



## ***EBTC INFORMATION BULLETIN***

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***DATE: November 2, 2007***

***SUBJECT: Blue Water Bridge***

***SOURCE: Globe & Mail***

Traffic across the second-busiest commercial crossing between Ontario and the United States - the Blue Water Bridge at Sarnia, Ont., over which 6,000 trucks a day cross - could be crippled by a strike next week.

Toll collectors, maintenance workers, custodial staff and currency exchange tellers, who are represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada, are set to vote Tuesday on whether to accept a final offer from the Blue Water Bridge Authority, the Crown agency that operates the bridge between Sarnia and Port Huron, Mich.

If union members reject the authority's offer, which includes a 25-per-cent cut in pay for new hires, the workers would be in a legal strike position at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday.

After mediation talks between the authority and the union broke down this week, the company sent employees a notice that it intends to implement its final offer starting on Wednesday.

Chuck Chrapko, who the Conservative government appointed president of the authority in November of 2006, said that, rather than installing new technology for the collection of tolls, lower wages for new hires are "a way to preserve the jobs here at the Blue Water Bridge for the long term."

He said that existing employees would not be affected by the reduced wage scales, and that he hopes that they will accept the four-year contract, which offers signing bonuses of \$1,300 for full-time workers and \$900 for part-time for the first year, followed by an increase of 3 per cent a year for the final three years.

The current top rate for a toll collector is \$22.38 an hour. Maintenance workers earn a maximum of \$24.82, custodial workers \$16.05 and exchange tellers \$18.68.

PSAC bargaining agent Todd Waytiuk said the union is perplexed by the demand for lower wages for new workers, as the authority has not presented any data that show it is under financial pressure.

It is not clear how much chaos would result if the workers strike. In addition to the trucks, the bridge is used by 8,000 to 9,000 cars a day, and industry sources said the alternative crossings are already operating at capacity.

The union will ask unionized truck drivers not to use the bridge, but the critical issue would be whether Canada Customs agents and immigration officers would honour picket lines, which seems likely, as they are also PSAC members, one industry official said.