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**Big Business and Local Government: Matty Moroun, the Ambassador Bridge and the City of Windsor**

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*Abstract*

This paper examines the role of one powerful business owner in local government decision-making. The paper examines Manuel Moroun's efforts to influence local government decision-making in Windsor, Ontario. Moroun is the owner of the Ambassador Bridge (the most significant North American border crossing in terms of the volume and value of trade), which connects the cities of Windsor and Detroit. Moroun is currently engaged in an effort to build a replacement bridge and prevent the construction of a publicly-controlled bridge that will break the monopoly that his bridge currently enjoys. In this campaign Moroun has sought to influence local governments. This paper examines these efforts and the degree of their success in influencing the decisions taken by Windsor City Council with respect to the border crossing. The paper examines different explanations of Moroun's influence in local politics. The conclusions reached are that Moroun is a major player in local politics. He has not however dominated local decision-making and has not enjoyed as much influence as in the United States. Windsor City Council has been prepared to oppose his policy goals and have been at least partially successful in these efforts.

*Keywords:* municipal government, big business, border crossing, urban regimes

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### *Résumé*

Cet article examine le rôle d'un chef d'entreprise puissant dans le processus décisionnel du gouvernement local. L'article examine les efforts de Manuel Moroun à influencer le processus décisionnel du gouvernement local de Windsor, Ontario. Moroun est le propriétaire du pont Ambassador (le poste frontière le plus significatif en Amérique du Nord en termes de volume et valeur d'échange), qui relie les villes de Windsor et Detroit. Actuellement, Moroun est engagé dans un effort pour construire un pont de remplacement et empêcher la construction d'un pont de rechange sous contrôle public qui rompra le monopole dont son pont bénéficie actuellement. Dans cette campagne, Moroun a cherché d'influencer les gouvernements locaux. Cet article examine ces efforts et le degré de succès de leur influence sur les décisions prises par le conseil municipal de Windsor par rapport au poste frontière. L'article examine les différentes explications de l'influence de Moroun dans la politique locale. Les conclusions atteintes sont que Moroun est un acteur majeur dans la politique locale. Cependant, il n'a pas dominé la prise de décision locale et n'a pas eu autant d'influence qu'aux Etats-Unis. Le conseil municipal de Windsor a été préparé pour s'opposer à ses objectifs politiques et a du moins partiellement réussi.

Mots clés: gouvernement municipal, grandes entreprises, poste frontière, régimes urbains

### **Introduction**

Scholars of municipal politics in Canada and elsewhere have long studied the influence of major business interests, financial organizations and property developers on municipal decision-making (Cobban 2003; Peterson 1981; Leo 1997; 2003; Stone 1989; 1993). A central question in this scholarship is whether these actors influence the local democratic process and thus secure advantageous regulatory or development decisions that are not necessarily in the interests of the wider local community. This question is given added urgency, it is often argued, by the mobility of modern capital and business in an era of globalization and by recent economic conditions that have created or added to fiscal problems facing municipal governments (Hackworth 2007; Leo 2002; McAllister 2004; Ruppert 2000).

This paper examines this question by analyzing a case study involving a financially powerful business and property owner and his efforts to influence development decisions within Windsor in Ontario, Canada. The businessman in question is Manuel (Matty) Moroun who, although a resident of Michigan, controls a business empire that extends into Canada. The most significant, if not the most profitable, element of this empire is the Ambassador Bridge that links Windsor with Detroit and which is a central element facilitating the flow of North American trade. In addition, Moroun's companies have significant land holdings in both Michigan and in Windsor.

Over the past decade, Matty Moroun has sought to construct a new span and plaza on properties he owns immediately to the west of the existing Ambassador Bridge (the so-called twinning or enhancement of the Ambassador Bridge). This is a complicated development proposal that requires approval from a wide range of actors on both

sides of the border (Sutcliffe 2008; 2011; 2012). The municipal government does not have unilateral control over these policy decisions and Matty Moroun's attempt to influence the border policy debate is by no means restricted to the municipal level. This case nevertheless presents an opportunity to examine one individual's attempts to influence a Canadian municipal government because the proposed twinning of the Ambassador Bridge requires that Matty Moroun deal with Windsor City Council. In this relationship, Matty Moroun has employed several strategies, including legal cases and public campaigns, in order to influence the municipal council's position. This article examines these attempts and their impact.

