

# BLUE WATER BRIDGE PLAZA AND CORRIDOR EXPANSION PROJECT

CITY OF PORT HURON AND PORT HURON TOWNSHIP, ST. CLAIR COUNTY

## BACKGROUND

*The Blue Water Bridge (BWB) is a major international border crossing between the United States and Canada, located between Port Huron, Mich., and Point Edward, Ontario, Canada. U.S. trade with Canada averages more than \$1.2 billion per day, with the BWB responsible for approximately \$130 million of that daily total.*

*In 2011, more than \$47 billion in goods (14 percent of total commercial vehicle trade) crossed the BWB between the United States and Canada. More than 15,000 cars and trucks cross the BWB on an average day.*

*The existing 18-acre BWB Plaza employs about 485 federal, state, and private business persons, most of whom live in the Port Huron area.*

## PROJECT AREA AND HISTORY

The BWB, jointly owned by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Blue Water Bridge Canada, consists of two bridge spans over the St. Clair River: one for eastbound traffic to Canada and one for westbound traffic to the United States. The original span (which now carries westbound traffic) was opened in 1938 and the second span (designed for eastbound traffic) opened in 1997.

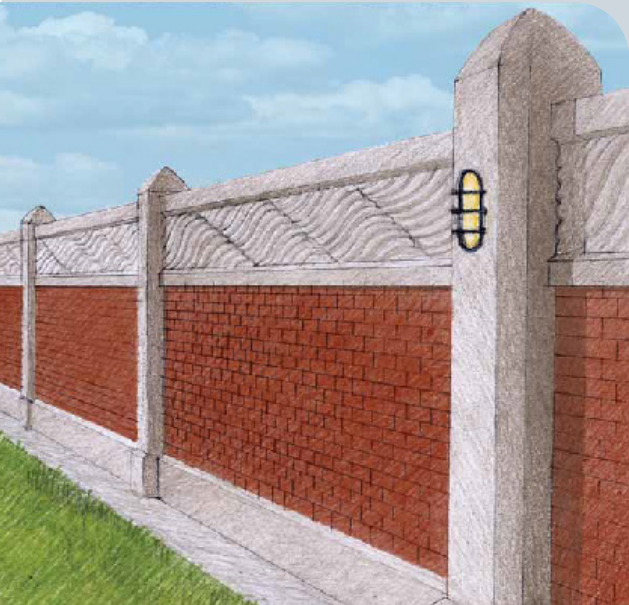
Federal agencies operating in the plaza include the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The inspection agencies lease facilities in the plaza from MDOT through the General Services Administration (GSA), which provides buildings for the federal governments.

After Sept. 11, 2001, the introduction of new inspection technologies, procedures and policies to enhance security at the border highlighted the need for a larger facility. In response, the state of Michigan initiated a study in 2002 to consider expansion alternatives, following the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Consequently, MDOT sponsored an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as the lead federal agency.

The EIS identified a recommended alternative, which received federal approval with a Record of Decision (ROD) signed by the FHWA in May 2009. **The ROD approved the following:**

- ▶ *Reconstruction of 2.2 miles of existing freeway approaching the plaza*
- ▶ *Relocation of the existing Welcome Center*
- ▶ *Reconstruction of the Water Street and Lapeer Connector interchanges*
- ▶ *Replacement of the existing Black River Bridge*
- ▶ *Expansion of the existing 18-acre plaza to a new 56-acre facility*
- ▶ *Relocation of M-25*

As part of the EIS "Green Sheet" commitment, MDOT and consultants Wilbur Smith and HNTB prepared an Aesthetic Design Guide (ADG) as a tool for design professionals to ensure development and implementation of context-sensitive infrastructure and landscape aesthetic improvements during construction of the project. The ADG identifies opportunities throughout the plaza and the I-94/I-69 corridor where aesthetic and other design treatments can be added to help offset the visual impacts of the project.





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The ADG, which was developed between December 2008 and May 2009, and completed in partnership with the project Community Advisory Group (CAG), consisted of the following stakeholders:

- ▶ *Adjacent neighborhoods*
- ▶ *Local businesses*
- ▶ *Port Huron Chamber of Commerce*
- ▶ *St. Clair County*
- ▶ *City of Port Huron*
- ▶ *Port Huron Charter Township*
- ▶ *FHWA*
- ▶ *GSA*
- ▶ *The Historic District Association*
- ▶ *The Bridge Plaza Business and Community Coalition*
- ▶ *MDOT*

The estimated plaza construction cost was approximately \$300 million. However, in late 2010, as part of the federal budget process, CBP notified the GSA and MDOT that the 56-acre plaza would not receive funding. Working together, GSA, CBP, FHWA and MDOT developed a more affordable, reduced plaza option that would undergo further technical review for re-submittal into the federal budget process. The total proposed plaza size was reduced from 56 acres to 34 acres with an estimated cost of \$165 million for the federal agency facilities.

Using a variety of federal funding sources, MDOT was able to fund design and construction for the Black River Bridge and I-94/I-69 freeway approaching the plaza, allowing major construction to begin on the corridor in 2011.

## CURRENT STATUS

MDOT is scheduled to complete construction on the I-94/I-69 freeway and Black River Bridge segment of the project in November 2012. The total construction cost for this project is approximately \$103 million, including a \$30 million TIGER I Grant. Work included:

- ▶ *Replacement and widening of the I-94/I-69 Black River Bridge*
- ▶ *Construction of a 14-foot-wide nonmotorized pathway across the Black River*
- ▶ *Construction of the new Pine Grove exit ramp from eastbound I-94/I-69*
- ▶ *Replacement of the Water Street and Lapeer Connector interchange*
- ▶ *Reconstruction of the Stocks Creek culvert under I-94/I-69*
- ▶ *Grading and other site work for the proposed Welcome Center*
- ▶ *Construction of a wetland mitigation site*

More information on the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study can be found at: [http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9621\\_11058\\_22978---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9621_11058_22978---,00.html)

Information on context-sensitive solutions at MDOT can be found at: [http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9621\\_41446---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9621_41446---,00.html)