge plaza project.

He believes the utility relocation can occur simultaneous to construction getting started on the new truck inspection plaza and that's why his company can start work in a month.

"I think the Morouns have made it clear they want to work with the city on whatever needs to be done and get things going," Ussoletti said.

None of the work for which his company has been retained includes actual construction of a new span across the Detroit River.

The Moroun family has proposed building a new six-lane bridge across the Detroit River just metres west of the existing 88-year-old four-lane crossing.

Securing final permission last fall from **Transport Canada** - the final major permit required - was a shock to many local residents since the **Canadian** government has been heavily involved in building its own nearby international border span - the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

"It's an exciting time to be a Windsorite and we are proud to be involved in helping the Ambassador Bridge put its best forward," Ussoletti said. dbattagello@postmedia.com

Photo: Jason Kryk / An area near the Ambassador Bridge is being cleared to make way for the new span between Windsor and Detroit. A \$50-million tender has been awarded to TCI Titan Contracting for construction of a new truck inspection plaza for the twin-span project.;

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China link may be issue for bid on Howe Bridge

Aecon, a key partner in one consortium, in process of selling majority ownership

Dave Battagello

A company that's involved in bidding on the Gordie Howe Bridge has come under scrutiny for its ties to a Chinese conglomerate.

Questions are being raised about whether Aecon, one of the three short-listed consortiums vying to build the new crossing between Windsor and Detroit, should remain as a bidder on the Gordie Howe International Bridge project since it is in the midst of a takeover by a Chinese conglomerate.

The Toronto-based company is one of more than a dozen firms which have joined forces to form the consortium Bridging North America in an effort to land the bridge contract from the Canadian government.

The majority control of Aecon was sold last fall to a Chinese firm known as China Communications Construction International Holding Ltd. The Canadian government must approve the takeover, but it has been pending for several months while a review is underway.

The deal has been criticized and the possibility Aecon will have to remove itself from its multinational bidding team on the bridge project has been raised. Local **MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor-West)** in February asked in the **House of Commons** what Aecon's takeover would mean for the Howe bridge project.

"You are talking about security issues, completion issues, also jobs and types of materials that might be used on the border crossing," Masse said on Monday.

The winning consortium will not only build the Howe bridge project, but will also be responsible for operating the crossing for the next 30 years. It's that factor which has raised concerns that a Chinese-controlled company would be privy to movement of goods and other confidential security information related to a **Canada-U.S.** border crossing.

A decision on who will build the bridge - which includes the crossing, plazas and feeder roads in Detroit to link with the I-75 freeway in Detroit - is expected to be made within the next few months by the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority.

A final contract with financial terms will then be negotiated and slated to be in place this fall with construction to be launched soon afterwards.

There are also concerns about how the U.S. government will react to a Chinese-controlled company being part of the construction and operating team for the Howe bridge. Relations have been tense between the two nations and a tariff war launched in recent weeks has exacerbated the situation.

Bridge authority officials would not say much Monday about Aecon or the consortium - which includes companies such as Fluor **Canada**, ACS Infrastructure and a handful of others that were involved with the **Herb Gray Parkway**.

"I won't speak to speculation regarding a possible change in members in any of the short-listed proponents' teams," said Mark Butler, spokesman for the bridge authority.

"I can say that all of the proponents are required to comply with all applicable Canadian and U.S. laws and regulations."

The bridge authority has "robust integrity provisions" which all the global consortiums are expected to follow during bidding, he said.

"As the Gordie Howe International Bridge project is a bi-national project, both **Canada** and the United States have input as to whether to do business with a potential contractor," Butler said.

Messages left with a spokeswoman for Aeon in Toronto were not returned on Monday, but the company issued a statement in February to address what it called "misleading information" about the potential change in ownership.

"Following the close of the proposed transaction with CCCC, Aeon will continue to be led by its Canadian management team and will operate according to the company's long-held values in full compliance with all applicable laws and regulations in **Canada**," said the statement by the company's CEO John Beck. dbattagello@postmedia.com

Photo: / Brian Masse; / John Beck;

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As money flows for Howe bridge, Masse angry community benefits delayed

There has been \$630 million budgeted for the Gordie Howe International Bridge project to date, leaving local **MP Brian Masse** wondering exactly when the first dollar under community benefits will be spent to assist residents in Sandwich.

"Now would be good," said Masse (**NDP-Windsor-West**). "How many more days will the people in Sandwich - which has some of the highest child poverty rates - not see any benefits from this massive construction project going on a kilometre away?"

