

**Testimony for Bill Black before
the Joint Michigan House and Senate
Transportation Committees**

May 11, 2006

Good morning.

My name is Bill Black and I am Legislative and Governmental Affairs Director for the Michigan Teamsters Joint Council 43. It is a pleasure to be here.

I want to thank Chairman LaJoy and Chairman Gilbert, as well as all the other congressional members on this committee for allowing me to testify today. We believe the work you are doing here today is important and we applaud your efforts to guarantee that Michigan taxpayers get the most for our money.

Before I start, I want all of you to understand that **all** transportation in the Detroit/Windsor corridor is important to us. As Teamsters, we are proponents of both truck and rail transportation because we represent both rail workers and truck drivers. We have thousands of members in this area because the Detroit/Windsor border is the busiest international crossing in the world.

And, we'd like to keep it that way.

I understand that these hearings are about the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) Study and its efforts to find the next international crossing in the Detroit-Windsor corridor. And, I will address the DRIC in a minute. However, the real issue here is Michigan JOBS.

Over the last three years, manufacturing jobs have been leaving Michigan at the rate of 7,000 jobs per month. That's nearly 250,000 jobs lost.

We need to stop the bleeding. We need to show the manufacturers that are left, and especially those in the auto industry, that we are serious about keeping them here. More importantly from an economic development standpoint, we need to show potential businesses that we are a vibrant and forward-thinking region. We need to take immediate and visible actions that will help build regional momentum. We need a solution much sooner than 2013. We can't wait.

In our opinion, the lack of reliable transportation to and from Canada is a negative mark on the check list of every company that evaluates this region. This unreliability is caused by the fact that there is just one lane in each direction for international truck traffic to cross this border -- and the result is regular backups on both sides of this busy corridor. And every Teamster driver can tell you that this makes just-in-time deliveries to auto

plants more difficult -- or impossible at times. This is forcing the auto industry to look elsewhere for more reliable transportation.

As little as five years ago, Teamsters drivers used to make two to four trips each day back and forth across the Detroit/Windsor border. Today, they are lucky to make just one and get home at a decent time.

That makes border delays a quality of life issue for our members.

So, what do we do about it?

Fix it. And, fix it fast!

To make this happen fast, we need additional truck and rail capacity.

A new, high-capacity train tunnel, like the one in Port Huron, is needed to keep rail service in the Detroit/Windsor region. Without it, rail service to this area will be seriously curtailed over the next several years. I urge you to support the building of a next-generation rail tunnel in Detroit.

We need more truck-crossing capacity, too. Now, more than ever. And that solution involves the DRIC. (I told you I'd get back to that topic).

In our opinion, the DRIC's decision-making process, to date, has been flawed. As you heard here in recent weeks, the DRIC is being driven by political not engineering decisions. We think that is wrong.

As we all heard from Marge Byington, the DRIC needs a mid-course correction. We need the DRIC to take a hard look at all of the existing

infrastructure and try to find a public/private partnership solution there. A public/private partnership seems to us to be the best outcome for the region. We must leverage our existing regional transportation assets. And the DRIC needs to find a way to create synergy among those assets.

When the DRIC eliminated the existing infrastructure from further consideration, it turned its back on nearly a billion dollars of private infrastructure dollars. Instead, officials and their consultants selected their own solution that may well cost Michigan and U.S. taxpayers over a billion dollars. We find that odd.

By directing the DRIC to find a solution within the existing infrastructure, you will make scarce public dollars available to MDOT for other transportation projects throughout the state.

Decisions you make in this committee can multiply the number of jobs created in Michigan. Jobs to build the next crossing would be paid for with private funds. Jobs to complete other Michigan transportation projects would be funded with the money that would have been allocated to construct the final DRIC solution.

That looks like an irresistible win/win to us.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to testify. I welcome questions on any points I can clarify.