

INFORMATION BULLETIN

DATE: August 27, 2014

SUBJECT: Plaza changes vital to Lewiston-Queenston span

SOURCE: Editorial, Niagara Gazette, 8/24/14

A major problem that continues to plague the traffic flows at the border here is the totally inadequate system for processing vehicles on the U.S. plaza of the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge.

When the span opened in 1962, it met all the demands for safety, security and related facilities in that thriving era. In fact, within a few years, it was frequently cited as a model in new bridge design and construction. The \$720-million Niagara Power Project had just been completed two years earlier and soon the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge had become the fourth busiest commercial land crossing between the U.S. and Canada. Yet traffic congestion was inevitable.

The tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, however, compounded matters with the harsh reality that our borders were no longer as safe as we had believed for decades. Due to the sharp increase in security, the customs and immigration processing times at the area bridges actually doubled.

Yet mind-boggling changes occurred. After some foot-dragging and debate, Canada dealt with the problem on that side of the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge. The project started in 2007 is now in the final stages of \$140 million in improvements, made possible by the Canadian government and the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission. Although the commission invested heavily in the design and basic plans for the U.S. plaza, the federal government simply refused to make any commitment due to budget constraints.

Meanwhile, on this end, U.S.-bound motorists continue to face frequent and lengthy delays in "wait times" as they approach the Customs and Border Protection inspection booths. Even worse, feared by people familiar with the endless problem, is that frustrating delays will continue, at unpredictable periods, with five-mile backups from Lewiston and along provincial Highway 405, the link between the bridge and the Queen Elizabeth Way. When those backups occur now, local authorities often opt to close that

highway stretch leading to the L-Q bridge and route all traffic toward the Peace Bridge, between Fort Erie, Ont., and Buffalo.

That's hardly the way to resolve gridlock at the border. And imagine the blow that deals to the Niagara area economy, especially the bustling Military Road core that produces millions of sales tax dollars for Niagara County. One eye-opening statistic on that impact: Canadian shoppers buy 82 percent of the value of goods sold at Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, Military Road. Incidentally, that same mall is in the process of adding some 50 stores.

Beyond that, the international bridges have always been considered vital arteries for commerce, industry and tourism between two of the world's biggest trading partners. That alone is sufficient to make it imperative that both countries strive to keep those corridors accessible.