### **Business Interests and Canadian Municipalities**

The recognition that business interests (along with property developers, and commercial and financial elites) have the potential to shape municipal decision-making is not new and has long been the subject of academic examination in multiple settings (Cobban, 2003; Dahl 1961; Hackworth 2007; Savitch and Kantor 2002; Leo 1997; 2002; Stone 1989; 1993). It is also one that generates controversy.

According to one perspective, business interests enjoy a dominant place in local policy-making because of the financial resources they control and because of their economic importance to the local community as well as municipal governments' traditional responsibility for providing services to residential and commercial properties. Municipal politicians recognize the importance of business interests' capacity to shape local economic development and therefore their importance to the economic vitality of a local community. In addition, municipal politicians recognize the possibility that business interests may relocate to an alternative location and thus withdraw their resources from the local tax base (Peterson 1981; see also Cobban 2003: 233; Harding, Wilks-Heeg, and Hutchins 2000).<sup>1</sup> This account of urban politics highlights the dominant position enjoyed by these business and development interests within the local community, and the extent to which elected politicians feel obliged to develop policies that reflect their interests (such as lower business taxes and development costs), at the expense of investing money in tackling other issues such as social exclusion or urban poverty (see Sellers 2002; Leo 2003). These arguments have increasingly been linked to the prevalence of neoliberalism as a philosophy dominating politics at different territorial levels over the last two to three decades (Harvey 2005; Hackworth 2007). Neoliberalism emphasises that government regulation and intervention should only occur sparingly and that instead individuals and businesses should operate "within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (Harvey 2005: 2). In the view of some scholars, this governing perspective has affected municipal governments by placing substantial limits on their decision-making capacity, particularly as it relates to powerful business interests (see Tindal and Tindal 2009: 18-19; Hackworth 2007). Ruppert's study of Toronto, for example, argues that private business interests increasingly dominate governance of the city and, as a result, local government is a "shell emptied of its content" (2000: 285).

A related view, building on the work of Clarence Stone, argues that municipalities can be dominated by an alliance between business (particularly local developers) and

elected officials in an 'urban regime' (Stone 1989; 1993). An urban regime points to the existence of a stable relationship forming among actors at the municipal level that allows them to pursue mutually advantageous policy goals (Leo, 1995). A 'corporate regime' linking business interests and politicians is one possible example of such a regime with the actors possessing a shared interest in an urban policy agenda that favours business and development. While disagreement exists regarding the existence of urban regimes in Canadian settings (Cobban 2003; Leo 2003), this disagreement focuses on the stability and permanence of relationships at the urban level. There is a much wider agreement that different business interests can be influential at different times in municipal policy-making (Rayside 1991). As noted above, the reasons for this can relate to the capacity of business groups to shape the municipal economy. In addition, it may result from their access to municipal decision-makers or from their ability to contribute to municipal politicians' election campaign funds.

Mega-projects, such as the construction of major league sports stadiums or other major infrastructure projects, are sometimes used as an example of the pervasiveness of business interests as an influence on municipal governments. In this view, mega-projects are promoted by municipal governments, in part because of the pressure to develop the 'world class' reputation of the municipality and thus make it desirable to mobile businesses, capital and investors (see Sassen 2001; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). Swyngedouw et al. conclude that mega-projects contribute to situations where cities "hide in their underbelly perverse and pervasive processes of social exclusion and marginalization and are rife with all manner of struggle, conflict, and often outright despair in the midst of the greatest affluence, abundance, and pleasure" (2002: 545; see also Hackworth 2007: 170-1).

