Executive Summary

The Canadian, U.S., Ontario and Michigan governments[1] are conducting a Planning Needs and Feasibility Study to provide a long-term strategy that will ensure the safe and efficient movement of people, goods and services between Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario. The study will assess the existing transportation network, including border crossings, and will identify transportation alternatives, including new crossings, to meet the medium- and long-term needs in the region of Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario.

The context under which this study will be carried out, the justification for the project and the issues and opportunities to be addressed by the study will be documented in the **Transportation Problems and Opportunities Report** of which this Strategic and Geographic Area Overview Working Paper is the first product. It is the purpose of this document to establish the existing conditions that will permit an evaluation of need.

The Broad Geographic Area of the study extends from approximately London, Ontario on the east to near Battle Creek, Michigan on the west. The area includes the St. Clair River on the north and the Detroit River on the south. The major federal/provincial highways are Highways 401 and 402 in Ontario and I-69, I-94, I-75, and I-96 in Michigan. The border crossings include the Blue Water Bridge (BWB) between Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan, the Ambassador Bridge (AB) and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel (DWT) between Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan, as well as rail tunnels and ferries across the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers.

Notable findings of the data reviewed to date include:

- Eighty-seven percent of the value of total Canadian worldwide exports is to the U.S., and forty-one percent of this trade, as measured by value, crosses the Ambassador Bridge or the Blue Water Bridge. The majority of this trade is automotive related.
- The Detroit River crossings handle two to three times as much freight traffic by value and almost twice as much by tonnage as does the Blue Water Bridge.
- The vehicular crossings in Southwest Ontario / Southeast Michigan are the busiest of all Canada – U.S. border crossings and the Ambassador Bridge carries more commercial vehicles than any other U. S. border crossing. Each of the vehicular crossings is tolled and there are Customs and Immigrations inspection stations on both sides of the border.
- Table 2.1 shows the facilities available to handle tolls and inspections at the two bridges and the tunnel.
- The events of September 11, 2001 changed the context of U.S. / Canada border security. With the twin and competing pressures of elevating the level of security and ensuring the free flow of people and trade, the two nations began creating a new template for border management. On December 12, 2001 the

[1] Transport Canada (TC), Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO), U. S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

two nations issued "The Canada-U.S. Smart Border Declaration: Building A Smart Border For The 21st Century On The Foundation Of A North American Zone Of Confidence." (Appendix B)

TABLE 2.1 ROADWAY CROSSING FACILITIES

Crossing	Traffic Lanes (to US / to CAN)	Toll Booths (to US / to CAN)	Inspection Lanes for Trucks (to US / to CAN)	Inspection Lanes for Autos (to US / to CAN)
Ambassador Bridge	2 / 2	13 / 18	7 / 10	12 / 10
Detroit-Windsor Tunnel	1 / 1	6 / 5	3 / 3	10 / 9
Blue Water Bridge	3 / 3	6 / 5	5 / 7	8 / 12

Source: Southeast Michigan / Southwest Ontario Binational Transportation Planning Project, November 2001.

- In February, 2002 the announcement was made that the U. S. Customs service would hire 285 additional officers for five Northern state border crossings. It is estimated that 78 of these new officers will be deployed to Detroit and 16 to Port Huron by the end of 2002.
- Reports from border crossing operators and users indicate that the major near-term challenge to reducing travel time across the borders is the need for security checks and the number of staff and facilities assigned to this function.
- International trade carried by trucks is projected to increase at an average annual rate of four to five percent.
- From 1995 to 2001, cross-border truck crossings and railcar crossings averaged 5.2 percent and 6.6 percent annual growth, respectively. The proportion of trucks to total vehicle crossings at these ports is increasing steadily and now represents approximately 20 percent of total traffic.
- The choice between using the BWB route and the AB-DWT route is based on a number of factors including: a trip-end in the vicinity of one of the crossings, access to the southbound I-75 corridor in the U.S.
- There is more than one mode of travel between Ontario and Michigan and a variety of factors ranging from direct cost, to delays, to Customs issues will play a part in determining if a particular movement uses road, rail, or water.
- On each of the border crossings, the roadway capacity of the facility itself will not become a factor until issues of tollbooths, Customs inspection stations and local access/egress are at a level that will permit free flow on the facility. Even under such "free flow" conditions, roadway capacity on the Blue Water Bridge is unlikely to become a limiting factor with three lanes of traffic available in each direction.

- The six-lane BWB has adequate capacity provided by a recently opened three-lane "twin" bridge. The DWT has just two-lanes that reach capacity at peak hours and the four-lane AB is projected to reach capacity sometime between 2011 and 2021.
- There are important access and capacity issues on the approaches and/or plazas of each of the border crossings. The DWT begins and ends in the central business districts of Detroit and Windsor and faces daily congestion issues in each city. A new plaza is in design for the U.S.-side of the AB but Huron Church Road, the Windsor approach to the bridge, is facing significant congestion problems when delay occurs at the border crossing. Redesign of the BWB's U.S. plaza is underway.

Next Steps

The context under which this study will be carried out, the justification for the project and the issues and opportunities to be addressed by the study will be documented in the **Transportation Problems and Opportunities Report**. This Transportation Problems and Opportunities Report is a compilation of five technical tasks:

- Strategic and Geographic Area Working Paper;
    - Will set the context of the study in terms of identifying jurisdictions involved and their respective legislation and policies, which provide the framework for this study.
- Travel Demand Analysis Process Working Paper;
    - Determines the appropriate methodology to be used for travel demand forecasting that will reveal patterns and volumes of the movement of people and goods.
- Existing and Future Travel Demand Working Paper;
    - The description, analysis and assessment of existing and future scenarios for road and rail networks to develop a quantitative and qualitative understanding of travel demand.
- Analysis Area Working Paper;
    - The rationale for the identification of, use of, and boundaries of, a Focused Analysis Area within which feasible alternatives will address the transportation problems of the region.
- Environmental Overview,
    - Inventory existing conditions within the Focused Analysis Area to assist in the generation and evaluation of alternatives.

The **Transportation Problems and Opportunities Report** will serve as the basis for the identification, development and assessment of transportation alternatives. Subsequent tasks will lead to the identification of a long-term transportation strategy to address the transportation problems of the region.