

# FOSTERING CROSS-BORDER TRAIL TOURISM

Between the Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan Metropolitan Areas

# 2025



Front cover photos: upper left – Gordie Howe International Bridge; lower right – multi-use path on the Gordie Howe International Bridge (credits: Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority)

# ***Fostering Cross-Border Trail Tourism***

## **Between the Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan Metropolitan Areas**

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# Preface

As we look ahead to the fall of 2025 and the opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge between Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario, it is important to recognize the significance of the new toll-free bridge for pedestrians.

This bridge, and especially its pedestrian lane, will provide a crucial link to new opportunities connecting residents via the Trans Canada Trail. It will expand cross-border tourism and allow people to engage with nature, history, and culture. Most notably, this will be the first international bridge crossing within the 28,000-km trail network, further enhancing opportunities for recreation, active transportation, tourism, and economic development in both border communities.

When I first advocated for the pedestrian lane back in 2011, my goal was to create a cross-border trail network that would connect Canadians and Americans. Now, with the support of environmental groups from both Windsor and Detroit, we are seeing this vision take shape, especially with the creation of Ojibway National Urban Park at the foot of the bridge. I am proud to see this progress. Although we are still working to pass legislation to officially establish Ojibway National Urban Park, the federal government has already announced \$36.1 million in funding over five years for this park, along with \$4.6 million per year in funding. Additionally, this park will soon be connected by trail to Detroit's Belle Isle Park and the newly developed Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park, which also opens this fall, presenting a whole new binational experience for seasoned tourists on both sides of the Detroit River.

The benefits of trail tourism are numerous: it promotes health and wellness, enhances quality of life, conserves natural resources, celebrates history and community identity, and stimulates economic growth. I am committed to helping create more opportunities for binational trails and am honored to have been part of seeing this come to fruition.

I highly recommend this report and encourage everyone to explore the incredible water, wildlife, heritage, and recreational opportunities right in our own backyard. Binational trails and connections cannot be understated. I look forward to seeing you on the trail!

***Brian Masse, Former Member of Canadian Parliament  
Windsor West***

# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land on which the Gordie Howe International Bridge project is being constructed sits on the Traditional Territory of the Three Fires Confederacy which comprise the Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatomi Peoples, as well as many other First Peoples of Turtle Island since time immemorial (the Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapee, and Huron/Wendat Peoples). We further acknowledge the diverse and vibrant communities that call this place home today, including Caldwell First Nation, Walpole First Nation, the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, and the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation.

"We were placed here and given responsibility, just as all people around the world, to take care of Creation. We are all in relationship and have this responsibility. There is only one Earth, and we must take care of Her and make a place for seven generations to come."

***Elder Dr. Myrna Kicknosway  
Walpole Island, Bkejwanong Territory  
Elder-in-Residence at Windsor Law***



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We also gratefully acknowledge the members of the steering committee who helped organize and convene the conference and all conference speakers, panelists, and participants for sharing their knowledge and ideas. A special thanks to Mary Lou Scratch, Nia Khuong, Sharon Lackie, and Judy Jantzen of the University of Windsor's Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research and Dr. Catherine Febria and student volunteers, including Sarika Sharma, Amesh Wickramasinghe, and Shane Peters, from the University's Health Headwaters Lab for their significant contributions to making the conference a success. Finally, we thank Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc. and Tennille Newsome for their help with the design and layout of this report.

# Executive Summary

The fall 2025 opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge between Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan, with its multi-use trail for cyclists and pedestrians, is projected to be transformational for cross-border trail tourism. The October 2024 State of the Strait Conference was convened at the University of Windsor to help foster cross-border trail tourism. The conference program included a keynote address, an overview of the Gordie Howe International Bridge project, and three panel discussions focused on connecting greenways, local perspectives, and trail tourism marketing and business benefits.

The conference found that Gordie Howe International Bridge has the potential to catalyze cross-border trail tourism in a way that serves as a springboard for broader revitalization of the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas. Meaningful community engagement is key to reaching the full potential of cross-border trail tourism. Experience has shown that real, lasting change happens when people feel heard and empowered. The new bridge has the potential to be more than just a physical connection between these two border cities. Indeed, it can be a conduit for co-creating a common trail tourism vision, sharing stories, fostering understanding, advancing collaboration, celebrating history, improving quality of life, and continuing the longstanding highly regarded relationship between the United States and Canada.

Both the Windsor and Detroit sides of the border have unique trail systems with a broad geographic scale and compelling destinations. However, one area of improvement is cross-border trail tourism institutionalization. Visit Detroit, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, greenway trail partners, The City Institute, the Downtown Detroit Partnership, and the four parties of the cross-border trail tourism MOU (i.e., Trans Canada Trail, Ontario's Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, Michigan's Iron Belle Trail, and Michigan's The Great Lakes Way) should explore greater collaboration on cross-border trail tourism. In essence, these organizations would come together in a collaborative or boundary organization network to foster cross-border trail tourism.

Conference Steering Committee recommendations include:

- Increase meaningful community outreach and engagement in trail planning and programming, including local businesses, and ensure open communication channels among all stakeholders.
- Develop strategies for community engagement and storytelling to enhance cultural connections between regions.

- Strengthen ties between trail groups and environmental organizations to provide meaningful trail experiences that reconnect people with the river and other natural resources, make memories, create a sense of wonder, and help foster a stewardship ethic.
- Develop themed trail experiences to celebrate the region's unique biodiversity and culture (see Table 2 in the body of report) and market these to the cycling community, including casual cyclists.
- Strengthen the connections between public transportation and greenways, including planning cycling routes and infrastructure adjustments to connect to the Gordie Howe International Bridge.
- Prioritize wayfinding signage (i.e., digital, analog, and physical signage), expand bike rack installations along trails, and share key information with businesses along a trail.
- Develop a sustainable infrastructure improvement plan for Windsor, addressing drainage, maintenance, and public spaces.
- Incorporate e-bikes into cycling community planning to broaden accessibility.
- Go beyond physical infrastructure and develop binational and local trail programs/events to engage and inform residents and visitors and promote cross-border exchanges.
- Support the Detroit River Project's efforts to obtain a World Heritage Site designation for the Underground Railroad in the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas, and support the Canadian federal designation of Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor.
- Develop strategies to make downtowns more welcoming for tourists (addressing cleanliness, safety, and revitalization).
- Establish partnerships with Detroit/Windsor cycling groups to create joint tourism offerings.
- Foster community collaborations to leverage the Gordie Howe International Bridge as an opportunity for Detroit's and Windsor's growth.
- Strengthen collaborations between Visit Detroit and Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI) for cross-border trail tourism, including website promotion of cross-border trail tourism (e.g., border crossing requirements, trail points of interest, videos and photography, itineraries for one-day, two-day, and weekend trips, and event calendars). Visit Detroit and TWEPI should also work with The City Institute in Detroit and others to help develop cross-border trail tourism itineraries and tours. Finally, Visit Detroit and TWEPI should work with other regional partners to ensure tourism-related businesses are market-ready.
- Institutionalize greenway assessments (e.g., potentially a status assessment every 5-10 years) to evaluate trail segment completions, gaps, potential route improvements, safety improvements, equity considerations, etc., and to keep greenways in the public consciousness.
- Measure and broadly communicate the economic impact of cross-border trail tourism resulting from the multi-use trail on the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

# Introduction

Cross-border trail tourism can result in many benefits, including social/cultural (Stoffelen, 2018), economic (Duda, 2024), public health (Mayr et al., 2022), and environmental (Timothy and Boyd, 2015). However, there can be a plethora of barriers to cross-border trail tourism, including complexities of border crossing procedures, regulatory differences between countries, language differences, lack of coordinated infrastructure across borders, political tensions, inadequate wayfinding signage and trail maintenance, cultural differences, economic disparities between neighboring regions, and safety concerns at border crossings (Makkonen and Williams, 2024; Timothy et al., 2016).

