

U.S. border fee proposal to be 'vigorously' fought by Ottawa

Homeland Security wants to charge every vehicle, pedestrian a fee to enter U.S.

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Ottawa "will vigorously lobby against" a proposal to charge every vehicle and pedestrian a fee to enter the United States at any land border crossing, says a spokeswoman for Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The Department of Homeland Security wants Congress to authorize the study of a fee that could be collected from everyone who enters the U.S. at land crossings bordering Canada and Mexico.

Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade thinks a fee to simply enter the U.S. would be bad for business between the two countries.

"Canadian officials will vigorously lobby against this proposal," department spokeswoman Emma Welford told CBC News in an email.

"We believe that any fee on travelers crossing the Canada-U.S. border would be bad for travellers and bad for the economy," .

Welford said Canadians spend more than \$21 billion annually in the U.S.

Chrysler alone, for example, makes more than 1,600 customs entries in Windsor-Detroit every day.

Matt Marchand, president of Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, also dislikes the proposal.

"We intend to fully leverage the entire chamber network on both sides of the border ... to defeat this idea," said Marchand, who has already discussed the proposal with chambers in Michigan.

Marchand says 80 per cent of Ontario's exports go to the U.S. and that 32 U.S. states name Canada as their top destination for exports.

"Our economies are incredibly integrated," he said. "Any impediment or wall placed in between us slows economic growth and slows productivity. Creating barriers does not increase trade or tourism."

Sarnia-Lambton stands as Canada's second busiest border crossing by volume. Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley has already written MP Pat Davidson to raise his concerns.

"Any proposal that would increase fees on Canadians would be seen as a clear impediment to jobs and growth and is not in line with the economic agenda of the government of Canada," Davidson said.

The 2014 Department of Homeland Security budget proposal seeks increases in existing fees charged for services, including fees that air and sea travellers must pay when they enter the country.

But the agency also wants to study the feasibility of collecting a land border crossing fee for pedestrians and passenger vehicles along the northern and southwest borders of the United States.

No fees have previously been imposed on those who enter by car, bus or train.

Hopes that 'sanity will prevail'

The budget request says the study should consider a fee that could be added to existing tolls or to ticket prices for those arriving by bus or train.

According to the request, the study should include:

- The feasibility of collecting from existing operators on the land border, such as bridge commissions, toll operators, commercial passenger bus and commercial passenger rail.
- Requirements to collect at land ports of entry where existing capability is not present.
- Any legal and regulatory impediments to establishing and collecting a land border crossing fee.

The budget doesn't suggest how much the fee would be. The study is to be completed within nine months.

The NDP's border critic and Windsor West MP, Brian Masse, told CBC News that even a study "is still very serious," and a fee could have "a serious economic impact."

Masse said the NDP would record its "strongest objections" to the study in a letter to Public Safety Minister Vic Toews and Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird.

Masse said Canada "doesn't need passenger vehicles backing up at the border."

Roy Norton, the consul general of Canada based in Detroit, cautioned the proposal is only in its preliminary stages. He told CBC News that he's confident the proposal will fail and that "sanity will prevail."

United States Ambassador to Canada, David Jacobson, said too much is being made of a proposal to conduct a study.

"There's a proposal for some money for a study. We'll wait to see what happens there," he told reporters Monday in Ottawa after a walk to honour victims of the Boston Marathon bombings.

The Canadian Snowbird Association is also against the proposal.

"While we appreciate the fiscal challenges faced by our friends in the United States, we would prefer the U.S. government focus on ways to reduce obstacles at the border that hinder trade and tourism," said Michael MacKenzie, the association's executive director.