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Sault Ste. Marie International Bridge traffic a mixed bag

January 10, 2011 -- Sault Ste. Marie International Bridge traffic figures for 2010 show a blend of both positive and negative trends.

On the positive side, the International Bridge Administration (IBA) reports total traffic for the year was 1,828,524, which was up 9.24 percent, or 154,739 vehicles from 2009. On the flip side, overall traffic from the past decade is down significantly. Traffic in 2009 was down 12.2 percent, or 232,950 vehicles from 2008, and in the last decade bridge traffic has dropped 32 percent from a high of 2,688,636 in 2000.

The IBA is pleased to report frequent-user traffic, made up of customers that use the discounted Prox toll card, was up in 2010. The IBA recorded 837,231 toll-card crossings in 2010, up 12.5 percent, or 93,300 vehicles from 2009. The 77,720 toll-card crossings in December were the second-highest December total in the last decade.

Commercial truck traffic ended the year at 99,551, which is a modest increase of 3.3 percent over 2009. However, in 2009 truck traffic had dropped to the lowest level since 1993. Annual truck traffic peaked at more than 147,000 crossings in 1999. The IBA reports that commercial trucks historically made up less than 7 percent of total traffic, yet they accounted for nearly 50 percent of bridge revenue.

"We monitor truck traffic trends very closely, and in 2010 trucks made up 5.4 percent of total traffic and commercial truck tolls made up 34 percent of total toll revenue," said IBA General Manager Phil Becker.

Unaudited figures indicate toll revenue for 2010 was \$6.83 million (U.S. Dollars) which is \$1.68 million more than 2009, primarily due to the April 1, 2010, toll increase of \$0.50 (USD) per

passenger vehicle. IBA budgeted 2010 expenditures for bridge operation, maintenance, and repairs totaled \$5.79 million (USD). This is nearly \$1 million below the 2009 actual audited expenditures of \$6.76 million (USD). The IBA estimates combined financial reserves will total approximately \$6.41 million (USD) at the end of 2010.

"Our goal is to build up our financial reserves for a series of bridge painting, concrete deck rehabilitation, and toll plaza projects needed within the next 15 years that are estimated to cost nearly \$50 million (USD)," said Becker. "Bridge truck traffic has been especially hard hit by the recession, and if it doesn't rebound we will have to revisit our traffic and revenue forecast."

Tolls and fees collected at the Sault Ste. Marie International Bridge are the only sources of funding the operation, maintenance, and repair of the bridge and toll plaza. The IBA does not receive any state, federal, or provincial funding for bridge operation, maintenance, and repair.

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Sault Ste. Marie International Bridge: Bridging Our Past, Connecting Our Future