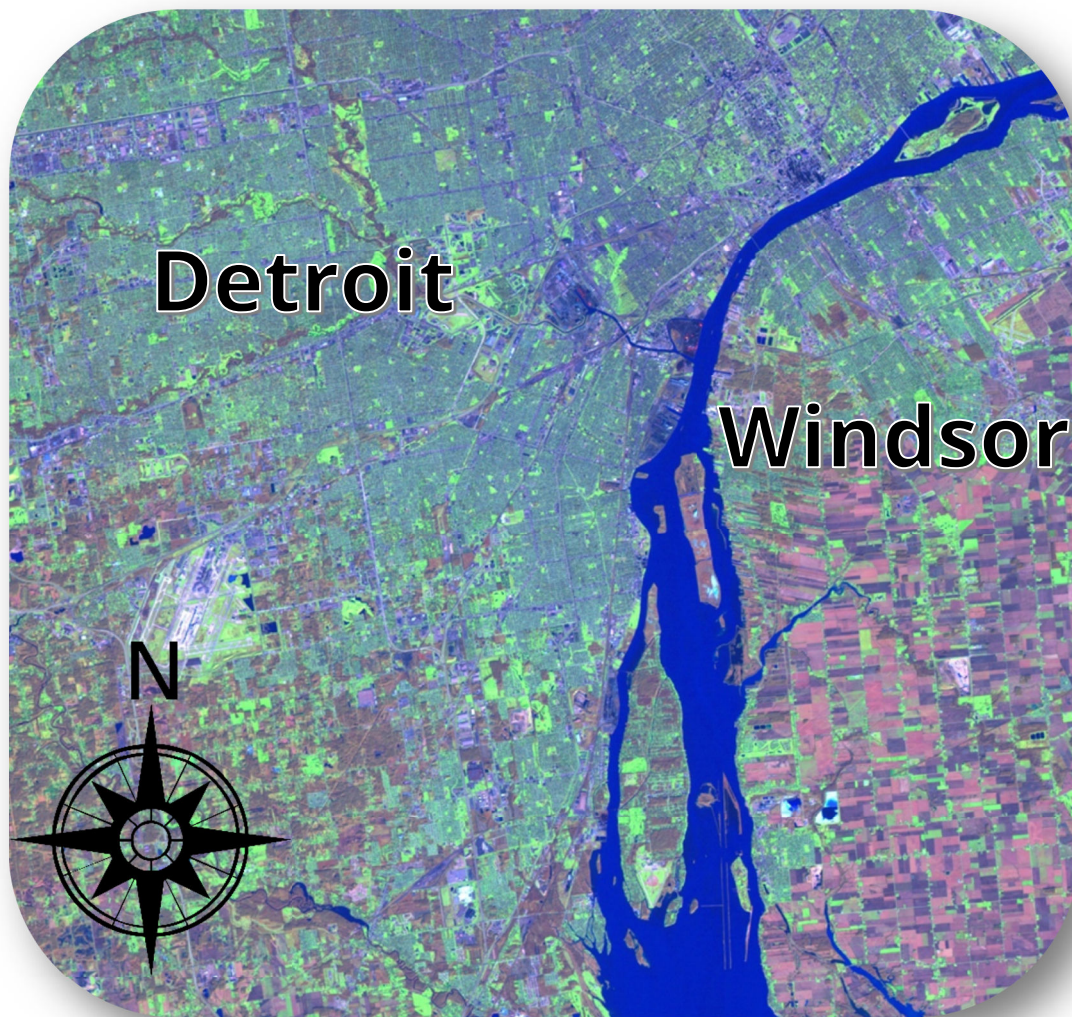
Situated at the heart of the Great Lakes is the Detroit River, a 51-km connecting water body through which all the water from the Upper Great Lakes (i.e., Lakes Superior, Michigan, and Huron) flows to the Lower Great Lakes (i.e., Lakes Erie and Ontario) (**Figure 1**). It also forms part of the border between Canada and the United States.

Located on the banks of the Detroit River are the border cities of Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario. The populations of metropolitan Detroit and Windsor-Essex County are approximately 4.35 million and 470,000, respectively. Both cities have long histories as commercial and manufacturing centers, with Detroit being the “Automobile Capital of the United States” and Windsor being the “Automobile Capital of Canada.”

The Windsor-Detroit crossing is the busiest commercial border crossing between the United States and Canada and is vital to the economies of Michigan and Ontario, as well as Canada and the United States. This crossing handles around one-third of all trade between the two countries and amounts to about \$1 billion in trade per day.

This border crossing includes the Ambassador Bridge built in 1927 for commercial truck traffic and passenger vehicles, the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel built in 1928 for passenger automobiles, and the Detroit River Rail Tunnel built in 1910 for freight. To plan for and facilitate the transportation of people and goods in the future, the new Gordie Howe International Bridge is being constructed across the Detroit River and will be completed in September 2025. In response to substantial public input, this new bridge will also include a dedicated multi-use path to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists crossing between Windsor and Detroit. Use of the path by pedestrians and cyclists will be toll-free.





*Figure 1. The Detroit River forms part of the border between metropolitan Windsor, Ontario, Canada and metropolitan Detroit, Michigan, USA, and is bordered by Lake St. Clair at the head of the river and western Lake Erie at its mouth (credit: NASA).*

The 2025 opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge and its dedicated bicycle and pedestrian lane provided a unique opportunity to explore and cultivate cross-border trail tourism as the theme of the 2024 State of the Strait (SOS) Conference. The SOS Strait Conference is a Canada-U.S. forum held every two years that brings together governmental managers, researchers, students, nongovernmental organizations, and concerned citizens to better understand problems and opportunities facing the region and foster greater transboundary collaboration. The SOS conference now has a 27-year history of co-production of knowledge and co-innovation of solutions in the spirit of ecosystem-based management of these shared waters (**Appendix 1**).

This conference was organized by a binational steering committee and held at the University of Windsor on October 22, 2024. The conference program included a keynote address, an overview of the Gordie Howe International Bridge project, and three panel discussions focused on connecting greenways, local perspectives, and trail tourism marketing and business benefits (**Appendix 2**). This report presents a summary of conference discussions, along with key findings and conference steering committee recommendations for advancing cross-border trail tourism in the future.

### Cycling the Border Through Time – Keynote address by Chris Waters, International Lawyer and Cycling Advocate at Windsor Law

The Indigenous peoples of the region knew no borders. Not only did the Detroit River provide water to drink and fish, waterfowl, and wild rice to eat, but it also served as a transportation corridor to facilitate trade along and across the river. Similarly, during the French presence in the region, the Detroit River was a seamless connector.

Prior to the 1700s, Indigenous trail networks were the first greenways (Sewick, 2016; Mason, 1959; Hinsdale, 1931). Early European surveyors mapped these trails, and some became part of the present-day road grid patterns of the region (Sewick, 2016).

Today, the cities of Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan are located on the banks of the Detroit River. They are border cities in a long relationship with each other. The extent of their connection and integration can be seen in cross-border trade and commerce, cross-border marriage, and even cross-border smuggling, which hit its peak during Prohibition. Interpersonal, commercial, and cultural links were and are extensive.

On December 18, 1868, the Detroit Journal reported the first velocipede ride – a precursor of the bicycle, on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit. The first bicycle club in Detroit was formed in 1879. Then in the 1880s, the Good Roads Movement was started by bicyclists in the United States to advocate for improved roads (Scott and Gell, 2020).

In 1884, the Detroit Free Press published an exposé on an international cycle tour, titled The Great Canada Bicycle Tour (Bates, 1884). Written by President Bates of the Detroit Bicycle Club, the piece highlighted the journey starting in Detroit on July 2, 1883, crossing the river into Ontario, and ending in Buffalo, New York on July 12, 1883.

Cycling, at this time, was an activity engaged primarily by upper-class men and was considered a gentleman's sport. Drawings from the era depict men crossing the country on bicycles with a very large front wheel, or "high wheelers." Cyclists, or wheelmen, were riding on gravel, wood, and dirt road conditions.

Detroit and Windsor have a long bicycle legacy, including an international bicycle relationship (**Figure 2**). For example, an 1897 guidebook of the Michigan Division of the League of American Wheelmen advised cyclists on how to access Canadian cities and towns, including Tecumseh, Chatham, and Amherstburg (Waters, 2021). The starting point was the same for the Canadian destinations: "leave Detroit by Woodward Avenue. Take Ferry to Windsor (fare, five cents)." Canadian recreational cyclists similarly took their bikes on the ferry over to Detroit. So too did hundreds of cycle commuters. Detroiters and Windsorites were members of each other's cycling clubs, raced together, and even manufactured together. Evans & Dodge (of Dodge Brothers fame) built bikes right beside the ferry dock in Windsor.

Despite this promising start, joint Windsor-Detroit cycleways were kneecapped with the closure of the Ambassador Bridge to pedestrians and cyclists in 1982. With a Cold War reference, the Windsor Star quipped that, "it has been called the world's longest undefended border. But for pedestrians and bicyclists, the U.S.-Canada boundary now resembles an iron curtain."

Although Transit Windsor has provided a partial workaround in recent years by allowing bicycles to be transported through the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel on tunnel bus bicycle racks placed on each tunnel bus, the tunnel has also been closed to cyclists and pedestrians seeking direct access. At the same time as bikes were banned on our international crossings, efforts were made — sometimes deliberately, and sometimes under well-intentioned, if misguided, safety initiatives — to squeeze bikes off the roads of these "motor cities."

Until the bike boom of the 1970s, these efforts were almost successful. Thankfully, cycling in general in the Windsor region did pick up in the following decades, but cross-border cycling has generally involved putting your bike on a car and driving over the border.

The potential benefits of the multi-use path on the coming Gordie Howe International Bridge have been widely touted. Among other things, the Windsor-Detroit region is experiencing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to restart cross-border cycle tourism in our region in a meaningful way. The benefits of promoting cycling and outdoor adventures include better health and air quality, visitor dollars, and a chance to highlight the rich natural and human heritage of the Detroit River for those in and beyond our region.





