

Rebuilding the Champlain Bridge

Background

The Champlain Bridge is a major axis of transportation for people and goods. It is essential not only for the competitiveness of businesses in the Montreal area but is also a crucial component of eastern North America's large urban area transportation infrastructure and an international Gateway into Canada.

The Champlain Bridge is crossed more than 57 million times a year by vehicles. The bridge also ensures the flow of goods in the Ontario-Quebec-New England trade corridor through which most exports travel to the United States. More than \$20 million in goods cross Champlain Bridge each year. Thousands of businesses rely directly on the bridge – the distribution centres on each side of the river as well as the important trucking and shipping industry. For these businesses and so many others, the Champlain Bridge is the region's economic lung.

A recent federal study made public on July 13, 2011 clearly stated that "Annual expenditures rising from \$18 to \$25 million over the next ten years...would be necessary to prolong its life". The study also mentions that: "the maintenance work will become increasingly extensive and complex and require increasingly long lane closures..."The document reports "a lack of seismic resistance" of the existing structure due to "the deterioration of the deck [which] results in a deterioration of the girder flanges."

Technical studies are unanimous: remedial patches are no longer sufficient. The bridge's lifespan is nearly over and it must be replaced. A new construction that is secure, durable and integrated with public transportation is needed.

This is why the Champlain Bridge construction coalition has unanimous stakeholder approval. Municipalities, businesses, associations, business people, provincial governments, chambers of commerce are all in favour of the project. Citizens have been invited to add their voice to the coalition's by signing the online petition at www.champlainchantier.ca.

The Quebec government has created the *Bureau des partenaires sur les mesures préparatoires en vue du remplacement du pont Champlain*. By this gesture, it took a step forward towards the construction of a new bridge.

However, immediate commitments by the Federal government are required to avoid widespread socio-economic repercussions across Eastern Canada and Quebec. We anticipate that the new Champlain Bridge will promote our collective prosperity and bring permanent solutions to public transportation issues. It is critical that we act now to get this project up and running as soon as possible.

During the 2011 election campaign, the coalition called on all parties to immediately begin rebuilding the Champlain Bridge and develop a work plan for its construction. This work plan must address the reorganization of traffic flows during the years of construction, contain a work schedule and involve the creation of a project office.

Unfortunately, the federal government has yet to officially support rebuilding the bridge. In the last federal budget, no budget measure for the construction of a new Champlain bridge was announced; instead funds were allocated for general maintenance band-aid repairs. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is disappointed, since we had already taken note of prior investment announcements for infrastructure maintenance. Given the urgency of the matter and the alarming results from various studies, the only possible solution is to urgently build another bridge before the current Champlain Bridge lifespan is over. Other options are available which could alleviate funding concerns such as the implementation of a toll system or developing the projects as a public private partnership.

A decision must also be made as soon as possible to guarantee the security of the millions of people who cross the bridge each year. Canadians deserve certainty and the Canadian government must go forward

with a major announcement concerning a secure, efficient and durable infrastructure, particularly as planned work on Louis-Hypolite-Lafontaine tunnel will only increase the load on Champlain Bridge.

WHEREAS the Champlain Bridge is in a state of degradation and whereas associated risks are such that, according to the consulting engineers who examined it and recently presented a study to the government, it must be replaced by a new structure.

WHEREAS the Champlain Bridge is a major transportation axis for people and goods in Greater Montreal and Eastern Canada and is essential to business competition and productivity.

WHEREAS the Champlain Bridge is a crucial component of the Ontario-Quebec-New England trade corridor and our businesses would be greatly affected by loss of productivity due to a closing or a traffic disruption on the bridge.

WHEREAS the Champlain Bridge plays a strategic role in road transport within Quebec.

WHEREAS the design and construction required for such a project are important and must be undertaken without delay.

Recommendations

That the federal government:

1. Commit to rebuilding Champlain Bridge immediately.
2. Develop an action plan for the construction of the bridge which includes the reorganization of traffic flows during the years of construction, a work schedule and the creation of a project office.
3. Explore all available funding options including but not limited to implementing a toll system and/or developing the project as a P3 (public private partnership)