

# Get transportation projects right, says chamber



Bill Anderson, Ontario research chair in cross-border transportation policy at the University of Windsor and chair of the chamber's transportation committee which produced the paper on July 5, 2012, in Windsor. (Windsor Star files)



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Development of new and existing local transportation infrastructure projects is critical if the Windsor-Essex area is to remain economically competitive, according to a transportation white paper by the Windsor-Essex Region Chamber of Commerce.

“With so much local transportation infrastructure in play right now, this is a great opportunity to get it right and set this region up for economic success into the future,” said Bill Anderson, Ontario research chair in cross-border transportation policy at the University of Windsor and chair of the chamber’s transportation committee which produced the paper.

“We need to determine how this region takes full advantage of these infrastructure opportunities,” said Anderson. “We believe the recommendations we have made are not inconsistent with what many of the surrounding municipalities want to achieve.”

A chamber committee took a look at all local transportation sectors including road, rail, marine and rail as well as the Windsor-Detroit border crossing, adjacent highways and local transit.

The paper makes more than two dozen recommendations including completion of the Lauzon Parkway extension to Highway 401 as quickly as possible, construction of a new Detroit River rail tunnel, streamlined customs processes for trucks crossing the new Windsor-Detroit bridge, infrastructure renewal at ports along the Great Lakes seaway system and creation of a passenger ferry service across the Detroit River. It also says Windsor International Airport should continue its efforts to expand air freight operations.

“We felt it was important to go through this consultation process with businesses, our members and others and present an overall package of what those opportunities are moving forward,” said Anderson

The paper also recommends that Windsor market itself as a border-ready region stating that “it is relatively remote within Ontario, while it is highly accessible to a number of large U.S. cities.”

Ed Miles, chairman of the chamber’s board of directors, said “the paper provides a clear direction for the road ahead if we want to be even more competitive as a region.”

Anderson said that while the automotive industry “isn’t going away, it likely won’t grow in the near future.

“We need to build on the sort of capabilities that the industry has conferred on this region and that’s advanced manufacturing, logistics and warehousing. Those are the things we do best,” said Anderson.

The paper recommends public transit service be expanded into built-up areas beyond the city limits and that the U.S. government be encouraged to establish a truck preclearance centre in Essex County. The federal government, VIA Rail, Amtrak and relevant U.S. transportation agencies are advised to consider establishing a cross-border passenger rail link. As well, the paper says customs clearance hours at the Detroit-Windsor truck ferry should be extended.

Other recommendations refer specifically to streamlining and improving government policy regulations.