There are, then, a number of scholars who emphasize the relative powerlessness of municipal governments in the face of major business interests and property developers. There are also, however, more nuanced views. Savitch and Kantor, for example, conclude that cities "have real alternatives in coping with the effects of globalization" when it comes to promoting development strategies (2003: 1003). Jack Hackworth likewise argues that while all municipal governments have faced pressures to conform to a neoliberal policy agenda, not all municipalities have responded in the same way (Hackworth 2007; see also Stahre 2004; Massey 2007; Sutcliffe 2011). Starting from a slightly different focus, Hamel identifies the potential emergence of an urban citizenship that "favours the use of individual and collective action to bring social and cultural concerns into public-political space, such as greater social justice, heritage preservation, or the promotion of local democracy" (Hamel 2005: 38; Magnussun 2005). There is also a long history of community mobilization and opposition to projects (often mega-projects) promoted by municipal governments and developers. Jane Jacobs, in part, became well-known for her opposition to road construction and urban redevelopment in New York and Toronto (Leo 1977; Paul 2005). In addition to community opposition to developers or business proposals, it is also important to appreciate that business owners are not inevitably unified actors with shared interests. Instead, it is entirely possible that these actors have distinct and conflicting views about specific municipal policies and proposals.

Studying the influence of business interests in decision-making within Canadian

municipalities therefore requires an examination of different case studies with particular attention to the context, actors and potential idiosyncrasies of each case (Leo 2003). This analysis of the City of Windsor's reaction to the Ambassador Bridge Company's proposal to build a second Detroit River border crossing, as well as the interaction between the company and the city, is one such case study.

### **The Detroit River Border Crossing**

The construction of a new bridge spanning the Detroit River linking Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan has been under debate for over a decade. The impetus to construct a new crossing results from the fact that this is the busiest Canada-U.S. border crossing in terms of commercial traffic, particularly truck trade (Bow 2009; Brunet-Jailly 2000; 2006). In 2010 bilateral trade in goods and services between Canada and the United States was approximately \$645 billion, with over \$1.7 billion worth of goods and services crossing the border each day (Government of Canada 2012). Approximately 30 per cent of the total trade in goods crosses the border in south-west Ontario with the majority carried by trucks crossing the Ambassador Bridge over the Detroit River (see Pastor 2011; Sutcliffe 2012; Anderson 2012).

The approximately three million trucks that use the Ambassador Bridge each year make this the single most significant part of the North American transportation network (Austin, Dzinski, and Affolter-Caine 2008; Alden, 2008). Several reasons have been advanced to support the construction of a new border crossing to replace the Ambassador Bridge. The first of these relates to the age of the Ambassador Bridge, which was completed in 1929 (Mason 1987). As such, the bridge is nearing the end of its life-expectancy without substantial repairs (Battagello 2009a).

A second reason relates to border traffic projections and questions about the continued capacity of the four-lane Ambassador Bridge to support the bilateral trade flow across the Detroit River border. The bridge was completed before the significant expansion in U.S.-Canadian trade through the latter decades of the twentieth century and before the development of the modern multi-wheel trucks that carry much of this trade. Both the governments concerned and the Ambassador Bridge Company indicate that extra capacity will eventually be required to supplement or replace the existing bridge. Various government reports indicate that the expansion of trade justifies the construction of a second bridge (Detroit River International Crossing Partnership 2009). Government trade projections have been reduced over time, in part reflecting changing economic conditions following the post-2008 recession. Nevertheless, the governments continue to assert that the traffic projections show that the existing border crossings will be at or over capacity between 2015 and 2025 (Michigan Department of Transportation 2010; see also Battagello 2010a).

Security is a third reason given to justify the construction of a new Detroit River border crossing. According to this argument, the economic importance of the Ambassador Bridge, combined with the example of the costly border delays in the immediate aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 terrorist attacks, demands that a second bridge be constructed. In this view, a second bridge provides extra border crossing capacity that will be essential in the event that the Ambassador Bridge is closed as a result of a terrorist incident or significant accident (see Canadian Senate

2005; Austin, Dzenski, and Affolter-Caine 2008).