They asked for a quarter billion with no thoughts provided when they will provide community benefits to the public

Community benefits are a mandatory requirement under the \$5.7-billion bridge project. The project's contractor, Bridging North America, will spend \$20 million to aid host communities on both sides of the border.

Officials from the **Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority** were in **Ottawa** on Nov. 20 appearing before the standing committee of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities seeking final approval for an advance \$283.6 million - a required step to receive the latest budgeted instalment from the \$630 million of federal funds for the bridge project.

MP Brian Masse speaks at a press conference on Thursday, October 11, 2018.

"They asked for a quarter billion with no thoughts provided when they will provide community benefits to the public," said Masse, who attended the committee hearing.

"What they have promoted is more listening and discussions (on community benefits) when they have already been bulldozing on the west end for two years. It's pretty bold to expect the community to live with these consequences."

WDBA officials were in **Ottawa** last week to advance the latest instalment, which will cover project and construction costs, as well as the bridge authority's operating costs, said Mark Butler, WDBA spokesman. The funding request was unanimously approved by the committee.

"This funding is important to ensure that our critical path for the preparatory activities is met and that the works are completed in time for our private-sector partner (BNA) to stage their construction activities," Butler said.

WDBA's anticipated total funding for 2018-19 from the federal government is anticipated to be about \$480 million, he said.

Mark Butler, director of communications for the **Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority** attends Massey Day at the University of Windsor Engineering school on April 27, 2017.

The original 2012 crossing agreement for the Howe bridge project signed by Canada and Michigan outlined how a community benefits plan was to be included, Butler said.

"The plan will be delivered by Bridging North America with stringent oversight by WDBA," he said.

Given the community's request to "participate in the finalization of the community benefits plan," there will be further consultation in the upcoming months, Butler said.

WDBA is "targeting finalization of the plan in the first quarter of 2019," he said.

"Once the plan is finalized, steps toward implementing the plan will begin," Butler said.

The WDBA has primarily been working with a community benefits coalition on the west end that was formed to help gather ideas and which submitted a preliminary report to the bridge authority a year ago on possible requests.

The group has held roughly a dozen meetings to help narrow down priorities, said Frazier Fathers of United Way/Centraide, a member group of the coalition.

Economic development opportunities, job training, environmental protection, community rehabilitation in Sandwich and improved design features were among ideas requested by the coalition, he said.

"One piece they have not discussed is a legacy fund," Fathers said. "This is a 100-year project and it would be nice to have a little bit doled out (for the community) every year. We don't know what the community will need in 2050 when the bridge is still up and running."

With so many ideas on the table, there needs to be a bit more conversation for residents in Sandwich to "prioritize what is most important to them" and then spending on community benefits will hopefully occur quickly, he said.

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Local politician against Michigan **legislation** that allows hazardous waste across Ambassador Bridge

A local politician is raising alarm bells after Michigan officials voted to allow trucks carrying hazardous material to cross the Ambassador Bridge - an activity that goes against safety restrictions in place since the bridge opened.

Republican senators in Michigan passed changes to the state's COVID-19 Supplemental Appropriation legislature earlier this month that included allowing highly flammable and corrosive material to flow across the bridge.

This is something that environmental groups and some politicians on both sides of the border have long opposed.

"It's not only just about the hazardous materials, the trucks and the toxicity going on the bridge and the vulnerability with the aged infrastructure that can't cope with spills, fires, or turnovers, it's also in our neighbourhoods, we're re-introducing more trucks to city streets or we're re-introducing more dangers to ordinary citizens," **NDP MP Brian Masse** told CBC News.

Masse said that rules have been in place since 1929 to stop this sort of activity from happening.

In response to a letter Masse sent to the Minister of Transportation **Marc Garneau**, the government said it will make it a priority to look into what consequences the change on the American side of the border could have on Windsor's transportation system.

Currently trucks with hazardous goods are shipped across on ferries, which meets proper standards, Masse said.

The Ambassador Bridge Company has made repeated attempts over the years to allow hazardous materials to cross the bridge, but Masse is calling on the government to make sure that doesn't happen.

The Ambassador Bridge Company did not respond to a request for comment.

"Unfortunately there is a gap in some of our laws with regards to the movement of dangerous materials and hazardous goods. Federally, there are some laws on the international bridge and tunnel act - I've asked for that to be reviewed," Masse said.

Michigan State Senator of district 1, Stephanie Chang, who represents areas near the bridge, is mounting a similar effort on the American side.

