

INFORMATION BULLETIN

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SUBJECT: Official Opening of Calais Facility

SOURCE: WQDY Calais



Although the new international border crossing between Calais, Maine and St. Stephen, New Brunswick opened Nov. 16, a ceremonial grand opening was held Monday at the new Calais Port of Entry.

The US General Services Administration and the US Department of Homeland Security opened the new state-of-the-art, green land port of entry in Calais, Maine, partially funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Part of GSA's high-performance green building program, the port was built to achieve LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for comprehensive use of sustainable design and technology.

Recycled, reused, and locally-available materials were used during construction. The facility conserves energy by bringing natural light into every occupied space, and conserves water by using low-flow fixtures that consume 40 percent less water than

traditional plumbing.

"Thanks to funding from the Recovery Act, we were able to make this building a national example of sustainable design and construction," said GSA Chief Architect Les Shepherd. "The green technologies employed in this Recovery Act project created jobs in both traditional construction sectors and emerging green industries."

Dignitaries attending Monday's ceremony included the David Jacobson, US Ambassador to Canada; Senator Susan Collins, Congressman Michael Michaud along with Thomas Winkowski, Assistant Commissioner of Field Operations at US Customs and Border Protection; and David Cole, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Transportation.

The new Calais Port of Entry is located on a 54-acre site.

Calais and St. Stephen now have three international crossings; the Ferry Point bridge connecting both down towns and the Milltown bridge that connects both Milltown sections of the communities. Both crossings will remain open for noncommercial traffic.

All commercial traffic must use the new border crossing.

The story of a new border crossing is a local one that through persistence gained the attention of those state, provincial and federal officials to see it through.

"The bond between Calais and St. Stephen is so strong because it is a bond that is based on shared lives," Sen. Collins said. "To these two communities, hands across the border is more than the slogan for a summer festival, it is truly a way of life."

Maine Department of Transportation Commissioner David Cole recalled that some of the first studies done for a new border crossing date back to 1977, "according to my files."

"People could have given up at many, many points along the way," Cole said.

Eleven years ago things started to happen.

"MaineDOT and our counterparts, the New Brunswick DOT got together and formed the Public Advisory Committee and brought together 56 different organizations from local, state, provincial and the national level who had to be involved in making this project happen," Cole said.

Cole reiterated -- this was a local story.

"This is about Calais and St. Stephen getting together and trying to figure out how to get rid of horrendous congestion. And I was one of those parents with my kids in the back of the minivan complaining -- the hour-and-a-half at the border, so I understand that. And

we'd hear from the truckers," Cole said. "It's an incredible story."

Looking out at the audience, Cole saw Edmund Delmonaco and recalled --"In 2003 when the governor came on board, Edmund called for a meeting with other local officials and the governor and myself had made the case --- this is not on the radar screen for funding."

"Despite the Herculean efforts and planning efforts that had gone into it -- at that point, both the governor and I assured the community that we were going to make this a priority and working with our delegation, we all worked together and the delegation brought the federal funding home. Lo and behold in 2005, the Calais - St. Stephen border crossing was named the top US priority on both borders," Cole said.

But a number of things would crop up between 2005 and the completion of the crossing.

"This was not without its controversy and boy, it's nice to be able to drive in here without seeing the "Go away DOT" signs as you dump off on Route 1 from Route 9," Cole chuckled.

Following the inside ceremony, the speakers stepped outside for the ribbon cutting.

Kevin Rousseau of the Office of Freight and Business Services is one of the MaineDOT officials who made many a trip to Calais for what seemed at the time to be a never-ending series of PAC meetings on the new border crossing.

At the beginning of the process, it was thought a new border station would be a little bigger than what had existed for years locally, but upon seeing the massive new port facility up close Monday was described as "overwhelming" by Rousseau.

"I never imagined it would be anything quite like this."

During the time of discussion and planning for a new border crossing came the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 and everything changed.

"It changed the idea of what the new border crossing would look like -- from an upgraded Friendly's Restaurant to something that looks like Gillette Stadium," Rousseau said.