



INFORMATION BULLETIN

DATE: August 27, 2014

SUBJECT: *The Star's View: Bridge maintenance seems sorely lacking*

SOURCE: *Editorial, Windsor Star, 8/22/14*

Slow-moving traffic on the Ambassador Bridge turned out to be a real eye opener for Robert Hood.

The long-haul driver from Peterborough had nothing better to do than look around while waiting to cross into Detroit, and what he saw were guard rails that were in “shocking shape,” with missing sections, heavy rust and cracks.

“It’s hanging. It’s ready to fall. There’s nothing holding it up other than broken clamps,” he said of the section leading from the Canadian plaza to the newer main span. The sight so troubled Hood that he started snapping pictures.

People appreciate the fact Hood sounded the alarm bells, but Windsorites already know the 85-year-old bridge is full of rust and holes and crumbling concrete.

That’s been public knowledge since 2009, when Matty Moroun, the bridge’s billionaire owner, lost his court fight to keep secret a report outlining the condition of the structure. It wasn’t that we couldn’t see the damage. It’s that we wanted to know what the experts had to say about it. A U.S. safety report revealed that, among other things, Moroun’s bridge was in “fair” condition, needed “major maintenance or repairs,” and there were missing bolts, deteriorating support channels, rails that didn’t meet current standards and rail posts that would have trouble withstanding vehicular impact. (Man overboard!)

Some things changed, but many didn’t.

The results of a 2012 report, on the bridge's 83rd birthday, showed there were still significant problems.

In fact, it had University of Windsor students and faculty fearing the still-crumbling concrete and holes were a danger to both them and their vehicles. "When you see trucks driving over the holes, that can't be good," said one university staffer. No kidding.

Transport Canada indicated in 2013 it was satisfied the bridge was complying with report requirements regarding inspections, maintenance and repairs. But the agency didn't say that meant it was satisfied with the actual work.

When asked about the guard rails in question, Dan Stamper, president of the Canadian Transit Company, indicated they were awaiting government approval to add new foundations, decking, lighting and hand rails.

The truth is, Stamper is awaiting approval for things unrelated to current safety requirements, namely a six-lane approach on the Canadian side and the twinning of the Ambassador Bridge.

We all know hell would freeze over before that happens, but that doesn't mean Stamper and his successors can wait forever to fix what's wrong.

Officials on both sides of the border haven't cautioned people against driving on the bridge. But they've raised enough red flags — over and over — to show Moroun does the bare minimum, and only because it's a matter of public record.