She told CBC News that those who brought the bill forward relied on an old and incomplete report that is likely not legal.

"Our first priority now is really to work with the governor's office to ensure that this language [in Michigan's COVID Supplemental Appropriation] does not get enforced," Chang said. "And then one of the things that is very disappointing, unfortunately not that surprising, is that the proponents of this language appear to not have actually consulted with the Canadians on this at all."

In an emailed comment Thursday, the Ministry of Transportation said minister Caroline Mulroney "had a productive conversation with the Mayor of Windsor" and that they "expect the **federal** government to take a leadership role on this issue."

Photo: A truck heads towards the Ambassador Bridge. Michigan politicians have passed **legislation** that could allow hazardous waste to be carried across the border.

Credit: Carlos Osorio/Reuters

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Michigan governor nixes hazmat trucks on bridge

Brian Cross

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has crossed out a provision, tucked into a COVID relief bill, that would have allowed hazmat trucks on the Ambassador Bridge for the first time in 91 years.

The hazardous materials provision was one of 11 provisions subjected to line item vetoes as Whitmer signed Enrolled Senate Bill 748 on Tuesday morning.

"It's all stricken out and Whitmer's signature is right after it," MP **Brian Masse** said later in the day after receiving an emailed copy of the signed bill. "The governor has fixed the problem."

Masse rang the alarm bells last week after learning the provision had been included in the bill - intended to provide financial help to many Michiganders suffering due to COVID restrictions - and passed by the state senate the previous Friday. His letter alerting Canada's Transport Minister **Marc Garneau** of the surprise change to regulations forbidding hazardous materials on the bridge brought an immediate response. **Transport Canada** officials met the next day with officials representing Whitmer, who still had to sign the bill.

"I really give a lot of credit to Brian and the mayor (Drew Dilken) for speaking out on this so quickly because it was timed to be at a time that was very inconvenient for everybody, in the middle of the holidays and kind of in the dark of night," said Gregg Ward, owner of the Detroit-Windsor Truck Ferry, which is permitted to transport trucks carrying hazardous materials across the river.

The issue only came to light when Michigan state Sen. Stephanie Chang (D - Detroit), who represents neighbourhoods around the Ambassador Bridge, discovered the Ambassador Bridge provision - allowing certain hazardous materials - in the bill and voted against it, despite the bill's overall good intent.

"Allowing these types of hazardous materials to be transported across the Ambassador Bridge - a bridge that is over 90 years old, not up to the same level of inspections, traffic safety features, spill containment, or fire suppression systems needed to protect my residents'safety - is downright dangerous," Chang wrote in a commentary in the Detroit Free Press.

An attempt to reach an Ambassador Bridge spokesman Tuesday was not successful.

Ward said the owners of the bridge have invested a lot of money in lobbying, "so I don't think they'll crawl off and accept defeat." bcross@postmedia.com

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Protest group continues to cause havoc for Ambassador Bridge traffic

Dave Battagello

Protests for the third day in a row at the Ambassador Bridge brought traffic at the busiest border crossing in North America to a virtual standstill Tuesday, with business and political leaders denouncing the ongoing truck blockade as unfairly hurtful to Canadian business and citizens.

The head of the Windsor chamber of commerce called actions by protesters blocking traffic at the Ambassador Bridge "completely unacceptable" on Tuesday noting the harm already created for many businesses locally and beyond due to COVID-19 and various lockdowns.

"Many businesses have been through so much in the last two years," said Rakesh Naidu, CEO for the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. "This couldn't come at a worse time. To constrict the border like this will impact everyone not just in Windsor, but Ontario and Canada. You have thousands of businesses that rely on the border and trade coming through. You have inventory based on just-in-time delivery.

"Any disruption of supply can lead to shifts being cancelled and if it continues, closing operations. All of that doesn't just impact the businesses in all the different sectors, but consumers like you and me. This is not just manufacturing, but goods we all consume as well, like fresh produce, or chemicals and fuel that we need."

Protests against vaccine mandates at Windsor's Ambassador Bridge were relatively muted on Tuesday morning after traffic and crowds blocked access to the border crossing on Monday - but still the blockade continued.

In a bid to control traffic, Windsor police had closed off or were directing traffic near Wyandotte Street and the intersections around College Avenue and Huron Church Road to Tecumseh Road.

Small groups of protestors gathered in the road at Huron Church Road and College Avenue. Few of the vehicles were transport trucks.

