
MDOT Blue Water Bridge (BWB) Toll Adjustment
Frequently Asked Questions
November 2009

1. *When was the last toll increase?*

A: 1997 was the last time the tolls were increased. They were raised from \$1.25 (passenger), \$1.50 (commercial) to the current \$1.50 (passenger), \$1.75 per axle (commercial).

2. *How much money will this toll increase raise per year?*

A. Annual toll revenue fluctuates depending on annual traffic volumes. However, based on the traffic patterns over the last three years, MDOT estimates increasing the tolls to \$3.00 (passenger), \$3.25 (commercial) will raise an additional \$8-\$10 million annually. These funds will be used to preserve the existing bridge assets and improve traffic operations on the Blue Water Bridge, the plaza, and the approaching roadways.

3. *What factors went into increasing the toll?*

A. Three primary factors necessitated the need for raising the U.S. Blue Water Bridge toll: 1.) the Blue Water Bridge is financially self sufficient, meaning, it receives no other funding from MDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, or other local sources to fund the daily bridge operations, maintenance or capital projects. MDOT strives to maintain a positive fund balance in its Blue Water Bridge fund. 2.) The Blue Water Bridge has many upcoming preservation and long-term maintenance needs including bridge painting (\$10 million), redecking the second span (\$40 million), redecking original span (\$50 million), and 3.) the plaza expansion project (\$583 million).

4. *Will there be other toll increases in the future?*

A. This toll increase is a necessary step to ensure there is enough funding to:

- maintain the daily operations of bridge (i.e., toll collections, traffic management, snow removal),
- conduct necessary major bridge maintenance projects (i.e., painting and redecking), and
- implement the plaza expansion project.

The need for future toll increases will be evaluated based on a number of factors including; the recovery of our state and national economies, future traffic volumes, and how much additional funding can be garnered for the plaza expansion

project from MDOT's partners in Washington D.C. (i.e., General Services Administration funds, new federal money which may come to Michigan in form of ARRA, TIGER Grants, or Congressional earmarks).

5. How does the proposed Blue Water Bridge toll compare to other northern border crossings?

A. Currently the U.S. Blue Water Bridge toll is the lowest passenger bridge crossing, and the second lowest commercial fare on the U.S./Ontario, Canada border. MDOT intentionally held the tolls the same rate until the Blue Water Bridge Plaza Study was completed and a recommended alternative was identified.

U.S./Canada (Bridge/Tunnel) Border Toll Comparisons (Passenger)	
	Toll
Blue Water Bridge (US) - MI	\$1.50
International Bridge - MI	\$2.50
Thousand Islands - NY	\$2.50
Ogdensburg-Prescott Bridge - NY	\$2.75
Blue Water Bridge (Canada)	\$3.00
Blue Water Bridge US (Proposed)	\$3.00
Peace Bridge - NY	\$3.00
Seaway International Bridge - NY	\$3.00
Queenston-Lewiston Bridge - NY	\$3.25
Rainbow Bridge - NY	\$3.25
Ambassador Bridge - MI	\$4.00
Detroit-Windsor Tunnel - MI	\$4.00

U.S./Canada (Bridge/Tunnel) Border Toll Comparisons (Commercial)	
(5-axle equivalent)	Toll
Ogdensburg-Prescott Bridge - NY	\$8.50
Blue Water Bridge (US) - MI	\$8.75
Thousand Islands - NY	\$9.75
Seaway International Bridge - NY	\$13.50
Blue Water Bridge US (Proposed)	\$16.25
Blue Water Bridge (Canada)	\$16.25
International Bridge - MI	\$17.50
Queenston-Lewiston Bridge - NY	\$18.50
Rainbow Bridge - NY	\$18.50
Ambassador Bridge - MI <i>(calculates tolls using weight-based formula)</i>	\$16.25 - \$22.50
Peace Bridge - NY	\$28.00

As shown on the tables above, with the proposed toll increase MDOT is still within the regional average for both passenger and commercial bridge/tunnels on the U.S./Ontario, Canada border.

6. *How did you determine the amount of the proposed toll increase?*

A. The toll increase proposed assures MDOT is able to maintain a positive fund balance while allowing the department to meet both current operational and preservation needs. The increase will also be used to fund longer-term preservation and operational improvement capital projects.

This toll increase brings the U.S. BWB Bridge toll into alignment with tolls charged by Blue Water Bridge Canada. The proposed U.S. Blue Water Bridge toll rates are still lower than the regional average for northern border bridge crossings.

7. *With this proposed increase, how will the U.S. Blue Water Bridge be improved?*

A. MDOT is committed to providing a safe, secure and efficient BWB crossing experience. As a result, several recent improvements including the installation of 28 dynamic messages signs on the bridge have improved cross border traveler information and crossing efficiency. MDOT has also incorporated security enhancements on the bridge and completed a street realignment/pier protection project on local streets under the BWB. All of these improvements compliment the proposed long-term maintenance and plaza expansion projects, making the Blue Water Bridge a state of the art U.S./Canada border crossing.

