

The Environmental Study Process

The Windsor-Detroit border is the busiest commercial land border crossing in North America and trade travelling through this corridor is expected to increase well into the future. This is good news for the economies of Windsor-Essex County and for the provincial and national economies as well.

The governments of Canada, the U.S., Ontario and Michigan have recognized the importance of the Windsor-Detroit Gateway and have come together to form the Border Transportation Partnership (the Partnership). The purpose of the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) study is to provide for the safe, efficient and secure movement of people and goods across the Canada-U.S. border in the Detroit River area to support the economies of Ontario, Michigan, Canada and the U.S. In other words, construct a new end-to-end transportation system that will link Highway 401 to the U.S. interstate system with inspection plazas and a new river crossing in between.

A Coordinated Process

This international transportation improvement project will require approvals from governments on both sides of the border. The Partnership has developed a coordinated process that will enable the joint selection of a recommended river crossing location that meets the requirements of the *Ontario Environmental Assessment Act* (OEAA), *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA), and U.S. *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) in an effective and efficient manner.

A key principle of this process is that all affected and interested parties are being given the opportunity to participate and offer input throughout the study. The Partnership is proactively seeking community and stakeholder input at key points during the study.

Requirements of the *Ontario Environmental Assessment Act* (OEAA)

As required under the OEAA, a Terms of Reference (TOR) document was prepared and received approval prior to commencement of the DRIC Environmental Assessment study. This document outlines the framework that the DRIC study team must follow in completing the environmental assessment including key opportunities for public participation.

At the completion of this study, the Environmental Assessment (EA) Report will be submitted to the Ontario Minister of the Environment for approval. The formal review process provides opportunities for public comment.

Requirements of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA)

CEAA applies to certain projects that require a decision by the Government of Canada. In the case of this study Transport Canada has partnered with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to conduct the Canadian portion of the study. The requirements of the OEAA and CEAA are being coordinated in a manner that will ensure that the most rigorous EA standards are met.

A Project Description document has been prepared for the DRIC study and federal agencies with an interest in the study have been identified.

A Screening Report identifying project impacts and mitigation needs will be prepared and reviewed by the appropriate federal authorities.

As part of the coordinated EA process, the federal Draft EA Guidelines and Public Consultation Plan are being provided for public review. Members of the public are invited to review these documents and provide comments to the study team. Draft copies are available to view at the Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs) and members of the study team are available to answer questions. These documents can also be downloaded or viewed online at the Partnership web site (www.partnershipborderstudy.com). Information on the federal environmental assessment process is also available on the following web site: <http://www.ceaa.gc.ca>.

Requirements of the *U.S. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*

In the United States, the umbrella environmental law is the *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*. NEPA provides for a decision-making process relying on interdisciplinary analysis, and consultation and commenting by the public, stakeholders and regulatory agencies.

For major federal actions an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared. A draft EIS is to explain the purpose and need for a project, examine alternatives, describe the impacts of the practical alternatives, and document the public involvement and coordination that occurs. The draft EIS is released for formal comment and a public hearing is held. Subsequently, a decision is made on a preferred alternative, based on the comments received and any further analysis that is required to respond adequately to the comments. That decision is made available to the public and agencies through the formal availability of the Final EIS (FEIS). When comments on the FEIS are addressed and the decision is to pursue an "action" alternative, a Record of Decision (ROD) is prepared. Under NEPA, a ROD allows a project to advance to the design stage.

What does all of this mean?

The DRIC study is following three legislated processes. These processes require that the DRIC Environmental Study be thorough, open, transparent and fully accessible to the public for scrutiny and evaluation. The DRIC study team is fully committed to working with the public, communities, and interested groups in Windsor-Essex County, in consultation with the U.S. partners, to develop a solution that best meets future transportation needs, while minimizing community impacts.