The Ambassador Bridge is a vital trade artery between Canada and the U.S. Many essential workers, including frontline health care workers, rely on it to get to work. Police are on the scene to ensure traffic is moving safely.

- Doug Ford (@fordnation) February 8, 2022

Several protestors declined to speak with the Windsor Star.

As of 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, no traffic was allowed onto the bridge from the Detroit side, but there was some availability in Windsor going into the U.S. with access from Wyandotte Street for both cars and some truck traffic, according to Randy Spader, the bridge's general manager.

Ambassador Bridge owner Matt Moroun released a statement Tuesday morning calling for enforcement action to allow traffic to flow.

"International commerce needs to resume," Moroun said. "The Ambassador Bridge and the Moroun family sympathize with truck drivers and those caught up in this blockade. We recognize truck drivers are essential workers that work hard to deliver necessities to all of us and that the Canadian government has done a tremendous job with vaccine rates.

"The Ambassador Bridge has a solemn obligation to facilitate safe and efficient international trade and travel. We encourage the appropriate officials to take prompt action to alleviate the situation as quickly as possible in a manner that reflects mutual respect."

Anti-mandate protestors are shown near the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor on Tuesday, February 8, 2022.

Naidu said the local chamber was coordinating with its provincial and federal counterparts to form an action plan dealing with the protest in Windsor.

"This group has a right to protest, but not at the cost of people's livelihoods. You also have a number of medical professionals that commute (to Detroit) and use the bridge. If they cannot reach work on time, it may impact people's lives.

"Common sense should prevail here. I urge protesters to find a better way to do this than disruption of supply and trade."

Diane Cross, spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Transportation, said at its worst on Monday night trucks and other traffic heading for the Ambassador Bridge was backed up for over 10 kilometres on both I-75 and I-96 freeways.

She said MDOT and police in Michigan have since shut down all entrances indefinitely leading to the bridge on I-75, I-96 and Lodge freeways. Electronic signage on all nearby freeways is also being used by MDOT to notify the bridge heading from Detroit into Windsor remains closed.

"There are some trucks on the shoulder and some cars affecting flow once they are realizing they can't get off the on the exits to the bridge," Cross said.

MDOT does provide live cameras online for anyone who wishes to take a look at the current road situation on the U.S. side near the bridge or Detroit-Windsor tunnel which as on 11 a.m. did not have any excessive backup of traffic. The cameras can be found online at michigan.gov/drive and utilizing the camera icon.

I am closely monitoring the situation at the Ambassador Bridge. I have reached out to Minister @C_Mulroney to see how we can be of assistance.

- **Omar Alghabra** (@OmarAlghabra) February 8, 2022

Over 100,000 employees in the automotive parts, tool sector and other industry suppliers are being impacted by the protest choking bridge traffic in Windsor, said Flavio Volpe, president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association.

"Nobody is panicking that's the first thing," he said on Tuesday. "They knew there was potential (for the protest). We have been in contact with provincial and federal officials on movement of goods. What we are looking for is the law to be enforced. It's really that simple."

He emphasized what's occurring in Windsor on Huron Church is by no means "a trucker protest."

"This stopped having anything to do with truckers a long time ago," Volpe said. "The grievances of these activists have moved from vaccination to American style freedom declarations. They appear to want government to step down and some council belonging to them given control to run the country. That's not smart."

An anti-mandate vehicle is shown near the Canadian inspection booths at the Ambassador Bridge on Tuesday, February 8, 2022.

"Everybody has a right to protest - go to Queen's Park or Parliament. But if you park something that impedes a border crossing you are subject to consequences the law dictates. That's part of the deal."

"You are talking about \$50 million in goods (each day) from Canadian factories and the same amount coming the other way. The moral legitimacy of this protest ends at the door when you are risking layoffs of hundreds of thousands of people. Trying to inspire people to join a movement when you forced them home without pay is not a good idea."

Local **MP Brian Masse** (NDP - Windsor-West) whose riding includes the bridge criticized the federal government on Tuesday for not preparing ahead of time for the potential impact on the bridge by protesters.

"Who didn't see this coming?," he said.

"This is an international border crossing and number one economic bloodline for our country. It's not just here, but in Sarnia or Niagara Falls. There was no planning or support on this by the government for any of the border communities. This is our number one trading partner and for heaven's sake why has it been left up to local areas to deal with an international issue."

Masse has long been outspoken on the need for a border authority to be established to deal with any crisis issues, that not only include the current protest in Windsor, but issues around COVID-19 requirements for travellers or any threat to the movement of goods or people across the border.

