

St. Croix EDC Joins County Board in Support of New Bridge

U.S. Congress is asked to intervene in St. Croix River Crossing Project

St. Croix Economic Development Corporation (EDC) unanimously reaffirmed support for the St. Croix River Crossing project at its January 2011 board meeting. In related action, the St. Croix County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution supporting the new bridge on January 4, 2011. Earlier resolutions from the county go back to 1984 and 1997.

William Rubin, the EDC's executive director, called on other civic organizations and local elected boards to adopt resolutions of support. "With new administrations in Wisconsin and Minnesota, advocates for this project want to demonstrate broad support when Congress is asked to intervene," said Rubin. "The project has been analyzed for decades, and with the National Park Service finding last October, the last recourse rests with Congressional action."

Because the St. Croix River has protected status under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Park Service ruled last October that the proposed river crossing project would have direct and adverse effects that cannot be avoided or eliminated. In its findings, the Park Service referred to federal language that allows Congress to act in order to resolve a stalemate.

Rubin said bridge supporters initiated conversations with federal legislators, who will be asked to exempt the river crossing from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. A 2-state organization called the Coalition for the St. Croix River Crossing has been formed to advocate for the project in Washington, D.C.

A new bridge over the St. Croix River between St. Croix County, Wisconsin and Washington County, Minnesota has been discussed since the 1970s. It would replace a 1930s-era lift bridge in Stillwater, Minnesota. The lift



This photo simulation shows an aerial view of the King Plant looking west and illustrates the proposed St. Croix River Crossing between Oak Park Heights, MN and St. Joseph, WI.

bridge is at the end of its economic life and transportation officials have determined it is structurally deficient.

A new river crossing will help two states (Wisconsin and Minnesota) and a 13-county metro area with a population of 3.25 million people — address regional transportation shortcomings. Rubin said St. Croix County in Wisconsin and Washington County in Minnesota consistently rank near the top of each state's fastest-growing areas.

"Inaction by Congress does nothing to solve the bigger issue of a deficient lift bridge," said Rubin. "The lift bridge is also impacted by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. It seemingly cannot be expanded or modified without an adverse effect to the St. Croix River."

Funding for the proposed bridge would come from the Federal Highway Administration, and the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. For more information about the St. Croix River Crossing project, go to www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/stcroix.