***Figure 2. Chas Fox participates in the 5th annual 16-km road race sponsored by the Walkerville Wheelmen bicycle club on August 1, 1896, in Windsor, Ontario (credit: Charlie Fox).***



Detroit has an extensive and continually growing network of greenways and other forms of cycling infrastructure, including the 47-km Joe Louis Greenway, the Detroit RiverWalk – the No.1 riverwalk in the United States three years in a row, and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park that is currently under construction. The draw in that direction, for Windsorites, is clear.

For Detroiters crossing into Windsor, the lure is the proposed Ojibway National Urban Park, riverfront greenways connected to downtown, and many historical and cultural attractions.

Will visitors to both cities find safe and attractive cycling routes with adequate wayfinding signage? There are also some trail gaps on both sides of the border, which will leave cyclists — especially those who feel vulnerable on our roads — reluctant to explore what these cities and regions have to offer. Progress on the Windsor side towards implementing the Active Transportation Master Plan remains slow, though the numbers who turn out for Open Streets suggest that Windsorites crave being out on foot or on two or three wheels.

Unfortunately, rather than encouraging efforts in Windsor and other municipalities to make cycling an important part of the transportation mix for recreation and daily living alike, the Province of Ontario is attempting to quash the development of cycle paths. Recently passed legislation will not only require municipalities to seek permission to remove a lane of motorized traffic for purposes of building a bikeway, but will allow the province to order the removal of existing bike lanes.

Leaving aside questions of provincial overreach, the environmental, health, and equity benefits of cycling are ignored in this proposal. So too is the simple math that people on bikes take up less space than people in cars.

Bicycles and other forms of micro-mobility will have to be part of the congestion solution. Finally, and particularly to our region, efforts to put roadblocks in the path of cycling threaten to undermine the potential catalytic benefits of the Gordie Howe International Bridge's multi-use path.

If it is to be more than a novelty, the bridge bikeway has to be a path, catalyst, and tool for safe cycling on both sides of the river. Priority must be placed on developing more border/boundary spanners – individuals or organizations that reach across institutional, geographic, political, disciplinary, cultural, and socio-economic boundaries and overcome barriers to build relationships to achieve common goals like strong linkages between southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan greenways and robust cross-border trail tourism.

## Building Cross-Border Connections - Heather Grondin, Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority

The Gordie Howe International Bridge project is a once-in-a-generation undertaking. The project will deliver much-needed transportation improvements for international travelers, provide jobs and opportunities for growth to the Windsor-Detroit region, and include features that make this project truly distinctive.

Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority is a Canadian Crown corporation charged with a mandate to deliver the project through a public-private partnership model. Bridging North America was selected in 2018 as the private-sector partner responsible for designing, building, financing, maintaining, and operating the Gordie Howe International Bridge (**Figure 3**).

Four components are currently under construction: the longest cable-stayed bridge in North America; two state-of-the-art ports of entry – one in Canada and one in the United States; and a connection into the Michigan Interstate system. In response to feedback obtained through substantial community engagement, the Gordie Howe International Bridge includes a dedicated multi-use path to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists crossing between Windsor and Detroit. It will open in September of 2025 (Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority, 2024).

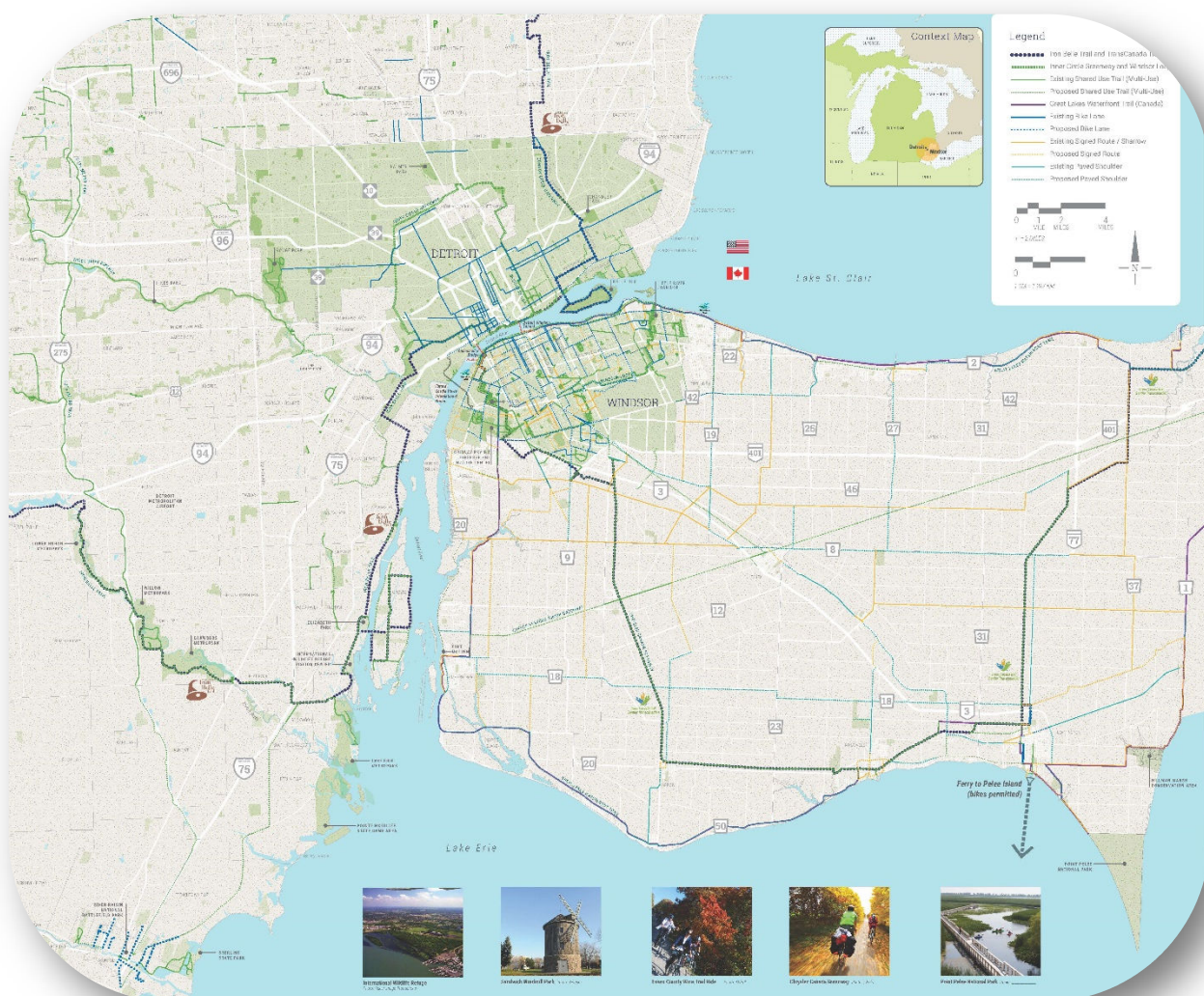


**Figure 3. The Gordie Howe International Bridge is being constructed by Bridging North America (credit: Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority).**

The bridge is 2.4 km long and includes six lanes – three Canadian-bound and three U.S.-bound – and a 3.7-m-wide multi-use path. The multi-use path will be one lane that accommodates two-way traffic and will be separated from vehicular traffic by concrete barriers. Use of the path will be toll-free.

The multi-use path will benefit local communities by supporting active transportation, healthy lifestyles, and enhancing cycling tourism across the border. The bridge team is working closely with municipal partners to establish trail network connections (**Figure 4**). For example, connections are constructed around the Port of Entry, along Sandwich Street, and to Malden Park. These routes offer connections to the Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway Trail, the Chrysler Greenway, the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, and Trans Canada Trail (**Table 1**). In the United States, connections are being constructed around the Port of Entry and nearby streets, and to the Joe Louis Greenway, Iron Belle Trail, and The Great Lakes Way (**Table 1**).