"It's always reactionary and playing catch-up," he said. "We need the government to be in front of this and that requires leadership. You need a system set up to deal with complaints or crisis. The government needs to be proactive on what's needed

with proper funding and infrastructure to unplug problems like this before they happen."

More to come.

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Masse wants pledge Canadian steel used on Howe bridge plaza, approach

Kathleen Saylor

A local **MP** is calling for the Canadian government to advocate for Canadian materials to be used in the Canadian port of entry at the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

Procurement of North American iron and steel for the Gordie Howe International Bridge project United States customs facility and main bridge spans is complete, The Canadian Press reports.

But procurement for the Canadian customs plaza and bridge approach is ongoing and "for which (Bridging North America) is considering both sources from within America and Canada and outside of those two countries," the Canadian project manager said.

"The government needs to step up right now, and that's what we're asking," **Brian Masse, NDP MP** for Windsor-West and critic for innovation, science and economic development, said Wednesday.

"There was the expectation that we would be using Canadian content for as much as possible. ... They left it a little bit vague, but it should be Canadian steel, plain and simple."

A spokesperson for the **Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority** said steel for the project is sourced in compliance with a 2012 agreement and a waiver on the Buy American Act. That waiver permits steel for the American and international parts of the bridge to be either American or Canadian, but the bridge approach and Canadian customs plaza are not subject to that waiver.

"The requirements, based on a waiver to the Buy American Act, stipulate that all iron and steel for any component of the project in the United States and the international bridge itself must be produced in either the U.S. or Canada and, in fact, the steel for the bridge has been sourced from a Canadian company," Heather Grondin, bridge authority vice-president of corporate affairs and external relations, said in a statement.

"The iron and steel for the project components in Canada can be globally sourced."

The bridge authority says the 131-acre Canadian port of entry will be the single largest port facility along the Canada-U.S. border and one of the largest in North America upon completion. It will include inbound and outbound border inspection facilities for both passenger and commercial vehicles and maintenance facilities, as well as an array of booths to allow for the collection of tolls.

The United Steelworkers Canada national director, sworn into the position Tuesday, said he didn't understand why the federal government has not insisted on the use of Canadian materials, especially in light of "buy American" procurement rules Canada must now navigate.

"It's about our North American image as well," Marty Warren said. "I think that's what's most important, that if a bridge that comes into being would be using foreign steel, that would be just a shot in the belly to both of us."

Masse said the expectation has always been that Canadian steel would be used.

"One of the problems with public-private partnerships is ... allowing clauses like that, that are less definitive," Masse said. "We need to stick up for ourselves at a certain point in time," Masse said. With files from The Canadian Press

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Ambassador Bridge firm drops plan for twin span Company, city still in discussions to expand **Canada** customs plaza

Dave Battagello

Attempts to build a new twin span of the Ambassador Bridge appear dead for the foreseeable future, but City of Windsor officials remain in discussions with the bridge company to expand the current **Canada** customs plaza to include secondary truck inspection on the city's west end.

"We are meeting with them on a regular basis," said city solicitor Shelby Askin-Hager. "The permit for construction of the span has expired. They don't want to construct another span, but they still have interest in the plaza."

Currently, secondary truck inspection at the bridge takes place two kilometres away on a large site off Malden Road, not near any residents, but "doesn't work well" for either **Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)** or the bridge company, she said.

The bridge company owns an extensive amount of property in Sandwich Towne that includes Indian Road, Mill Street, plus the former Forster Secondary School and its playing field, which in some form would feature a new secondary truck inspection site connected to the current bridge plaza.

"I can't discuss the focus of our discussions, but we are continuing to look at what a go-forward position would be on a plaza expansion," said Askin-Hager who noted the two sides met as recently as last Friday.

City administrators are well aware of protecting nearby residents in Sandwich in terms of any bridge plaza expansion, she said.

"Obviously our concerns have never changed with respect to ensuring the residents are protected and ensuring (the bridge company) is not taking more housing stock where they don't need to," Askin-Hager said. "We are working with them and continuing to talk."

Meanwhile, plans for a twin span are off the table, according to the president of the bridge company in a letter issued Tuesday to Detroit city council.

The **Canadian** permit issued in 2017 that gave the company a five-year window to launch construction of a new six-lane cable stayed bridge next to the existing 93-year-old crossing expired Aug. 31.

It lapsed after the bridge company failed to meet roughly a dozen conditions, most notably a concrete plan to tear down the existing crossing.