There is, therefore, a widespread consensus within both the public and private sectors supporting the construction of a new Detroit River border crossing (Jang, Marotte, and Keenan 2011; Keenan 2007; Austin, Dzenski, and Affolter-Caine 2008). There is not, however, unanimous agreement on where this crossing should be located, who should pay for, build and operate it. These questions continue to generate debate and disagreement more than a decade after they were first raised. While various actors have advanced different proposals for a new crossing over this time, only two have advanced beyond the preliminary stage of development. One of these is the Ambassador Bridge Company's proposal to construct a replacement span.<sup>2</sup> The company first submitted its proposal for an Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project in 2006, with additional information being submitted in subsequent years (Transport Canada 2013; Battagello 2011a). This proposal to construct a six-lane, cable-stayed bridge that will connect the existing bridge plaza in Detroit to an expanded plaza in Windsor is currently undergoing an environmental assessment process by the Canadian federal government (see Transport Canada 2013; Battagello 2013a; Jarvis 2013a). It will, in addition, require environmental approval from the U.S. federal government, with the U.S. Coast Guard being the lead agency in this process, as well as a presidential permit (Chen 2009). As of June 2014, these approvals and permits have not been secured.

The second proposal is for a publicly-owned but privately-constructed and run bridge; the so-called Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC).<sup>3</sup> This proposal was developed by a bi-national partnership of representatives from the four senior governments—the governments of Ontario and Michigan and the two federal governments—that need to provide formal approval for a new border crossing. It has been discussed at summit meetings between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and President Barack Obama, as well as at meetings of federal government representatives and those of the state and provincial governments. By 2009 it had secured the required environmental approvals in both the United States and Canada (Nelles and Sutcliffe 2013). The Canadian government introduced and passed the 2012 *Bridge to Strengthen Trade Act* to provide the Canadian federal legislative approval for the construction of a new bridge, and in June 2012 signed an agreement with the Government of Michigan to provide a \$550 million loan to cover Michigan's share of the construction costs (Jang, 2012; Chase and Keenan, 2012). A U.S. presidential permit was submitted in June 2012 and approved on 12 April 2013 (Battagello 2013b; Chase 2013), and a Coast Guard permit for the proposed bridge was granted on 3 June 2014 (Battagello 2014a). In addition, the land for the bridge has been purchased on the Canadian side and the first call for tenders from private companies interested in participating in the construction and running of the bridge were issued by the Canadian federal government in June 2014 (Battagello 2014b).

### **Matty Moroun and the Ambassador Bridge**

A central player in the debate over the future of the Detroit River border is the businessman who owns the Ambassador Bridge. Manuel "Matty" Moroun was born in 1927 (the same year as construction of the Ambassador Bridge began), grew up in Detroit and currently resides in Grosse Point Shores, a suburb of Detroit (Kidd

2005; McKenna 2010). His family's net worth is listed at U.S. \$1.1 billion by Forbes magazine as of March 2013 (Manuel Moroun & Family 2013) and he controls a wide range of enterprises including trucking companies, insurance and property holdings (Battagello 2006a; 2009b). In 1979 the Moroun family's Central Cartage Company purchased the final shares that secured outright ownership of the Ambassador Bridge, and they have controlled the bridge since that time under the joint title of the Detroit International Bridge Company and the Canadian Transit Company (Fitch and Muller 2004; Jang 2007).

The Ambassador Bridge, which was originally constructed by a private consortium and which has always been privately owned, has increased in economic importance to Matty Moroun as the volume of traffic across the bridge has increased since 1979. It is variously estimated that the company annually secures approximately US\$60 million in tolls from the bridge (Sorensen 2011; Kidd 2005). In addition, the bridge company owns the duty free stores and gas stations connected to the bridge (Vander Doelen 2012a). Although the exact figures are not publicly known, the Ambassador Bridge's total value to Matty Moroun is evident from the length to which he has gone in order to retain a virtual monopoly of the truck traffic across the Detroit River border crossing. This involves lawsuits brought against various governments in the United States and Canada (Battagello 2013c), including a case brought under NAFTA against the Canadian government (Battagello 2010b). In 2010 the Ambassador Bridge Company sought an injunction in U.S. federal court to prevent the construction of a government-backed bridge across the Detroit River. In this suit, the company claimed that the U.S. and Canadian governments were conspiring to undermine the value of the Ambassador Bridge and force him out of business (Battagello 2010c).

