

Straight Talk On...

The Environmental Assessment Process and the DRIC Study

Environmental Assessment or EA is a decision-making process used to promote good environmental planning by assessing the potential effects of certain activities on the environment. In Ontario, this process is defined and finds its authority in the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA). The purpose of the EAA is to provide for the protection, conservation, and wise management of Ontario's environment.

The Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) study is following the full, formal requirements of Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act. The first stage in the process was completed in September 2004, with the approval of the Environmental Assessment Terms of Reference. The formal environmental assessment began in January 2005. All of the work that has been undertaken since that time will lead to preparation of an Environmental Assessment Report, which will require formal approval of Ontario's Minister of the Environment. This report will also be submitted to federal government agencies, for screening under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA).

In order to satisfy the requirements of the EAA, DRIC study team must consider alternatives to the undertaking and alternative methods for the undertaking, consult with stakeholders, and identify environmental effects, and mitigating measures. "Environment" is defined to include the natural environment, as well as the social, economic and cultural conditions that influence the life of humans or a community.

Since the DRIC study is international in scope, the Canadian study is being conducted in a coordinated manner, with a parallel study process in the U.S. The Michigan Department of Transportation leads the U.S. study, which will require approvals under the U.S. National Environmental Policy Act.

The Canadian and U.S. study teams have been closely coordinating their work in following the respective environmental study requirements of the two countries. An improved Detroit River international crossing is important not only to the people of Windsor, but it is also of provincial, national and international significance. The DRIC study team is very carefully following the EA process. We want a solution that provides the best balance of transportation benefits with community impacts, when compared to other alternatives. The EA process provides guidance in collecting and assessing the information we need to deliver this transportation system right the first time.

EA study processes vary in length. The EA study process for the DRIC study is scheduled to take close to three years. A recommendation for a preferred access road, plaza location and river crossing will be identified by mid-2007 and the final EA reports on the Canadian side of the border will be delivered to Ontario's Ministry of the Environment and federal authorities by the end of 2007.

The process to date has relied heavily on a combination of technical studies, field work, modelling studies, mitigation studies and community consultation. These analyses, and others, will continue until the end of the EA process.

The EA Terms of Reference for the study provides a framework to guide the preparation of the EA. To review this document, visit the DRIC study website at www.partnershipborderstudy.com.

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