There were ongoing discussions over the past year between the federal government and bridge company on whether the conditions could be met, narrowed down or a permit extension granted, but now it appears the company has no further desire to construct a new bridge.

In a two-page letter by bridge company president Dan Stamper, he informed Detroit's council the company has decided not to apply for a new **Canadian** permit "for several reasons."

He cited how the company has spent a "significant amount of money" repairing the existing bridge, which will "extend its useful life by many decades."

Stamper also blames the **Canadian** government for continuing to block a twin span because of its insistence the current bridge must be demolished.

His letter also noted how cross-border traffic has "steadily declined" over the last 20 years and "finally, the (Gordie Howe International Bridge) will open in a few years adding capacity in the corridor."

"Some or all of these important circumstances would have to change significantly for us to reconsider building a new bridge,"

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Gordie Howe bridge opening delayed 10 months price tag up \$700M

Trevor Wilhelm

The opening of the long-awaited Gordie Howe International Bridge has been pushed back nearly a year - with an extra \$700 million added to the price tag.

The estimated cost of the bridge is now \$6.4 billion - up from \$5.7 billion, according to a news release Thursday from the groups responsible for its construction.

And the first vehicles are expected to cross in the fall of 2025, following construction completion that September. The contractual opening date was originally set for November 2024 with substantial monetary penalties for each day beyond the deadline.

The federal government is waiving those penalties while taking on the cost of the extra \$700-million.

The delays and the budget increases are considered a "shared risk," said Heather Grondin, spokesperson for the **Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority** (WDBA).

"In our contract, we did allow for some instances where some things could be a shared risk," Grondin told the Star. "This would be an example of that.

"Understanding the pandemic that we've gone through, our contract did allow for schedule and cost risks to be shared in certain circumstances.

"So, in a circumstance such as the pandemic - something that you wouldn't necessarily be able to plan for - our contract allowed for those circumstances to be taken under consideration."

The WDBA, which oversees the project for the federal government, and the consortium of contractors known as Bridging North America (BNA) announced in a joint statement on Thursday they have agreed to amend the cost and timeline of the project.

The teams said the bridge construction, like many other projects, faced "unprecedented disruptions" caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"After a three-year pandemic and considering the size and complexity of the Gordie Howe International Bridge project, our project team is pleased that the impact to the construction schedule is limited to only 10 months beyond the original contracted completion date and that we could agree on a reasonable adjustment to the contract value," said bridge authority CEO Charl van Niekerk.

"With safety as our top priority, we will continue to work together to deliver this much needed infrastructure to the thousands of eager travellers ready to cross North America's longest cable-stayed bridge."

MP Irek Kusmierczyk (L - Windsor-Tecumseh) told the Star "a delay is not entirely unexpected" given COVID-19 issues and supply chain disruptions.

But with an extended community benefits plan and 11 million worker hours already put into the project, with more to come, he said the delay is actually good for the local economy.

"The way I see it, you've got more local workers working longer on this project," said Kusmierczyk. "You've got more workers bringing home good paycheques on this historic project, which is important especially as we pull ourselves out of the COVID aftershocks."

The Gordie Howe International Bridge construction site is shown on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024.

The global pandemic wasn't the only issue delaying the project. The Star reported in 2022, after obtaining an analyst's report, that completion of the bridge would likely be delayed to at least August 2025, partly due to several disputes between WDBA and BNA.

The Star also reported in 2022 that BNA had formally requested relief from the contracted project completion date.

Grondin told the Star at the time that there were no plans to alter the project, and the contractor was still "obligated" to meet contract dates. She acknowledged Thursday that the disputes contributed to the delays, but said those issues have been resolved.

"I know there had been some speculation about timing and extension of the construction schedule," she said. "But really what we needed to do was see how much progress could be made over 2023 and where we were at over that time.

"What's different now is we're able to present with more confidence the schedule and confirmation of our overall timeline of being able to open in 2025."

The WDBA said that in recognition of the impacts of the extended construction period, it has budgeted for a one-year extension of the Gordie Howe International Bridge Community Benefits Plan.

The additional \$3 million will be divided equally between the communities of Sandwich/West Windsor and Delray/Southwest Detroit.

"The most important thing is it's getting done," said **MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor West)**.

"We can live with the delay in terms of the repercussions to the community," he said.

"But I want to do a full investigation and analysis as to the contract not being met and making sure we're getting the best value for taxpayers, because we paid a premium to have a public-private partnership for this deal.