**Figure 4. Canadian and U.S. greenways that will soon be linked by the multi-use trail of the Gordie Howe International Bridge.**

**Table 1. Examples of trail route options coming off the Gordie Howe International Bridge.**

Exiting Bridge	Examples of Trail Route Options
<b>Windsor, Ontario</b>	<p>Coming off the bridge, an immediate cycling option is to take the Sandwich Town Loop that connects with Windsor's Malden Park and historic Sandwich Town, established in 1796 and considered one of the oldest continuously inhabited European settlements in Ontario. Another option is to cycle the Parkway Trail linking Malden Park in Windsor, LaSalle, and the Town of Essex via the 17-km Herb Gray Parkway, Trans Canada Trail (Chrysler Greenway), and Cypher Systems Greenway. From that point, another trail option is to take in stories past, historic architecture, nature, a natural shoreline, and a beach overlooking Lake Erie through the Heritage Waterfront Trail that links Amherstburg, Harrow, and Colchester via the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, Cypher Systems Greenway, and the Trans Canada Trail (Chrysler Greenway). Other exciting trail options include the Wine Trail Loop that connects several wineries between Colchester, Harrow, and Kingsville, or taking the Pelee Island Ferry to explore fascinating history, nature preserves with native alvar habitats, sandy beaches, and a winery on the 27-km Pelee Island Loop around the 42-km<sup>2</sup> Pelee Island that is signed as part of the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail.</p>
<b>Detroit, Michigan</b>	<p><b>East route:</b> Cyclists can head east on the Joe Louis Greenway to the Detroit RiverWalk and Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park (an \$80 million new park that features two regulation-size basketball courts in an outdoor sport house, a playground with multiple animal structures, an expansive lawn for outdoor events, and a water garden). From the park, cyclists have the option of heading north on the Southwest Greenway to Detroit's Central Train Station (this 1913 train station has recently gone through a \$1 billion renovation as a technology and cultural hub) and Mexicantown or head east toward Cullen Plaza, Milliken State Park, and its Outdoor Adventure Center (a family outdoor adventure venue that features hands-on activities, exhibits, and simulators). From there, cyclists can head north on the Dequindre Cut to Eastern Market (the oldest open-air market in the United States) or continue to head east on the riverwalk to the 397-ha island park called Belle Isle that features the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory, Belle Isle Aquarium, Belle Isle Nature Center, Dossin Great Lakes Museum, Oudolf Garden, James Scott Memorial Fountain, three lakes, 81 ha of forest, athletic fields, public beach, picnic areas, spectacular views of the Detroit and Windsor skylines, and more.</p> <p><b>West route:</b> Cyclists can head west along the Joe Louis Greenway to trails of Downriver Linked Greenways. Key points of interest along this route will be: Fort Street Bridge Park in Southwest Detroit; Ecorse's Dingell Park; Wyandotte's Downtown, Bishop Park, and BASF Park; Wayne County's Elizabeth Park (the oldest county park in Michigan and home to Jazz on the River); the Visitor Center of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge; Humbug Marsh (Michigan's only Ramsar Wetland of International Importance); and Lake Erie Metropark (a beautiful Metropark that is home to Detroit River Hawk Watch and Hawk Fest). There are also many inland trail extensions.</p>

In essence, the bridge will support a Windsor-Detroit cross-river tour that will celebrate the unique culture, history, and diversity of the Sandwich/West Windsor and Delray/Southwest Detroit communities. Signage, including historical and cultural content, will be placed along pedestrian and cycling paths on the lands surrounding the Canadian and U.S. Ports of Entry. The project team has worked closely with a Community Stories Committee to identify possible sign content for inclusion while incorporating community input. Between six to eight signs will be installed around each Port of Entry.

The bridge project also includes a Visual Art Program to create memorable, high-quality works of art consistent with the international importance of the bridge and to celebrate and promote creativity and friendship between Canada and the United States. Multiple artistic features are incorporated into the project as a result of ongoing community feedback to integrate cultural and historical recognition features where possible, including public art, commemorative art, and Community Benefits Plan art.

Cross-border trail tourism will enhance local economies and the well-being of residents, and will enrich the lives of visitors. Unique destinations that provide compelling experiences along such trails are critical to achieving repeat visits. Windsor and Detroit are fortunate to have many such destinations, including Windsor's proposed Ojibway National Urban Park, Detroit's Belle Isle, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, First Nations sacred sites, Windsor's waterfront parks and greenways, the Detroit RiverWalk – voted the No. 1 riverwalk in the United States three years in a row, Amherstburg's Fort Malden and Detroit's Fort Wayne, the Underground Railroad where 40,000 freedom seekers crossed the Detroit River to Canada, automobile history, ship-building history, rum running, and so many more. Such cross-border trail tourism experiences will help showcase the Windsor-Detroit metropolitan area as a great place to live, work, and play, and as an ecotourism and cultural destination of choice. Such experiences also play a key role in attracting and retaining employees for businesses.

### Connecting Greenways Panel Discussion

The first conference panel discussion focused on connecting greenways and was moderated by Marlaine Koehler, executive director of Ontario's Waterfront Regeneration Trust, and included four panelists – Christina Peltier, deputy director of complete streets for Detroit's Department of Public Works, Karen DuPerry, construction executive at the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Phil Roberts, former parks director at Windsor and Amherstburg, and Anneke Smit, director of the Centre for Cities at Windsor Law.

The panel discussion was initiated with an overview of the 3,600-km Great Lakes Waterfront Trail in Ontario by Marlaine Koehler. This trail is the signature project of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, a charity that succeeded from the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront led by the Hon. David Crombie.

This Royal Commission made 83 ground-breaking recommendations in its final report, leading to major changes in waterfront and watershed planning. One of those recommendations called for creating a waterfront trail and greenway to serve as background for a strategy to regenerate the waterfront. The trail would also serve as a catalyst and way to redefine the people's relationship with the Great Lakes.

The initiative represents more than three decades of collaboration to create a connected trail system that is an integral part of each local ecosystem it passes through, enhancing the environment, economy, society, and history of every participating community. It is a partnership of 177 communities along the Canadian Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River waterfronts.

The long-term goal is a dedicated trail as close to the water's edge as ecologically feasible. Today, 13% of this 3,600-km signed route is dedicated paths and quiet residential streets, 76% is on secondary roads, often in rural and northern regions, and 11% is on provincial highways with enhanced shoulders.

The Great Lakes Waterfront Trail uses interim routes to achieve connectivity, which is critical to motivating community participation and ensuring public confidence in the initiative. Trail communities and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust seize opportunities to continuously improve trail alignment and expand the connections to and from the trail.

This trail is proud to be designated as part of the Trans Canada Trail (TCT), the world's longest multi-use trail network that stretches 28,000 kilometers across Canada, connecting the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic oceans. The Gordie Howe International Bridge represents an exciting opportunity for the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail and the TCT to connect to the exciting transformation taking place on the American side of the Detroit River through trail experiences. In 2022, the TCT, the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan on behalf of The Great Lakes Way, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources on behalf of the Iron Belle Trail signed a memorandum of understanding to collaborate on binational trail experiences that inspire, educate, and foster a sense of stewardship (Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, 2024). Trail experiences connected to the region's stories (natural and cultural heritage) are powerful and



essential tools to inspire the next generation of stakeholders to embrace such legacy initiatives and contribute to their realization.

Next, Christina Peltier provided an overview of Detroit's Complete Streets Initiative, a multi-departmental approach to ensure access for all. Among other things, it strives to connect regional greenways, including the Iron Belle Trail, The Great Lakes Way, the Detroit RiverWalk, and the Joe Louis Greenway, a 45-km trail loop that connects Detroit, Hamtramck, Highland Park, and Dearborn.

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*"I grew up in Detroit in the 1950s in an era when discharges of untreated or minimally treated industrial and municipal wastewater were considered a necessary cost of doing business and belching smokestacks were a sign of economic prosperity. I remember not seeing the Detroit River while driving along East Jefferson from Woodward Avenue to Belle Isle because of the factories solidly lining the river. In recent decades, most of the old factories were abandoned and many torn down, leaving a legacy of contamination known as brownfields. For a long time, attitudes prevailed that cleanup of these sites would be too costly. Now, thanks to visionary community leaders on both sides of the river, cleanup has occurred, paving the way for repurposing the waterfront for a compatible combination of recreational and economic development. I never thought I would see such positive change in my lifetime. It is so exciting and encouraging."*

*John Gannon, State of the Strait Steering Committee*

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The Joe Louis Greenway is a cycling and walking trail that will unify Detroit's neighborhoods, people, and parks. To build trust in this greenway initiative, 57 community meetings and more than 100 design charrettes were held. This helped create a trail system that all community members can be proud of. Further, this helped uplift local voices and stories, and helped create desirable connections, support housing options, build wealth, and celebrate neighborhoods.

Karen DuPerry provided an overview of the transformation of Detroit's waterfront, called the Detroit RiverWalk. In 2003, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy was established to create a clean, safe, accessible, and beautiful public space that would make everyone feel welcome.

In its development, the community engagement was comprehensive, including public meetings, design charrettes, meeting with block clubs and church groups, and going to people's homes. The results were effective in building a riverwalk that is welcoming to all and a source of community pride. The Detroit RiverWalk was voted the No. 1 riverwalk in the United States for three consecutive years.



The concept started with a vision of bridge to bridge – the MacArthur Bridge to Belle Isle to the Ambassador Bridge to Windsor. The Conservancy had to overcome numerous obstacles, including the cleanup of industrial brownfield sites. The transformation was astounding, from abandoned brownfield sites with no public waterfront access to a series of pocket parks linked by a waterfront greenway trail.

Today, the Detroit RiverWalk attracts more than three million annual visitors and is one of the most ethnically diverse places in Michigan. In its first ten years of existence, the riverwalk has spurred more than \$1 billion in public and private investment (CSL International, 2013).