The toll adjustment allows MDOT to further improve day-to-day traffic operations and toll collection duties, as well as deliver long-term maintenance preservation projects, such as bridge painting, and bridge redeckings.

The toll increase will also provide funding for a portion of the plaza expansion project. Benefits of the plaza expansion project include:

- Improved border security as state-of-the-art customs inspection technology will be incorporated into the expanded plaza
- Increase in the number of primary inspection booths heading into the U.S. to 20 (currently 12)
- The plaza expansion will provide separate dedicated facilities for both commercial and secondary inspections,

resulting in improved border security and increased border crossing efficiency

- Estimated future (2030) crossing delays are projected to decrease from a 26 minute average to 3 minutes for traffic entering the U.S.
- Improved safety by eliminating the mid BWB “truck weave”
- Dedicated lanes provided for FAST/NEXUS enrolled vehicles heading into the U.S. plaza
- Separation of local and international traffic across the Black River Bridge, including a dedicated lane for FAST/NEXUS enrolled vehicles heading towards Canada
- New outbound inspection facilities provided improving both security and the flow of cross border traffic
- New Duty Free operations providing convenient access to travelers

The BWB Plaza Expansion Project will also provide many economic benefits to both the state of Michigan and the Port Huron community, including:

- Approximately 485 individuals work on the plaza including, federal inspection agents, and MDOT staff.
- The expanded Blue Water Bridge Plaza project will support new permanent job growth within economically distressed St. Clair County. These positions include bridge and plaza maintenance jobs, and a significant number of employees in the various federal inspection agencies that will be operating the expanded border station.
- The project will also benefit national employment by decreasing the cost of transporting goods across the border and increasing revenue and efficiency for firms that rely on the border crossing to ship products and parts between the United States and Canada.
- MDOT estimates the design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction phases of the \$583 million plaza expansion project are expected to generate 6,340 jobs.
- The plaza expansion project will also provide improved access to the greater Port Huron community, providing increased opportunities for local economic development and tourism.

8. *When is this toll increase scheduled to take effect?*

A. **The proposed toll increase is scheduled to go in effect on Tuesday, January 5, 2010.**

9. *What have you done to minimize the impact on local commuters who use the bridge on a daily basis?*

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- A. MDOT will continue to honor the BWB commuter token program. The price of commuter tokens will not change. Commuters who participate in the commuter token program save approximately 33% depending on the U.S. to Canadian exchange rate over the proposed new fare adjustment.**

10. How much of the Blue Water Bridge traffic is local commuter traffic versus long-haul traffic?

- A. Approximately 6% of the U.S. Blue Water Bridge passenger traffic currently participates in the commuter token program. The current Canadian Blue Water Bridge commuter token participation rate is approximately 17% of passenger traffic. MDOT estimates an increased participation rate in the BWB commuter token program.**

The remaining traffic either is local traffic that does not participate in the commuter token program, or long-haul cross-border traffic.

11. Can anyone participate in the commuter program?

- A. Anyone designated as a non-commercial vehicle can participate in the Blue Water Bridge commuter token program. Commuters who participate in the commuter token program will experience approximately 33% savings, depending on the U.S. to Canadian exchange rate over the regular proposed toll.**

12. How much toll funding is needed to fund the plaza expansion versus bridge operations and maintenance activities?

- A. As currently proposed, MDOT will fund the \$583 million plaza expansion with a variety of revenue sources. Traditional federal aid funding, in the form of earmarks contained within the last transportation authorization bill (SAFETEA LU), is currently being used to fund the design and a portion of the right-of-way acquisition phase. The remaining right-of-way acquisition and construction phases of the project (currently estimated at \$483 million) will be funded through the sale of bonds. These bonds will be backed by both toll revenue and lease revenue from the tenants on the plaza.**

13. Will there be different rates for U.S. versus Canadian currencies?

- A. The U.S. proposed toll rate will be the same for both U.S. and Canadian currencies.**

14. Will Blue Water Bridge Canada rates increase as part of this action?

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- A. MDOT does not have any control over toll increases on the Canadian side of the Blue Water Bridge. All such decisions are controlled by Blue Water Bridge Canada.**

15. What other funding sources are being used to fund the bridge plaza expansion project?

- A. MDOT will use a variety of funding sources to fund the BWB plaza expansion project. Congressional earmarks contained within the last transportation reauthorization bill (SAFETEA LU) are being used to fund the design phase and partially fund right-of-way acquisition activities.**

MDOT is currently pursuing other new federal aid that could be applied to the project such as American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) TIGER grants, and ARRA funding from the General Services Administration. The remaining project funds will be paid for by the sale of bonds. MDOT will repay the bonds with both toll revenue and lease revenue from the federal agencies who will operate on the plaza, and the Duty Free Store.