"And it coming in late and over budget are something we just want to make sure are accounted for. So we can live with it.

"We're going to get some community benefits, which is what I pushed for. But we want to make sure it's going to be the best deal for taxpayers."

Related

Completion of Gordie Howe bridge reaches another milestone

Gordie Howe bridge to cost \$5.7B, open in 2024

Despite the delays, WDBA said 2023 was the busiest construction year on the project so far.

Grondin said the biggest 2023 milestone was the towers reaching their full heights.

In 2024, she said highlights will include the **Canadian** and U.S. sides of the road deck meeting over the Detroit River, and the installation of all 216 stay cables.

"We're all very happy with the progress that was made over 2023," she said. "It's put us in a good position to be able to continue that same level of progress in 2024.

"So full steam ahead. And a lot of work still ahead of us this year and into next."

twilhelm@postmedia.com

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Stamper says in the letter.

The bridge president issued the letter to Detroit's council Tuesday due to its ongoing efforts to secure a large piece of Riverfront Park in Detroit that sits next to the bridge.

A parcel of the park is the last remaining property required by the bridge company on the U.S. side should it ever proceed with building a new span.

A land-swap agreement was reached in 2015 between the bridge company and Detroit officials that would see the bridge owners get the park parcel in exchange for some properties it controls near the riverfront closer to downtown.

But the City of Detroit cannot give away parkland without several approvals, including at the federal level, so talks between the bridge company and Detroit's council have continued.

Council has put up resistance to completing the deal out of fear giving up the park parcel will either lead to renewed efforts by bridge owner Matthew Moroun to build the twin span or further expand the current bridge's U.S. customs operations - both of which would have negative impacts on nearby residential communities.

Stamper in his letter to council claims the park site is only desired for "more efficient maintenance" of the bridge and to act as a "buffer between bridge operations and the remainder of Riverside Park."

Local **MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor-West)**, who represents the riding where the bridge is located, was glad to hear the bridge company is dropping plans for a second span, but concerned about potential plaza expansion to accommodate trucks into Sandwich.

"I definitely hope this wouldn't move forward until there are consultations with the community and also a commitment to provide community benefits," he said. dbattagello@postmedia.com

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Gordie Howe Bridge to feature art commemorating Underground Railroad

The Gordie Howe International Bridge project team has announced its intent to commission a piece of art to commemorate the Underground Railroad.

The finished piece will be a free-standing work of art located in an accessible area outside the Canadian port of entry that reflects the themes of hope and freedom, according to a news release from the **Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority**.

"I think it's good," said Lana Talbot, the heritage coordinator at Sandwich First Baptist Church, the treasurer of the Windsor Essex Black Council, and the vice chair of the Artists of Colour.

"I think that Black artists here - I think we deserve that. That's the least they could [do]: show respect to us. ... they're going to name the bridge after an American."

Talbot would prefer that the bridge itself be named in honour of the railroad, she said.

"It feels like it would be fitting because it's coming right into Sandwich."

The community of Sandwich, which is located near the Gordie Howe International Bridge project site, was a destination for thousands of people who escaped slavery in the United States and made their way to freedom in Canada.

The area remains home to descendants of many of those who made that journey, including Talbot.

The project team will launch a request for qualifications this month for professional Canadian artists of the Black, African and Caribbean diaspora living and working in Canada who are interested in the commission.

It includes a mentorship opportunity for a local youth identifying as a member of the Black, African and Caribbean diaspora from Sandwich/west Windsor to work with the artist.

"I want people to know that there are excellent Black Canadian artists that are from right here, this region" - Lana Talbot
Talbot said it's appropriate that the art be created by a Black artist but felt that the commission itself should also go to an artist from the region.

"When they do things in Toronto or if they do things in Niagara Falls or if they do things in Hamilton, I don't ever recall ever receiving any invitation to be part of that," she said.

"I want people to know that there are excellent Black Canadian artists that are from right here, this region."

Details on the request for qualifications are available at GordieHoweInternationalBridge.com.

The juried artist selection process will follow **Canadian Heritage's** guidelines for public artist selection, the bridge authority said.

The project team plans to complete artist selection this summer and unveil the final art concept late this year. The final art piece will be installed in conjunction with the opening of the bridge, which is currently slated for late 2024 or early 2025.

The bridge team developed the commission in response to community feedback and in conjunction with the Detroit River Project and the Essex County Black Historical Research Society, it said.

Windsor West MP **Brian Masse** congratulated the city's Black community for successfully persuading the bridge authority to include the artwork as part of the project.