Next, Phil Roberts shared the concept of a “Biodiversity Belt” around Windsor that would showcase the region’s rich and rare plant and animal life. Plans for such a “Biodiversity Belt” exist in municipal planning documents and much of this potential trail system is in place, but a lack of political will has stalled progress. Such a “Biodiversity Belt” would be an important attraction and cross-border trail tourism experience.

Anneke Smit highlighted the efforts to create Ojibway National Urban Park to connect people with nature, conserve natural resources, and reconcile with those who came before (**Figure 5**). She noted that the University of Windsor has created a National Urban Park Hub to help build Parks Canada’s capacity for its new National Urban Park Policy. This hub will be a network, a center of excellence, and a boundary spanner.

She noted that there will always be tension in balancing conservation goals and attracting more visitation. Further, conservation should not only be pursued in discrete parks. Nature should be approached and explored throughout the city. People are going to protect biodiversity because of their commitment to nature, not public policy. That does create an inherent conflict between the protection of biodiversity and providing access to nature. More institutional efforts need to be placed on finding ways to address this.



**Figure 5. The proposed Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor, Ontario (credit: Friends of Ojibway Prairie).**

### **Key Ideas**

Key ideas discussed by the panel include:

- Greenway trails can be a good example of the “triple bottom line” – social, environmental, and economic prosperity.
- Experience has shown that if you build a trail, residents and visitors will be drawn to it.
- Periodic trail network assessments need to be performed, consistent with adaptive management (i.e., assess, set priorities, and take action in an iterative fashion for continuous improvement). Such assessments should include trail segment completions, trail gaps, potential route improvements, safety improvements, equity considerations, etc.
- Greenway trails play a pivotal role in conserving the region’s unique ecology by managing human impact, while providing an amenity that is important to people’s physical and mental well-being.
- Reconnecting people to the river and other natural resources through greenways can lead to environmental remediation, ecological restoration, conservation of natural resources, and the development of a stewardship ethic.
- Successful trail and greenway initiatives have strong community buy-in, which takes real work and commitment to develop. The Detroit River Conservancy, the Waterfront

Regeneration Trust, the Joe Louis Greenway Partnership, and the Trans Canada Trail are good examples of organizations that steward ambitious visions and are committed to building and maintaining partnerships to advance them.

- Community and event programming on greenways is as important as the physical infrastructure to maintaining community interest and care in the initiative. Community events with local partners help generate support for trails and trail organizations.
- Greenways and trails become meaningful experiences when they serve as vehicles to our stories and values. These stories contribute to a sense of place (i.e., a characteristic held by people that make a place special or unique, that fosters a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging).
- Way-finding signage, interpretive panels, apps, before and after photos, and QR codes all enhance the greenway experience.
- Greenway experiences are further enhanced by sharing the region's rich Indigenous history, including creating spaces to host Indigenous ceremonies. Further, greenway planning can be improved by traditional ecological knowledge.

### **Suggested Next Steps**

Suggested next steps from the Connecting Greenways panel discussion include:

- Strengthen ties between trail groups and environmental organizations to provide meaningful trail experiences that reconnect people with the river and other natural resources, make memories, create a sense of wonder, and foster a stewardship ethic.
- Strengthen the connections between public transportation and greenways.
- Go beyond physical infrastructure. Develop a binational and local trail program or event(s) to engage and inform residents and visitors and promote cross-border exchanges.
- Develop themed trail experiences to celebrate the region's unique biodiversity and culture (e.g., Underground Railroad, Indigenous, culinary, historic ecosystem type, etc.).
- Institutionalize greenway assessments (e.g., every 5-10 years) to evaluate trail segment completions, gaps, potential route improvements, safety improvements, equity considerations, etc., and to keep greenways in the public consciousness.
- Use the State of the Strait network to help support efforts to have the Detroit River designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

### **Local Perspectives Panel Discussion**

The second conference panel discussion focused on local perspectives and connections. Moderated by Todd Scott, executive director of Detroit Greenways Coalition, it included four panelists – Mark Tillman, the Pedals and Passports event coordinator for the Metro 313 Cyclones bike club, Adriano Ciotoli, founder and co-owner of WindsorEats, Shannon Prince, former curator of the Buxton

National Historic Site & Museum, and Steve Green, Downtown Windsor Farmers Market and Steve Green Foods.

### **Main Themes**

Five major themes discussed by this panel include:

- Gordie Howe International Bridge as a Transformative Opportunity: The bridge is a game-changer for international tourism, providing new opportunities for cross-border connectivity between Windsor and Detroit. All sources agree it presents a significant opportunity to reshape this region's future, particularly in the realm of international tourism and cycling connectivity.
- Cycling Tourism as a Key Focus: Cycling is identified as a major opportunity area. The bridge's accessibility, combined with the rise of e-bikes, is expected to attract a wider demographic of cyclists. However, infrastructure improvements are needed. Mark Tillman highlighted the potential for increased cycling routes in Windsor and surrounding areas, particularly with the new Gordie Howe International Bridge, which will facilitate long-distance rides from Detroit to Windsor (**Figure 6**).



***Figure 6. Pedals and Passports cycling event in Windsor, Ontario coordinated by the Metro 313 Cyclones bike club, 2024 (credit: Mark Tillman).***

- Windsor vs. Detroit – A Tale of Two Cities: A recurring theme is the stark contrast between Detroit's resurgence and Windsor's struggles. Adriano Ciotoli candidly acknowledged this: Expressed as the 'elephant in the room', Adriano noted that we have two cities on very different paths – Detroit is becoming known as a must visit destination with safe cycling infrastructure, while Windsor has a downtown that appears to be hollowing out. Key



challenges for Windsor include a declining downtown, social issues, and a need for improved cleanliness and safety.

- **Community Engagement & Inclusivity are Paramount:** The importance of inclusive dialogue and community involvement in planning processes was strongly emphasized. Mark Tillman argued for more inclusive dialogue, ensuring diverse voices have a seat at the table in planning and consultation processes to foster genuine community development. Steve Green reinforced this, advocating for diverse voices in decision-making, stating, "it can't just be market managers – it needs to be everyone."
- **Leveraging Local Assets & Cultural Heritage:** The Buxton National Historic Site is highlighted as a significant cultural and historical attraction that should be integrated into tourism strategies. Shannon Prince emphasized Buxton's legacy as Canada's largest planned Black settlement and its importance as a symbol of freedom and resilience. Detroit is well known as a terminus of the Underground Railroad, where more than 40,000 people crossed the Detroit River and gained their freedom in Canada. Rich Underground Railroad history exists in both the Windsor and Detroit metropolitan areas. The Detroit River Project ([detroitriverproject.com](http://detroitriverproject.com)) is a dedicated group of American and Canadian activists, educators, and community members seeking to enshrine, celebrate, and inform the public regarding the crucial role the people of Detroit and Windsor played in the Detroit River crossing. Partners are working to obtain a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation (UNESCO, 1972) for the Underground Railroad in Detroit and Windsor. Research has shown that World Heritage status can have a major socio-economic impact, but there is also concern about over-tourism. Research on UNESCO projects in the United Kingdom, which include Scotland's six World Heritage sites, has documented an estimated £151 million of financial benefit each year (United Kingdom Commission for UNESCO, 2020). In addition, such designations help bring communities together to protect and conserve some of the most important places across their country. Germany has 18 biosphere reserves that are designated under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program, with 71.6 million visitor days per year (Job et al., 2024). These 71.6 million visitor days generate gross sales of € 3.84 billion through their on-site expenditures. Nationwide biosphere reserve tourism generates a direct value added of € 1.32 billion and an indirect value added of € 646.87 million – for a total of € 1.97 billion (Job et al., 2024). As a result, 77,419 people can earn an income directly or indirectly from tourism in German biosphere reserves.

### **Key Ideas**

Six key ideas discussed by the panel include:

- **Windsor Eats' Evolution:** This company has evolved from a local restaurant guide to a national leader in experiential tourism, offering innovative tours like the wine trail ride.

WindsorEats was recently named the best tourism business in Canada. It aims to leverage the bridge by offering tours of Detroit.

- Major Taylor's Canadian Legacy: The historical significance of cycling in the region, including the legacy of Major Taylor, was acknowledged. Mark Tillman's presentation specifically acknowledged Major Taylor's presence in Canada, highlighting his races in cities like Montreal and Ottawa.
- E-bike Impact: The rise of e-bikes is a game-changer, making long-distance cycling accessible to a broader demographic.
- Buxton's Significance: Founded in 1849 by Reverend William King, Buxton was a haven for escaped slaves. It was self-sufficient and had essential infrastructure like a church, school, and factories.
- Challenges for Windsor: The city faces significant challenges, including a declining downtown, social issues, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Windsor Farmer's Market: The market has experienced substantial growth, but faces infrastructure and leadership challenges. The Windsor Farmer's Market has grown substantially, now featuring about 70 vendors weekly and attracting 1,500 to 2,000 visitors every Saturday.

