

## Bridge group advances project

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The company looking to build a new bridge connecting Fort Erie and Buffalo has taken another step towards fulfilling its goal.

The Ambassador Niagara Signature Group has filed an application with the U.S. State Department to seek approval to build its bridge along the International Railroad Corridor.

The federal permit is just one of many green lights needed by governments on both sides of the border for the group to advance its proposal.

"We have done the majority of the environmental studies in the States. It makes sense to file at this point," said Leigh Whyte, a consultant working on the project for the Ambassador Group.

"I'm very confident of it (the project moving forward). I believe it is the best thing for the town of Fort Erie."

The Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, which is looking to expand its own bridge as a solution to ease commercial backups, said according to its studies the Ambassador group's proposal isn't feasible.

"We studied that corridor extensively and universally that alternative was not supported," said PBA general manager Ron Rienas.

"What happens with all of the investment currently within the Peace Bridge corridor (such as the) customs facilities, the duty free shop and the land arrangements made," questioned Rienas. "It would go through woodlots, through wetlands. Thousands of trees will be cut down for a road that's not necessary."

Rienas said another reason the proposal is not feasible is it's flat out against the law. He said the Canadian government enacted a law in 1923 to prohibit building a bridge within six miles of the Peace Bridge without the authority's permission.

But Ambassador Group's Whyte said he believes it's not the exclusively the Peace Bridge Authority's decision.

"The federal government has determined who can build this bridge and we've submitted an application to have them review this," he said.

Whyte said documents have also been filed with Transport Canada under the International Bridges and Tunnels Act but an environmental assessment has yet to be submitted.

"We filed under the International Bridges and Tunnels Act (which was enacted in February 2007) for the review of our project," said Whyte. "We are formally initiating the process."

Whyte said Ambassador's next step to advance their project is to discuss the application with Transport Canada and to continue to conduct site-specific environmental studies.

A cost estimate shows the facility will cost about \$300 million (U.S.) to construct.

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