Moroun has worked extensively within Michigan in order to block the authorization of a government-owned rival to the Ambassador Bridge. This takes the form of lobbying members of the Michigan legislature, including through the provision of campaign donations and advertising, in order to block approval of a rival bridge (Battagello 2012a; Christoff and Gray 2011; Fantoni 2012). Although it is difficult to establish whether this lobbying influenced Michigan politicians' decision-making with respect to a new bridge, it is the case that a bill to authorize Michigan's participation in the construction of the DRIC bridge was held up in committee within the Michigan Senate (Lessenberry 2012; Spangler 2010; White 2011). This lengthy delay led Michigan Governor Rick Snyder to bypass the legislature and sign an international agreement with the government of Canada in June 2012 authorizing construction of the Detroit River International Crossing bridge (Jang 2012; Chase and Keenan 2012; They aren't building that 2012). Matty Moroun, in turn, sought to overturn this international agreement by sponsoring and securing the inclusion of Proposal 6 on the November 2012 Michigan ballot. This initiative was intended to require a state referendum in order to approve construction of a new international crossing (Chen 2012; Chase 2012; Gallagher 2012). The Moroun family spent approximately US\$30 million on advertising in a failed effort to secure a 'yes' vote on this proposal (Battagello 2012b; 2012c; Egan and Gallagher 2012).

At the same time as Matty Moroun has sought to block the construction of the DRIC bridge, he is also working to construct his own replacement. As noted



above, the Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project is currently undergoing an environmental assessment as one of the required steps before it can proceed. In addition, Moroun's companies have purchased considerable amounts of property in both Michigan and Windsor to further the aim of building a twin span. Specifically with respect to Windsor, the company has purchased approximately 140 houses in the Sandwich area of the city which will be required to be demolished if the bridge company is able to move forward with its enhancement plan (Battagello 2007a). These purchases, as part of the larger enhancement project, mean that the bridge company is drawn into a relationship with Windsor City Council (Battagello 2009c; Jarvis 2009; Sutcliffe 2011).

### **The City of Windsor and the Ambassador Bridge Company**

The City of Windsor does not have formal decision-making authority over the choice of border crossing location or responsibility for paying for a new bridge or related border infrastructure. It is, however, intensely affected by the border and decisions relating to its future. In the first place, the City of Windsor has been the co-owner of the Windsor-Detroit tunnel since the 1990s. The tunnel is an important part of the Detroit River border infrastructure but it is, for the most part, not in direct competition with either the Ambassador Bridge or a new bridge as only a very limited number of trucks are permitted to use the tunnel. The city's interest in the border also stems from the extent to which the city's economic vitality is dependent upon cross-border trade and particularly trade relating to the highly integrated automotive sector with its manufacturing plants and suppliers in Windsor and Michigan. It also follows from the location of the Ambassador Bridge and the fact that the bridge and its access roads run through the city.

When Highway 401 was extended to south-western Ontario in the 1950s it was not linked to the Ambassador Bridge (Sutcliffe 2012). As a result, the final approximately 16 kilometres of the route to the bridge are city streets, and trucks carrying international trade must intersect with local traffic and negotiate 17 stop lights before reaching the border and subsequently entering the U.S. interstate highway system. In addition, the existing Canadian bridge plaza is too small to accommodate all of the demands placed upon it. Trucks that are requested to stop for more detailed secondary inspection when entering Canada, for example, cannot be accommodated at the existing plaza but instead have to drive to a location removed from the border (Battagello 2005a).

Truck traffic heading to and from the Ambassador Bridge therefore has a significant impact on Windsor. As a result, Windsor City Council is an active participant in the policy debates surrounding the reform of the Detroit River border crossing. Its central position has remained consistent over the course of the border debate. The city argues that a new border crossing must be as far removed from the city's core as possible and should be located in the western, industrial edge of the city (Sutcliffe 2008). This was the central conclusion of the city's 2005 Schwartz Report (Battagello 2007b), and it also led the city to support the location of the proposed Detroit River International Crossing bridge (Detroit River International Crossing Partnership 2009). When the binational government partnership team released its recommended bridge location,

Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis stated that this location is exactly what city council “has been advocating for from Day 1...The plaza and crossing are exactly where we would like it to be” (quoted in Battagello 2008a).