### **Suggested Next Steps**

The Gordie Howe International Bridge presents Detroit and Windsor with a unique opportunity. Capitalizing on this requires a concerted effort to address existing challenges, invest in infrastructure, foster collaboration, and embrace inclusivity. By leveraging our unique assets and working collaboratively, Windsor and Detroit can position this region as a dynamic international active transportation tourism destination.

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*"We can't wait for the Gordie Howe International Bridge to open so that our inclusive cycling club can take greater advantage of the trails in southwest Ontario. Cycling between two countries will be an awesome experience. We already sponsor a Pedals to Passport international ride where we invite cyclists from throughout the United States to cycle through scenic Windsor and Essex County."*

*Mark Tillman, Metro 313 Cyclones*

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Suggested next steps relative to infrastructure development and enhancement include:

- Plan cycling routes and infrastructure adjustments to accommodate the Gordie Howe International Bridge.
- Increase signage and bike rack installations along new and existing trails.
- Develop a sustainable infrastructure improvement plan for Windsor, addressing drainage, maintenance, and public spaces.

- Investigate enhancing public transportation options connecting the bridge to Windsor's core areas.
- Incorporate e-bikes into cycling community planning to broaden accessibility.

Suggested next steps relative to tourism strategy and marketing include:

- Develop strategies to make Windsor more welcoming for tourists (addressing cleanliness, safety, and downtown revitalization).
- Explore marketing approaches targeting casual cyclists and promote local attractions like the Buxton National Historic Site.
- Support the Detroit River Project's efforts to obtain a World Heritage Site designation for the Underground Railroad in the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas.

Suggested next steps relative to partnership development include:

- Establish partnerships with Detroit cycling groups to create joint tourism offerings.
- Foster community collaborations to leverage the Gordie Howe International Bridge as an opportunity for Detroit's and Windsor's growth.
- Increase community outreach to engage more local businesses and stakeholders in activities.
- Develop strategies for community engagement and storytelling to enhance cultural connections between regions.

Suggested next steps relative to community engagement and inclusivity include:

- Ensure diverse community representation and participation in planning discussions and decision-making processes.
- Foster open communication channels among stakeholders.

## Trail Tourism Marketing and Business Benefits Panel Discussion

The third panel discussion focused on trail tourism, marketing, and business benefits and was co-moderated by Lori Newton of Bike Windsor Essex and Kristin Dayag, Chief of Staff for Detroit City Councilperson Gabriela Santiago-Romero. The four panelists included: Greg Mangan of the Southwest Detroit Business Association; Lionel Kernerman of Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI); Marlaine Koehler of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust; and Tim Novak, State Trails Coordinator of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The panel discussion was initiated with an overview of efforts in Southwest Detroit. Greg Mangan identified the need for trail infrastructure that is inclusive, equitable, and safe. Further, greenways should create mobility options for people in the community. Mexicantown is well known for events like the Day of the Dead run with music and arts, parades, open street events, food (50 restaurants in the Mexicantown area), Concert of Colors, the Cinco de Mayo cultural and music festival, and more. In addition, Southwest Detroit has historic Fort Wayne, Michigan Central Train Station, and the new Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park that is opening in the fall of 2025 (**Figure 7**). These historical



**Figure 7. The Detroit RiverWalk's new Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park is scheduled to open in the fall of 2025 (credit: Detroit Riverfront Conservancy).**



attractions, the cultural heritage, and the variety of Mexicantown restaurants and dining options make Southwest Detroit a destination of choice for cyclists. With the 2025 opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge, there is a need to better synchronize and market the events, historical/cultural destinations, and dining experiences for cycling visitors.

Next, Lionel Kernerman noted that visitors are looking for authentic, diverse, accessible, and inclusive experiences. Trip motivators in Windsor and Essex County include food and drink, arts and culture, outdoor adventure, and entertainment. There is a need to develop a visitor economy through outdoor adventure, nature cycling, storytelling, and heritage. This should include sensory experiences and cycling itineraries.

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*“Having the opportunity to develop itineraries which showcase the two-nation vacation destination in both the Windsor Essex and Detroit markets will be very appealing to cyclists. Here, we will be able to provide for excursions that call out the unique festivals, events, attractions, parks, conservation areas, and districts that are sure to inspire a sense of wonder. Our shared storied past and rich culture create an amazing backdrop for our distinct sense, pride, and taste of place, alongside offering experiential tourism at its best.”*

*Lionel Kernerman, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island*

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Organizations like TWEPI and Visit Detroit, because of their visitor and tourism missions, need to play leadership roles in developing itineraries for cycle tourism. In addition, the four parties of the memorandum of understanding on cross-border trail tourism (i.e., Waterfront Regeneration Trust for Ontario’s Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, the Trans Canada Trail, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for the Iron-Belle Trail, and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan for The Great Lakes Way) can assist in cross-pollination of ideas and experiences and provide value-added support.

Such cross-border cycling itineraries should encourage longer stays and repeat visits. Further, developing a sense of place is critically important. Businesses along these trail routes need to become bike-friendly and market-ready. The long-term goal is to become a cycling destination of choice (e.g., a two-nation vacation destination).

Marlaine Koehler provided insights from the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail in Ontario. From the onset of this trail in 1988, priority has been placed on conservation and ecological restoration. Initially, there were many trail gaps, but the Waterfront Regeneration Trust has been filling gaps and connecting diverse points of interest by the trails over time.

The Ontario By Bike Network offers a variety of information on cycling in Ontario, inspiring visitors and residents to explore more by bicycle. In 2022, there were 1.2 million cycling visits in Ontario, representing 1% of total visits in Ontario. These cyclists spent \$565 million CAD, accounting for 2.35% of total visitor spending in Ontario.

Recreational cycling was the most popular type of cycling activity in 2023 (**Figure 8**), with 96% of respondents cycling for recreation, 40% cycling for touring, 36% participating in events/tours, 58% participating in one or more overnight trips, and 38% participating in two or more trips (Ontario by Bike, 2023). Road cycling, followed closely by riding off-road trails (paved and unpaved), were the preferred types of cycling, followed by gravel cycling and mountain biking. Fifty-two percent of the respondents preferred a daily ride distance of 46-99 km and 32% preferred distances between 21-45 km on multi-day trips that included cycling.



**Figure 8. Cyclists on the Cypher Systems Group Greenway, part of the nearly 100-km greenway trail network managed by the Essex Region Conservation Authority (credit: Essex Region Conservation Authority).**



Finally, Tim Novak provided an overview of the State of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. It is the longest designated state trail in the United States – more than 3,200 km. It originates in Ironwood at the western end of the Upper Peninsula and ends at Belle Isle Park in Detroit. Michigan recognizes the value of trails in attracting users and has been a leader in funding, maintaining, and improving trails as a strong economic driver. Overall, there needs to be increased recognition of the value of trails.

### **Key Ideas**

Key ideas discussed by the panel include:

- Developing a variety of cross-border trail experiences will be important. **Table 2** presents selected examples of potential themes for such experiences.
- Wayfinding and mapping apps are important.
- In developing cross-border trail experiences, a four-pronged approach has proven effective: 1) ensure sufficient public input; 2) market and show the impact; 3) provide education on how to properly use trails; and 4) provide good stewardship to ensure the trail is clean, safe, and usable.
- When working with existing trail owners (e.g., County Wide Active Transportation System), give extra attention to businesses and attractions to get them on board. Further, promote GPS software for routing.
- A UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for the Underground Railroad would be exciting, but care must be taken to balance protecting the environment with promoting tourism.
- Trail and tourism managers need to build seamless journeys, including raising awareness of ecosystems and respect for the land.

