

Thursday, June 17, 2010

New Windsor-Detroit rail tunnel proposed

Underwater link would replace one built in 1909

The push is on to build a new rail-only tunnel under the Detroit River connecting Windsor, Ont., and Detroit, Mich.

The newly formed Continental Rail Gateway Coalition wants to replace a century-old tunnel connecting the two cities.

The group is a public-private coalition made up of the Windsor Port Authority, Canadian Pacific Railway and Borealis Infrastructure created to raise the \$400 million needed to build the tunnel and lead the construction effort.

The current tunnel, built in 1909, carries approximately 350,000 rail cars every year. But it cannot handle double-stacked containers and some newer multilevel rail cars used by shippers and auto manufacturers.

'A larger replacement rail tunnel is critical to creating jobs and turning Windsor-Detroit into one of the most significant logistics hubs in the Midwest.'

—David Cree

The tunnel was expanded in 1994 but cannot be enlarged again, the coalition said in a news release Thursday.

The group argues that by building a new tunnel, it will make the Windsor-Essex and Detroit-Wayne County region more competitive as a logistics hub. A larger tunnel would allow container trains to cross over the border, creating a direct link from the Port of Montreal through Toronto, Windsor, Detroit and Chicago.

Construction would create jobs

"A larger replacement rail tunnel is critical to creating jobs and turning Windsor-Detroit into one of the most significant logistics hubs in the Midwest," said David Cree, president and CEO of the Windsor Port Authority.

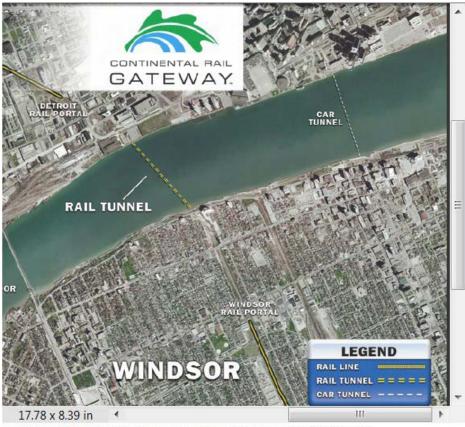
The group said it expects the tunnel project will create more than 2,200 direct and indirect jobs.

"A cross-border approach to regional economic development is long overdue," said coalition member Marge Byington. "This agreement reflects the close ties between the United States and its largest trading partner, as well as the shared interests of rail and port operators."

Backers hope to open the tunnel by 2015 pending environmental and other reviews.

A tunnel allowing double-stacked trains was built and opened in the 1990s between Port Huron, Mich., and Sarnia, Ont.

Below is a map of the proposed rail tunnel between Detroit and Windsor. Click on the map to move in and out to see the tunnel's path:



The proposed rail tunnel under the Detroit River would connect Windsor, Ont., with Detroit, Mich.



A Canadian Pacific train enters the tunnel under the Detroit River on its way to Ontario from Detroit in this photo from 2004.