

## **ANOTHER BRIDGE WON'T SOLVE OTTAWA'S TRAFFIC PROBLEM**

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The National Capital Region faces a serious problem with the ever-increasing volume of traffic flowing across the Ottawa River, with downtown Ottawa facing the worst impact of heavy trucks passing through the middle of the city. No one disputes the problem is getting worse.

Sadly, the National Capital Commission's proposed solution – building a very expensive new bridge east of the downtown core – will not solve this problem. The NCC's own experts agree.

Despite the half billion dollar investment in opening a new bridge, NCC consultants admit that the present volume of truck traffic on the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge of 2,600 vehicles per day will remain the same by the end of 2031 while the number of cars using the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge will actually increase from 4,000 to 6,000 per peak hour of traffic. Even if the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge were closed to trucks altogether, NCC consultants have concluded that most of the truck volume would continue to clog downtown Ottawa, with massive increases in truck traffic crossing the Chaudière bridge.

In sum, the proposed solution is no solution at all. Without making any meaningful change to the traffic congestion of downtown Ottawa, the new scheme will lessen the quality of life for the neighbourhoods experiencing the new bridge traffic and will create an incentive for further costly suburban sprawl in lieu of greater fiscal savings achieved through infill and downtown development. Funds would be better directed towards public transit needed to shorten commuter travel time and expense in reaching downtown Ottawa, and to create walkable, transit oriented, mixed use development communities.

Amazingly, because the NCC won't initiate a comprehensive origin and destination study, i.e. where cars and trucks crossing the bridges are coming from and going to, its assumption that a new bridge will solve the traffic problem in downtown Ottawa is flawed from the start. Like a hammer in search of a nail, the NCC has focussed solely on building a bridge for traffic to the exclusion of addressing greater regional sustainability issues.

Is this a rational way to spend more than half a billion dollars of taxpayers' money?

Ironically, the NCC is simultaneously promoting Horizon 2067, a 50-year plan for the region, yet it doesn't appear to have a serious plan for 2012. The NCC has given little or no thought to the fiscal, social and environmental consequences of a new bridge and the traffic impacts on the neighbourhoods and Greenbelt it will pass through, to say nothing of the vast additional sprawl that would inexorably follow construction of a new major bridge outside Ottawa's downtown.

The NCC (and by extension its "partners", Ontario and Quebec and Ottawa and Gatineau) appears to be locked into 1950's thinking. Had the NCC properly utilized this unique opportunity rather than simply rush to build another bridge, it would have implemented a regional smart growth tier system with:

- appropriate light rail transit;
- disincentives for sprawl development by requiring adequate transportation public facilities and transportation impact fees;
- encouragement of new residential and commercial development consisting of walkable mixed use centers, traditional neighborhood development, public-private transit development and downtown infill.

Focusing development resources on these areas would render another bridge unnecessary.

In the shorter run, the region needs to get tough with the growing volume of traffic across the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge. Limiting heavy trucks to 5 - 7 a.m. and 7 - 10 p.m. would remove heavy truck traffic from downtown Ottawa during peak hours. Truck drivers would be forced to use existing alternative routes.

The average car crossing the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge carries 1.2 people. Bridge tolls could permit cars with 3 or more persons to cross free and vehicles with 1 or 2 persons would pay sliding scale tolls to finance an alternative transportation system. Building a "park n' ride" on the Gatineau side of the bridge would encourage commuters to carpool to downtown or ride a bike.

Downtown Ottawa is already highly “pedestrianized.” Instead of building a new roadway and bridge, the \$500 million would be better spent towards construction of an automated people mover light rail system that would loop around Gatineau and downtown Ottawa. The City of Miami Downtown Metromover System has dramatically reduced vehicle traffic while accommodating 30,000 passengers a day. Yet the City of Miami is only one-third of the population of the City of Ottawa. Light rail could be built to cross the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge on one lane of the bridge and carry commuters and tourists from “park n’ ride” sites in Gatineau, depositing them within walking distance of all major downtown destinations.

It is simply incomprehensible that Canada’s capital has set such a poor planning example for the rest of the nation. A sensible, sustainable, urbanist, non-sprawl regional plan would yield extraordinary savings in terms of reduced economic costs of commuter delay; lower road maintenance and repair costs; reduced air contaminants and greenhouse gas emissions; fewer auto and pedestrian injuries and deaths; and avoided cost of new infrastructure and new roads to support suburban sprawl.

There is no public necessity or public purpose in simply building another bridge to run through Ottawa and Gatineau neighbourhoods and business centers, while doing nothing to address wider regional sustainability needs. The entire bridge study should be completely redone and the NCC needs to embrace sustainable “smart growth” 21<sup>st</sup> century regional planning.

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\*Over the past 40 years, the firm of Freilich and Popowitz, with offices in Los Angeles, Kansas City, Dallas and Aspen, has developed and implemented land use plans and regulations for sustainable smart growth for over 250 cities, counties and states in the U.S.A. Dr. Freilich is a co-author of the 2010 book "From Sprawl to Sustainability: Smart Growth, Sustainability, Green Development and Renewable Energy" and the "21st Century Land Development Code for the American Planning Association" 2008.