**Table 2. Selected examples of themes for cross-border trail tourism between the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas.**

Theme	Description
<b>Automobile heritage</b>	Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario are well known as the automobile capitals of the United States and Canada, respectively. These two interconnected regions offer the world's largest collection of cultural and labor organizations, museums, archives, factories, auto collections, and events to preserve the story of putting the world on wheels and building the middle class. An easy cross-border cycling experience could be Detroit's Ford Piquette Avenue Plant Museum and Windsor's Ford City in Walkerville. For more information, contact MotorCities National Heritage Areas ( <a href="http://motorcities.org">motorcities.org</a> ).
<b>First Nations</b>	The lands and waters of this region are on Anishinaabe and Huron territories. Local tribes include Caldwell First Nation, Walpole First Nation, the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, and the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation. Cross-border cycling experiences could include stops at the burial mounds at historic Fort Wayne in Detroit and Six Points, sacred grounds of the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation in Gibraltar, Michigan, and the proposed Ojibway National Urban Park in

Theme	Description
	Windsor that will be co-managed by Parks Canada and Caldwell First Nation, with operational assistance from Point Pelee National Park in Leamington, Ontario.
<b>Rum-running</b>	During Prohibition (1920-1933), Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario were centers of alcohol smuggling, known as rum-running. The Detroit River's many islands made it difficult to detect illegal activity. In 1929, illegal liquor was second only to the auto industry in Detroit in terms of revenue. Stories from this era abound, including blind pigs, the Purple Gang, and Panther Sweat. Bus tours currently exist, but cycling tours will be an important extension of cross-border trail tourism.
<b>Architecture</b>	Both Detroit and Windsor are known for their architecture. Preservation Detroit ( <a href="http://preservationdetroit.org">preservationdetroit.org</a> ) and The City Institute ( <a href="https://www.thecityinstitute.com/">https://www.thecityinstitute.com/</a> ) offer architectural tours of Detroit. Self-guided architectural tours in Windsor are offered by Windsor-Essex Jane's Walk ( <a href="https://www.windsorjaneswalk.ca/about">https://www.windsorjaneswalk.ca/about</a> ).
<b>Albert Kahn architecture</b>	Albert Kahn (1869-1942) is a well-known innovative architect of industrial plant complexes and other prominent buildings in Detroit and Windsor. For more information, contact the City Institute ( <a href="http://thecityinstitute.com">thecityinstitute.com</a> ), Detroit History Tours ( <a href="https://www.detroithistorytours.com/">https://www.detroithistorytours.com/</a> ), or the Albert Kahn Legacy Foundation ( <a href="https://albertkahnlegacyfoundation-bloom.kindful.com/e/walking-tour-of-windsors-walkerville-">https://albertkahnlegacyfoundation-bloom.kindful.com/e/walking-tour-of-windsors-walkerville-</a> ).
<b>American and Canadian Heritage Rivers</b>	The Detroit River is the only river system in North America to be designated as both American and Canadian Heritage Rivers. These designations celebrate natural heritage, cultural heritage, and recreational heritage. Binational heritage river tours could be set up by partners.
<b>Transboundary conservation</b>	One of the primary objectives of both the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and the proposed Ojibway National Urban Park is to bring conservation to cities. A cross-border cycling event could be set up with stops at both visitor centers that could showcase making nature part of everyday urban life and how they are working together to achieve transboundary conservation.
<b>National parks</b>	The region is fortunate to have two existing national parks (i.e., Point Pelee National Park in Leamington, Ontario - <a href="https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/on/pelee">https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/on/pelee</a> and River Raisin National Battlefield Park in Monroe, Michigan - <a href="https://www.nps.gov/rira/learn/historyculture/index.htm">https://www.nps.gov/rira/learn/historyculture/index.htm</a> ) and one proposed (i.e., Ojibway National Urban Park - <a href="https://www.citywindsor.ca/residents/building-windsors-future/national-urban-park">https://www.citywindsor.ca/residents/building-windsors-future/national-urban-park</a> ). Such national parks are a magnet for people because of their scenic beauty, opportunities for recreation and learning about history, and a chance to reconnect with nature.
<b>Underground Railroad</b>	Detroit is well known as a terminus of the Underground Railroad where more than 40,000 people crossed the Detroit River and gained their freedom in Canada. Rich Underground Railroad history exists on both sides of the border. For more information about the Underground Railroad in the region and efforts to secure a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, visit <a href="http://detroitriverproject.com">detroitriverproject.com</a> . For ways to experience the Underground Railroad in Detroit, visit <a href="https://visitdetroit.com/inside-the-d/ways-experience-detroits-underground-railroad/">https://visitdetroit.com/inside-the-d/ways-experience-detroits-underground-railroad/</a> . For ways to experience the Underground Railroad in Windsor and Essex County, visit <a href="https://greatadventuretours.com/itinerary/black-history-windsor-group-tours/">https://greatadventuretours.com/itinerary/black-history-windsor-group-tours/</a> .

Theme	Description
<b>Farm fresh</b>	Detroit's Eastern Market ( <a href="https://easternmarket.org/">https://easternmarket.org/</a> ) is the largest open-air market in the United States and the Downtown Windsor Farmers' Market is a major attraction throughout southwestern Ontario. It was named the 2024 "Farmers' Market of the Year" by Farmers' Markets Ontario ( <a href="https://www.downtownwindsor.ca/farmers-market/">https://www.downtownwindsor.ca/farmers-market/</a> ). Coupling cross-border cycling with farm-fresh food experiences would be appealing to many.
<b>Shipbuilding</b>	Because of Detroit and Windsor's strategic location in the heart of the Great Lakes, their position as centers of commerce, and the demand for transportation of people and goods, these border cities became leading ship-building centers in the United States and Canada. Shipbuilding provided jobs, but also furthered billions of dollars of commerce and trade regionally and globally. A shipbuilding cross-border cycling adventure could feature stops at Detroit and Windsor port authorities and historical museums like the Dossin Great Lakes Museum ( <a href="https://detroithistorical.org/dossin-great-lakes-museum/plan-your-visit/general-information">https://detroithistorical.org/dossin-great-lakes-museum/plan-your-visit/general-information</a> ) on Belle Isle and the River Rouge Historical Museum ( <a href="https://cityofriverrouge.com/historical-museum/">https://cityofriverrouge.com/historical-museum/</a> ).
<b>ByWays to FlyWays</b>	The Detroit River is situated at the intersection of the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, with more than 350 species of birds identified in the corridor. Partners have developed a ByWays to FlyWays Bird Driving Tour Map that features 27 unique birding sites in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan (Hartig et al., 2010). Cross-border trail birding experiences would appeal to many bird watchers.
<b>Binational "Slow Roll"</b>	In cycling, a "slow roll" refers to a leisurely group bike ride. It is often considered a social event where the pace is deliberately kept slow, allowing riders of all abilities to participate. "Slow Rolls" are organized in both Detroit and Windsor. A binational "Slow Roll" might be a cycling adventure that would be appealing to a growing cycling community.
<b>Nationally and globally recognized days that celebrate conservation and the environment</b>	Numerous celebratory days have been established to raise awareness of conservation and environmental protection, including National Bird Day (Jan. 5 <sup>th</sup> ), World Wetlands Day (Feb. 2 <sup>nd</sup> ), World Water Day (March 22 <sup>nd</sup> ); Earth Day (April 22 <sup>nd</sup> ), International Bird Day (second Saturday in May); International Biodiversity Day (May 22 <sup>nd</sup> ); and World Environment Day (June 5 <sup>th</sup> ). As a result of the Gordie Howe International Bridge, the border cities of Windsor and Detroit are now uniquely positioned to host binational cycling celebrations of such days.
<b>Binational open streets</b>	Both Windsor and Detroit participate in open street events to encourage active transportation and physical activity, enhance community building, promote community-led active living initiatives, showcase recently improved streetscapes, and provide an opportunity for local businesses and organizations to participate along the route. An annual binational open streets event could be established to create synergy.



### **Suggested Next Steps**

Suggested next steps from this panel discussion include:

- Visit Detroit and TWEPI should strengthen collaboration on cross-border trail tourism. Specifically, Visit Detroit and TWEPI should promote cross-border trail tourism on their websites, including more information on requirements for crossing the border, navigating biking the Gordie Howe International Bridge, highlighting points of interest on both sides of the border, adding photography and videos to enhance excursions, and building itineraries for one-day, two-day, and weekend trips. Further, Visit Detroit and TWEPI should work with other regional partners to ensure tourism-related businesses are market-ready and to eventually develop itineraries and routes for long-haul cyclists that would be appealing to the fully independent travel market.
- Trails are strong economic drivers that serve not only visitors but residents as well. Success will only be achieved if they are inclusive, equitable, and safe. Trail users and stakeholders should be consulted meaningfully, prior to construction of new trails or the development of trail programs.
- A higher priority should be placed on connecting people to nature through trails. Experience has shown that this will, in turn, help develop a stewardship ethic (Hutson et al., 2024; Mumaw, 2017; Hartig et al., 2022; Hartig, 2019).
- Wayfinding should be prioritized, including digital, analog, and physical signage. Further, efforts should be made to inform businesses that they are located on a trail.
- The economic impact of the new multi-use trail on the Gordie Howe International Bridge should be measured and broadly communicated. Further, efforts should be made to designate experiences as part of the Trans Canada Trail Exceptional Tourism Experience and to connect trail routes and stories.
- The City Institute in Detroit ([www.thecityinstitute.com](http://www.thecityinstitute.com)) helps people understand and appreciate where they live, work, and play through tours, educational programs, and other mechanisms. Because of its track record and 19-year history of telling authentic stories to better connect people to where they live and work, and their deep cross-border relationships, it is recommended that the City Institute work with trail partners to help develop cross-border trail tourism itineraries and tours that can be promoted by Visit Detroit, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, travel agents, etc.

### **Concluding Thoughts and Steering Committee Recommendations**

Greenways promote active recreation like walking and cycling, encourage healthier lifestyles, offer alternative transportation options, improve access to nature, strengthen community connections, and reap economic benefits by increasing tourism, adjacent property values, and jobs. The Waterfront Regeneration Trust's experience with the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail has shown that

greenways and trails become meaningful experiences when they serve as vehicles to tell local stories and share values. Indeed, these stories contribute to a sense of place.

