Work on new bridge at vital Detroit-Windsor trade corridor could begin as soon as 2018

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Design and construction of a new international bridge between Detroit and Windsor, Ont., could begin in just over a year. In November, the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority issued a request for proposal to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the new crossing, which will be located at the busiest trade corridor along the U.S.-Canada border.

Every year, approximately 2.5 million trucks travel through the corridor (in addition to passenger vehicles); they currently use the more-than-80-year-old Ambassador Bridge. It remains unclear when the new bridge will open; initial plans had targeted the year 2020.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge will be built and maintained through a public-private partnership. A private-sector partner (to be chosen over the next 18 months at the conclusion of the RFP process) will assume the initial financial burden and risks for construction. It will then be paid based on meeting specific goals (such as finishing the project on time) and certain performance standards once the bridge is open to the public.

The Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority — a nonprofit crown corporation owned by the government of Canada — is overseeing the entire project, including the procurement process. In addition, a six-member, binational board (with members representing the government of Canada and the state of Michigan) will approve key phases of the project.

The government of Canada is providing much of the upfront funding needed for the project, including the U.S. customs plaza (to be repaid with toll money from the bridge). When complete, the new bridge will be approximately 1.5 miles long, have six lanes and provide direct connections to Highway 401 in Ontario and Interstate 75 in Michigan.

The privately owned Ambassador Bridge will continue to operate once the new crossing is built. However, the Ambassador does not have adequate capacity and could not accommodate a customs plaza with enough lanes needed for vehicles and drivers that are part of the countries’ “trusted traveler” programs, which allow low-risk, frequent business and tourist travelers to move across the border more quickly.

The new bridge also will provide redundancy in case of a major accident or terrorist incident. As it stands now, if the Ambassador Bridge were to shut down for an extended period, truck traffic on this vital commercial corridor between the U.S. and Canada would come to a standstill.

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