Work on a second Detroit-Windsor bridge has begun, with opening slated for 2024

Ilene Grossman

After years of court cases, requests for proposals and bidding, work is underway for a new bridge at the busiest commercial crossing along the U.S.-Canada border. Approximately 7,000 trucks — carrying goods worth millions of dollars — already pass the border most days at Detroit and Windsor, Ont. All of these crossings are done now via the privately owned, 90-year-old Ambassador Bridge.

But with the scheduled opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge in late 2024, a second option will be available for U.S. and Canadian firms.

The bridge (named after the Hall of Fame Canadian hockey player who starred for the Detroit Red Wings) will provide larger, modern ports of entry and customs facilities, while incorporating new technologies to speed up border screenings. And with two bridges up and running, the movement of commercial goods will not be as affected by accidents or other incidents at the Detroit-Windsor crossing.

According to Bill Anderson, director of the Cross-Border Institute at the University of Windsor, the new bridge will be a welcome, much-needed addition to the Midwest’s transportation infrastructure. Delays at the border, he notes, can lead to costly inefficiencies and unpredictability.

“[Cross-border] supply chains are becoming more demanding,” he says, noting the rise in “just-in-time” delivery systems that involve U.S. and Canadian manufacturing firms building products together. For example, in the auto sector, vehicle parts pass the Detroit-Windsor border up to seven times before a car is finished.

Supply chains in other industries, such as aerospace and defense, are growing as well. Anderson also sees potential growth in areas such as the retail sector — especially as the U.S. and Canadian governments work to standardize their rules on packaging and labeling. (Different regulatory policies have traditionally hampered cross-border retail supply chains.)

“It is important to have enough capacity to anticipate what will happen in the future,” Anderson says.

This new bridge across the Detroit River will be built by a group of nine firms, operate as a public-private partnership, and be jointly owned by the government of Canada and the state of Michigan. The bridge is expected to cost $2.7 billion, with Canada providing most of the upfront financing.

Michigan will eventually pay for its share of the costs through money collected in bridge tolls. Another $1.7 billion will be required to maintain the Gordie Howe International Bridge during its first 30 years of operation.

Owners of the Ambassador Bridge have filed five major lawsuits seeking to prevent this construction project. The Michigan Supreme Court dismissed one of those lawsuits in December; a final one remains active. The owners have also appealed to President Trump to stop the project.

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