Stoffelen (2018) has shown in a study of cross-border cycle tourism in Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg that cross-border integration depends on the trail's strength as a tourism product, its cross-border institutionalization, the geography and scale of the trail, and the involved destinations. Assuming this holds true for cross-border trail tourism in Canada and the United States, the Windsor-Detroit region has strengths in strong tourism products and the geographical scale of the binational trail system, with many unique destinations. However, one area of improvement is cross-border trail institutionalization.

Visit Detroit, TWEPI, greenway trail partners, The City Institute, the Downtown Detroit Partnership, and the four parties of the cross-border trail tourism MOU (i.e., Trans Canada Trail, Ontario's Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, Michigan's Iron Belle Trail, and Michigan's The Great Lakes Way) should explore collaborating on cross-border

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*The U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, has estimated that outdoor recreation in the United States generated \$1.2 trillion USD in economic output in 2023 and supported five million jobs.*

*Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (2024)*

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trail tourism. In essence, these organizations would come together in a collaborative or boundary organization network (i.e., an entity that acts as a bridge between different groups, facilitating communication and collaboration by translating knowledge and perspectives between them, allowing them to work more effectively on shared goals).

The Gordie Howe International Bridge has the potential to catalyze cross-border trail tourism that serves as a springboard for broader revitalization of the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas. Meaningful community engagement is key to reaching the full potential of cross-border trail tourism. Experience has shown that real, lasting change happens when people feel heard and empowered. The new bridge has the potential to be more than just a physical connection between these two border cities. Indeed, it can be a conduit for co-creating a common trail tourism vision, sharing stories, fostering understanding, advancing collaboration, celebrating history, improving quality of life, and strengthening longstanding relationships between the United States and Canada.

In many respects, the Gordie Howe International Bridge will be a case study in cross-border trail tourism collaboration that reaps urban revitalization, prioritizes sustainable transportation, and fosters livable, vibrant, and connected border cities with a strong sense of community. The important lessons learned from this case study will be valuable to other cross-border regions and communities.

Steering Committee recommendations include:

- Increase meaningful community outreach and engagement in trail planning and programming, including local businesses, and ensure open communication channels among all stakeholders.
- Develop strategies for community engagement and storytelling to enhance cultural connections between regions.
- Strengthen ties between trail groups and environmental organizations to provide meaningful trail experiences that reconnect people with the river and other natural resources, make memories, create a sense of wonder, and help foster a stewardship ethic.
- Develop themed trail experiences to celebrate the region's unique biodiversity and culture (see Table 2) and market these to the cycling community, including casual cyclists.
- Strengthen the connections between public transportation and greenways, including planning cycling routes and infrastructure adjustments to connect to the Gordie Howe International Bridge.
- Prioritize wayfinding signage (i.e., digital, analog, and physical signage), expand bike rack installations along trails, and share key information with businesses along a trail.
- Develop a sustainable infrastructure improvement plan for Windsor, addressing drainage, maintenance, and public spaces.
- Incorporate e-bikes into cycling community planning to broaden accessibility.
- Go beyond physical infrastructure and develop binational and local trail programs/events to engage and inform residents and visitors and promote cross-border exchanges.
- Support the Detroit River Project's efforts to obtain a World Heritage Site designation for the Underground Railroad in the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas, and support the Canadian federal designation of Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor.
- Develop strategies to make downtowns more welcoming for tourists (addressing cleanliness, safety, and revitalization).
- Establish partnerships with Detroit/Windsor cycling groups to create joint tourism offerings.
- Foster community collaborations to leverage the Gordie Howe International Bridge as an opportunity for Detroit's and Windsor's growth.

- Strengthen collaborations between Visit Detroit and TWEPI for cross-border trail tourism, including website promotion of cross-border trail tourism (e.g., border crossing requirements, trail points of interest, videos and photography, itineraries for one-day, two-day, and weekend trips, and event calendars). Visit Detroit and TWEPI should also work with The City Institute in Detroit ([thecityinstitute.com](http://thecityinstitute.com)) and others to help develop cross-border trail tourism itineraries and tours. Finally, Visit Detroit and TWEPI should work with other regional partners to ensure tourism-related businesses are market-ready.
- Institutionalize greenway assessments (e.g., potentially a status assessment every 5-10 years) to evaluate trail segment completions, gaps, potential route improvements, safety improvements, equity considerations, etc., and to keep greenways in the public consciousness.
- Measure and broadly communicate the economic impact of cross-border trail tourism resulting from the multi-use trail on the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

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# Appendix 1

## Biennial State of the Strait Conferences and Themes 1998-2024

Date	Conference Theme	Reference
1998	Rehabilitating and conserving Detroit River habitats	Tulen et al., 1998
1999	Best management practices for soft engineering of shorelines	Caulk et al., 2000; Hartig et al., 2001
2001	Status and trends of the Detroit River ecosystem	Read et al., 2001
2004	Monitoring for sound management	Eedy et al., 2005
2006	Status and trends of key indicators	Hartig et al., 2007; Hartig et al., 2009
2009	Ecological benefits of habitat modification	Hartig et al., 2010; Hartig et al., 2014
2011	Use of remote sensing and GIS to better manage the Huron-Erie Corridor	Francoeur et al., 2012
2013	Setting ecological endpoints and restoration targets	No report
2015	Coordinating conservation in the St. Clair-Detroit River System	Francoeur et al., 2016
2017	Urban Bird Summit: Status, trends, and risks to species that call the corridor home	Francoeur et al., 2018
2019	Assessing ecosystem health of the Detroit River and western Lake Erie	Hartig et al., 2020; Hartig et al., 2021
2022	Contaminated sediment remediation	Hartig et al., 2023; Hartig et al., 2024
2024	Cross-border trail tourism	Hartig et al., 2025

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## Appendix 2

### 2024 Conference Program

**State of the Strait Conference Program**  
**CAW Centre, Alumni Auditorium, University of Windsor**

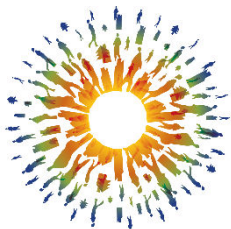
8:00-9:00 AM	Coffee and Pastries
9:00-9:20 AM	Welcome and Introductory Remarks (moderator: John Hartig, Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Land Acknowledgement from Elder Dr. Myrna Kicknosway, elder-in-residence at Windsor Law</li><li>• Welcome from the University of Windsor by Dr. Shanthi Johnson, Vice President of Research and Innovation</li><li>• Remarks from the Canadian Consul General Colin Bird</li><li>• Remarks from Member of Parliament Brian Masse (video)</li></ul>
9:20-9:50 AM	Keynote Address: Cycling the Border Through Time, Chris Waters, international lawyer and cycling advocate at Windsor Law
9:50-10:20 AM	Building Cross-Border Connections, Heather Grondin, Chief Relations Officer, Windsor Detroit Bridge Authority
10:20-10:40 AM	Coffee Break
10:40-12:10 AM	Connecting Greenways Panel Discussion (moderator: Marlaine Koehler, Executive Director at Waterfront Regeneration Trust, Toronto, ON)  Panelists: Christina Peltier, Deputy Director, Complete Streets for Department of Public Works, City of Detroit; Karen DuPerry, Construction Executive, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy; Phil Roberts, former Parks Director, Windsor and Amherstburg, ON; Anneke Smit, Director of Centre for Cities at Windsor Law
12:10-1:10 PM	Lunch
1:10-2:25 PM	Local Perspectives Panel Discussion (moderator: Todd Scott, Detroit Greenways Coalition)  Panelists: Mark Tillman, Metro 313 Cyclones; Adriano Ciotoli, Founder and co-owner of WindsorEats; Shannon Prince, former curator of the Buxton National Historic Site & Museum; Steve Green, Downtown Windsor Farmers Market and Steve Green Foods
2:25-2:45 PM	Coffee Break



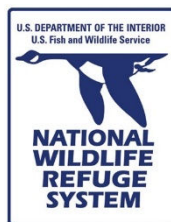
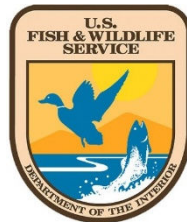
- 2:45-4:15 PM Trail Tourism Marketing and Business Benefits Panel Discussion (co-moderators: Kristin Dayag, Chief of Staff for Detroit City Councilperson Gabriela Santiago-Romero, and Lori Newton, Bike Windsor Essex)
- Panelists: Greg Mangan, Southwest Detroit Business Association; Lionel Kernerman, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island; Marlaine Koehler, Waterfront Regeneration Trust; Tim Novak, State Trails Coordinator, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- 4:15-4:30 PM Concluding Remarks – Lori Newton, Todd Scott, and John Hartig
- 4:30-6:00 PM Reception

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