

Chamber gets vocal about bridge support

October 16, 2012

Dave Hall, The Windsor Star

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is urging members to get vocal about their support for the \$4 billion border crossing project that will connect Windsor and Detroit by a second bridge

The chamber has sent a letter asking members, particularly those with operations in the United States, to counter an estimated \$10-million US advertising campaign backed by the owners of the Ambassador Bridge. The advertisements, sponsored by a group calling itself The People Should Decide, urge Michigan electors to endorse a proposal on the Nov. 6 ballot that would require voter approval for any new border crossing.

“There are some very rich and powerful special interests determined to block a new crossing that is clearly in the public interest and it is imperative that we get the right information into the hands of people who can make sure this project goes ahead,” said Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

“They are spending millions of dollars in an attempt to protect vested interests and we need to continue taking this issue very seriously.”

The chamber initiative targets Canadian companies with operations in the U.S. as well as companies on both sides of the border which have corporate headquarters well removed from the border and may not be versed on the issues and the importance of the crossing, said Beatty.

Attached to the chamber’s letter is a backgrounder about the New International Trade Crossing produced by the Canadian Consulate office in Detroit. It points out that the new bridge will create 10,000 to 15,000 direct construction jobs, provide another route for the 8,000 trucks which cross the border every day carrying \$120 billion annually in trade and protect hundreds of thousands of jobs that rely on an efficient border.

“We can’t show this support just once,” said Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. “We have to do it over and over again in multiple ways. We have to be aggressive and relentless in reaching every single person we can to make sure this crossing is approved because it is critical to the economies on both sides of the border.”

The Canadian chamber’s letter is signed by Marchand, Beatty and Allan O’Dette, president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association has also issued a letter to its members and Canadian business executives saying numerous studies have supported the need for the new crossing and asking for continued support.

“As manufacturers, we need to do everything possible to ensure the Proposal 6 question (on the Michigan ballot) is not successful,” says APMA president Steve Rodgers’ letter. “If you have a sales office, distribution centre, manufacturing facilities or any other type of operation in Michigan, we ask that you pass this message on to your Michigan employees.”

Major labour unions, automakers and farm organizations have already indicated their support.

At a recent policy conference in Grand Rapids, Mich., the new Windsor-Detroit border crossing was recognized as the top priority by the vast majority of those in attendance, Marchand said. “We need to keep re-emphasizing that message during the next three weeks.”

On June 15, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder announced an agreement paving the way for the new crossing by establishing the framework for Canada’s and Michigan’s roles and responsibilities for the construction, financing, operation and maintenance of the new crossing.

Mickey Blashfield, director of The People Should Decide and manager of government relations for the bridge company, couldn’t be reached for comment Tuesday.