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Downriver Detroit-Windsor toll bridge rejected by Michigan senate committee as a likely bankruptcy

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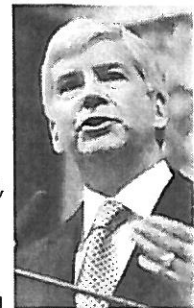
BRIDGE DETROIT-WINDSOR DRIC MICHIGAN NITC



A proposed new Canada-Michigan sponsored toll bridge downriver of the Ambassador Bridge in Detroit continues to lack support in the state legislature. Enabling legislation was rejected today by a key senate committee in which bridge promoters had invested great hopes.

Known variously by the acronyms DRIC (Detroit River International Crossing) and NITC (New International Trade Crossing) the new span is strongly supported by the Canadian Government, by the Michigan governor Rick Snyder, by the state DOT, by some business groups in Michigan, and by most of the local media.

However the legislature's majority has taken the position that the DRIC is an unnecessary 'showboat' project that is almost certain to lose money, and lose money big. Overall cost including approach parkways and interchanges as well as the river span are in the range \$3 to \$4 billion.



Gov Snyder



Kowall

The Michigan senate transportation committee has refused to take up the bill, but there was hope among bridge promoters this session that it might be sponsored by the Senate Economic Development Committee.

Today that hope was dashed when Democrats on the committee representing citizens in the neighborhood of the downriver bridge failed to support it and a majority of the Republicans voted it down. Committee chair Mike Kowall and Geoff Hansen both said the bridge was unjustified by the prospective traffic and would be a heavy financial drain on the state.

No US money

The US Government is providing no financial backing, although bridge promoters have claimed - quite falsely - that Canadian government money lent to help Michigan pay for approach works will somehow trigger federal funds for the state on a 4 to 1 basis. They have claimed as much as \$2.2 billion in federal grants will come Michigan's way once \$550m in Canadian money is committed to the project.

Marc Lemon a former FHWA chief lawyer, now with McKenna Long told the Michigan senate committee today that not a single extra federal dollar is generated in the project. In fact the federal government hasn't even committed to duplicating customs and other border entry facilities at the new site.

State senators Kowall and Hansen were both scathing about the project saying there isn't the traffic to warrant it, that there is no credible financial plan for raising capital and that toll revenues will never cover debt service.

Kowall said if the state's reputation is to be preserved they need to put money into financially viable projects always ensuring a return on dollars spent.

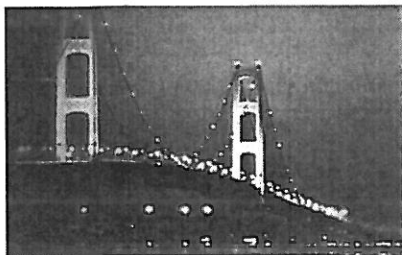


Hansen

He asked: "If tolls don't cover the bond payments, where is the money going to come from?"

Hansen said taxpayers would inevitably be put at risk if the state sponsored the bridge as proposed in SB410, the draft bill.

Supporters concede no nearterm prospect for advancing



Ambassador Bridge

The senate majority leader who likes the idea of another bridge was quoted afterwards as saying "I'm done with it at this point... there are other things we should be talking about."

The state governor Rick Snyder who also favors the new bridge said: "We need a cooling down period to let the bridge issue calm down so we can find common ground. "

Major problem for promoters of a new bridge is the slowness of traffic to pay tolls - only 43 thousand average a day in 2010 at three existing crossings, their number of lanes in parentheses:

- Ambassador Bridge 20k (4L)
- Blue Water Bridge 13k (6L)
- Detroit Windsor Tunnel 10k (2L)

Twelve crossing lanes on the three crossings carry 43k vehicles a day or an average 3500 vehicles per lane per day. A traffic lane can carry 3500 vehicles in two hours without congestion!

43k vehicles/day is carried without a problem on 4 lanes on many highways bridges and tunnels around America. The 12 existing Detroit area crossing lanes provide capacity for three or four times the existing traffic.

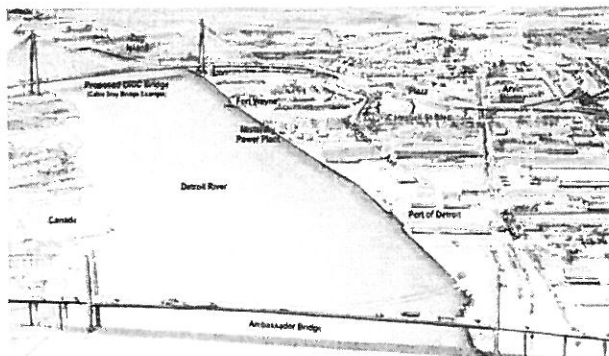
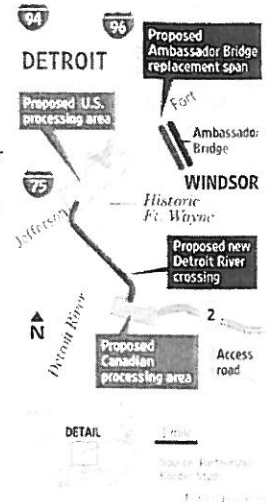
COMMENT: This hardly bodes well for the viability of a fourth crossing (DRIC or NITC designed for 6 lanes) taking the total number of lanes to 18. For less than 50,000 vehicles/day total!

The fourth crossing is at a less promising site than the existing crossings - downriver where the river is much wider, requiring a longer span, and where foundation conditions are treacherous. That fourth crossing will be poorly placed to compete with the existing three for traffic given its inevitably higher costs.

The total traffic is so slight a new bridge almost certainly couldn't be financed even if the Michigan legislature was unanimous tomorrow in granting permits, and even if the site was a good one. No one can write a financial plan to support raising capital for such a weak lemon of a project.

Delays at the border are attributed entirely to customs, immigration and security clearance, not the number of lanes of the crossings.

Unfortunately the fantasy of a new signature bridge downriver continues to distract attention from improving connections and border management of the existing three crossings - editor.



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