The bridge team plans to gather input from local members of the Black, African and Caribbean diaspora and broader Windsor-Essex community to share with the artist once identified, it said.

'That bridge was a place where freedom started for many of us'

African **Canadian heritage** consultant and the former Amherstburg Freedom Museum curator Elise Harding-Davis said in a statement that she is thrilled that the WDBA will be featuring African Canadian art, particularly focused on the Underground Railroad.

"The African Caribbean and pioneering black Canadians have contributed a lot," Harding-Davis said in the statement, issued by the bridge authority.

"And that bridge was a place where freedom started for many of us."

For more stories about the experiences of Black Canadians - from anti-Black racism to success stories within the Black community - check out Being Black in Canada, a CBC project Black Canadians can be proud of. You can read more stories [here](#).

Photo: An artist's rendering shows what the Gordie Howe Bridge will look like when finished. The bridge, which will provide a Canadian-controlled link between Windsor, Ont., and Detroit, Mich., is currently under construction.

Credit: **Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority**

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THE WINDSOR STAR

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Bridge authority reviewing complete road closure for Sandwich Street reconstruction following community backlash

Taylor Campbell

The **Windsor Detroit Bridge Authority** is reviewing its decision to fully close a stretch of Sandwich Street for road reconstruction following outcry from west-end politicians and business owners.

In an email to the Star, Tara Carson, director of communications for **Windsor Detroit Bridge Authority**, said the full road closure "is different than originally considered as a result of consultation with the road authority." The road authority in this case is the City of Windsor.

"We are further reviewing the proposed approach based on community feedback," she said.

Earlier this week, members of the Sandwich Town Business Improvement Association joined Ward 2 Coun. Fabio Costante and **MP Brian Masse (NDP - Windsor West)** and publicly shared their shock at the bridge authority's seemingly sudden decision to completely shut down part of Sandwich Street for reconstruction between the train tracks near Ojibway Parkway and Chappell Avenue, a community benefit project resulting from the Gordie Howe International Bridge's placement in west Windsor.

The change would impact businesses in Sandwich for the duration of the road closure, which is supposed to last at least eight weeks, business owners said. About 15,000 commuters and more than 1,000 transport trucks that travel that stretch of Sandwich Street daily would be diverted onto Prince Road, an already busy street.

Construction is scheduled to begin Sept. 5, the first day of school for many elementary and high school students in the region.

The BIA had been previously assured that the road would remain open to traffic during construction. In fact, the Gordie Howe International Bridge website still states - as of Wednesday morning evening - that traffic will be maintained along Sandwich Street, though traffic may be reduced to one lane.

Both Masse and Costante called the 11th-hour switch "unacceptable" and demanded answers from those involved in the decision.

"It seemed to be they were engaging the public on an open, accountable basis, and all of a sudden, they switched their consultation to exclude people," Masse said. "Somebody made a decision somewhere basically to keep this quiet."

Asked if the bridge authority consulted with the community ahead of its change of plans, spokesperson Carson said consultation was focused on "businesses in the immediate area, first responders and local bus companies, as well as the city." The bridge authority met with representatives from the BIA on Monday, she said.

"The discussion with the BIA was timely as we are still in the process of finalizing details of this work."

But Costante told reporters he called the "emergency" BIA meeting on Monday after spending about a week and a half pleading with the bridge authority to reconsider the road closure. Representatives from the bridge authority attended the meeting.

In her email to the Star, Carson noted that this phase of construction "does not extend the entire length of ... Sandwich Street into the BIA district."

Asked about the impact diverted traffic would have on the surrounding neighbourhood, Carson said the bridge authority, in coordination with the city, reviewed "several options" to minimize community impact.

"Many factors are taken into account in planning detours, including impact to traffic flow, duration of construction and the impact to residents, businesses and travellers," Carson said. "The proposed detour will require both commercial and passenger vehicles to be directed onto Prince Road."

"Bridging North America will undertake measures to mitigate environmental impacts such as noise and dust during the

reconstruction, in accordance with the approved Environmental Assessment Report and Federal Screening Report in **Canada.**"

Costante told reporters he found out about the change of plans from the city's engineering department, which is responsible for approving the construction permit.

A representative from the city's engineering department could not be reached ahead of the Star's print deadline.

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Url: <https://windsorstar.com/news/local-news/bridge-authority-reviewing-complete-road-closure-for-sandwich-street-reconstruction-following-community-backlash>

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