In the largest binational trading relationship in the world, no crossing matters more than the link between Detroit and Windsor, Canada. Currently, about 25 percent of the goods that move between the United States and Canada do so across the Detroit River via the 85-year-old, privately owned Ambassador Bridge. It is the busiest commercial crossing in North America, and one where users often face long delays and where traffic has steadily risen since the last recession.

A new bridge, the New International Trade Crossing, is scheduled to open by 2020, but as leaders of a group of the Midwest’s state and provincial legislators note, this binational infrastructure project still requires action from the U.S. government.

In a letter sent to President Barack Obama in August, the two chairs and two co-chairs of the Midwestern Legislative Conference Midwest-Canada Relations Committee ask for a federal commitment to support and staff a U.S. customs plaza at the New International Trade Crossing.

Without such a commitment, the new bridge cannot open. The U.S. government has thus far indicated to Canada and to the state of Michigan that funding is unavailable for the plaza, and Obama did not include plaza funding in his proposed budget.

“Canada and the U.S. already have the world’s largest trading relationship, and as trade continues to increase, the infrastructure must be in place to support that growth,” the letter says. “Bilateral trade in goods between Canada and the 11 states in the Midwestern Legislative Conference exceeded $243 billion last year.”

The letter was signed by Kansas House Speaker Ray Merrick and Saskatchewan MLA Wayne Elhard (co-chairs of the committee) as well as Indiana Sen. Ed Charbonneau and Manitoba MLA Drew Caldwell (co-vice chairs of the committee).

Increasingly, Canadian and U.S. companies rely on cross-border supply chains to make things together, and this is especially true in the Midwest. The auto industry is a good example of this, with components crossing the border six or seven times on the way to completing a vehicle, according to Earl Fry, a professor of Canadian studies at Brigham Young University.

The MLC committee leaders noted, too, that support for the bridge and the customs plaza would complement Obama’s National Export Initiative, the goal of which has been to double U.S. exports.

“One of the ways to reach this goal is to make it easier for Canadian and U.S. companies to do business together, and this starts with expanding the busiest commercial border crossing in the U.S.,” according to the letter.

The Canadian government has agreed to cover the costs of building the bridge. It will be reimbursed later from toll revenue for the U.S. share of construction costs. In July, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and Canadian Transport Minister Lisa Raitt announced their appointments to the two agencies that will oversee bridge construction and management.

One of the agencies, the Windsor-Detroit International Authority, has equal numbers of members from Canada and the United States. The other agency, the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority, is a Canadian corporation.

However, cross-border traffic will be unable to use the bridge until the United States has a facility to process people and cargo crossing the border.