

Let the goods flow

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Ever since Samuel de Champlain and his First Nations guides canoed down the St. Lawrence and into the Great Lakes, these waterways have been critical in bringing trade, people and prosperity to the people of both Canada and the United States. In the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region, the only barrier to cross-border migration and trade was the water itself.

Once the site of fierce naval battles and the sacking of city of York (today's Toronto) during the War of 1812, the far-sighted decision to demilitarize the lakes through the 1818's Rush-Bagot Treaty continues to be an important precedent in the negotiation of contemporary disarmament agreements.

The region has been the cradle of "good neighbourly relations," particularly around water stewardship. The Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 was one of the world's first environmental agreements, and its implementing institution, the bi-national International Joint Commission, is a model for binational stewardship. The Great Lakes Water Quality agreements (1972, 1978), along with the Compact (2005) signed by the Great Lakes Governors and Premiers, protects the Basin and prevents any future water diversion.

But the 105 million people living in the region today need their respective governments to continue to work together on the border. To remain the world's fourth largest economy, the region needs a second Detroit-Windsor crossing.

The Canada-U.S. Auto Agreement set the course for the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, and subsequently NAFTA, back in 1965. Our most integrated trade industry by far, the production and assembly of automobiles is concentrated in the Great Lakes region. This "industry of industries" draws in hundreds of feeder manufacturers in dozens of locations in Canada, the United States and Mexico. Although global pressures had once put the automotive sector in peril, today the industry is on the road to recovery thanks to the collaborative efforts of our federal, provincial and state governments. It also represents the evolution in North American business from trading separately to making things together.

However, industrial co-operation requires border co-operation.

Before a car is assembled in Michigan and Ontario, the component parts have criss-crossed the border an average of seven times. The Michigan based Center for Automotive Research recently concluded that 61% of a car or truck rolling off the assembly line in Ontario is "Made in U.S.A." -now that's making things together!

It is no surprise then that the Great Lakes region contains our busiest border crossings, presenting unique challenges for just-in-time delivery. The first step to making the border work better for people across the region should be the easiest: having inspection for all government services at each of the region's crossings available 24/7. Our competition overseas does not work 9-5 -neither can we.

But the top priority has to be the construction of a second bridge between Windsor and Detroit. In the 7,000 trucks that daily cross the Ambassador Bridge are contained over a quarter of the goods traded between Canada and the U.S. Any interruption in traffic on this 80-year-old, privately owned bridge means layoffs: thousands in the first day and tens of thousands stretching south to the Carolinas by day two. Resiliency, national security and the national interest of both countries requires us to build a second crossing, the new International Trade Crossing.

We also need to invest in the crossings and customs plazas between Port Huron and Sarnia and along the Niagara River from Buffalo-Fort Erie to Lewiston-Queenston. Rail and waterways are cost-efficient and low emissions. They need our attention too.

For nearly 200 years, we have enjoyed good relations across our land and maritime borders, and the commensurate benefits in jobs and growth that has resulted from our close ties. Now we need to meet the challenges of the 21st century by thinking like a region and making sure that a choked up border doesn't get in the way of our shared vision and mutual prosperity.

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