Windsor City Council has therefore been a vocal advocate of the proposed DRIC bridge. Its support for this project includes lobbying within the United States in an effort to secure the support of the Michigan legislature and public for this project (see Nelles and Sutcliffe 2013; Greenwood 2008). The city’s support for the proposed DRIC bridge is also related to its opposition to the Ambassador Bridge Company’s enhancement project. Although the city council advocates that additional border crossing capacity will be advantageous for the city, it has also consistently argued that the extra capacity should not take the shape of a second span as proposed by the Ambassador Bridge company. The city has advanced two main arguments against this project. First, it argues that the proposed twin span and its plaza will have a negative impact on the Sandwich area of the city where it is located and will further divide this community from the rest of the city. Secondly, the city argues that the highway access route for an Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project will continue to divide the city, intersect with city streets and have negative environmental consequences for residents (Fessler 2007; Battagello 2006b; Sutcliffe 2012). In his 2008 state of the city address, Mayor Eddie Francis expressed this sentiment when stating that, “Our citizens deserve a better quality of life, a healthier environment and a solution that gets trucks off of city streets and out of our neighbourhoods” (Francis 2008).

In sum, the city’s central goal in the border crossing debates is to advocate for a new border crossing that is further removed from the city and which thus routes cross-border traffic, and especially trucks, away from city streets. With this in mind, the city opposes a second Ambassador Bridge span and supports construction of the DRIC bridge. These positions have brought the city into conflict with the Ambassador Bridge company, particularly with respect to the company’s extensive property holdings in Windsor. As noted above, the company has purchased over 140 houses in the Sandwich area of the city and is currently seeking to demolish many of these properties in order to clear the land needed for its enhancement project (Battagello 2007a). These houses, which have been largely left vacant and boarded up, bring significant problems to the community. They have become the scenes of drug abuse and vandalism, they provide a breeding ground for vermin, and they are distinctly problematic for house owners in the immediate vicinity. Overall, they are highly damaging to Sandwich’s image and thus its reputation and make it highly unlikely that people will be willing to locate in Sandwich (Schmidt 2009). In spite of this, the city continues to oppose the demolition of these houses. In January 2007 the city passed a demolition control by-law to prevent these houses being taken down (Danese 2007). Related to this, the city initiated a Sandwich Heritage Conservation District study in September 2006, which ultimately led to the preparation of *The Sandwich Heritage Conservation District Conservation Plan* in July 2008 (City of Windsor 2008). The city claims that Sandwich, including many of the properties owned by the Ambassador Bridge, has heritage value and therefore that properties within the heritage area can only be demolished if certain conditions are met, including the full disclosure of the company’s plans for the area (City of Windsor 2008: 4.6). In the words of Mayor Eddie Francis: “Historical and

cultural preservation is not something new. ...It is very significant in our city to have the historical significance of an area like Sandwich. We are looking to preserve that” (Battagello 2007a).

There is a large extent to which the heritage designation and the demolition by-law controls are deliberately targeted against the bridge company’s plan to build a second span. The mayor, for example, has asserted that the council is “not prepared to cede a large swath of Sandwich for a [new] customs plaza” (quoted in Schmidt 2012a). Certainly the company claims that the city’s actions target the Ambassador Bridge Company. The company filed a lawsuit in July 2010 against the mayor and councillors claiming that they deliberately sought to interfere with the bridge’s business and prevent the construction of a new crossing (Schmidt 2010). It is also the case that in September 2008 Greg Heil, then chair of Windsor’s Heritage Committee, resigned claiming that there were political influences placed on the committee by the council in reaching its conclusions (Lajoie 2008). This is also the view of one local landowners’ group called Boarded Up Houses Demolition Action Group, led by Hilary Payne who has owned houses in Sandwich for over 20 years. As the name implies, this group seeks the demolition of the Ambassador Bridge’s houses in Sandwich on the grounds that they negatively affect property values in the area. They also argue that the bridge has provided a suitable plan for landscaping the land left if the houses are demolished. This group joined the bridge company’s lawsuit against the city to have the demolition control by-laws overturned. One interesting aspect of this case is that Hilary Payne successfully secured election to city council in 2010 and was therefore in the rather unusual situation of being a sitting councillor suing the council of which he is a part (Battagello 2011b).

It is the case, therefore, that while Moroun is a rich and powerful businessman and property owner, he has not been able to secure the support he wants from Windsor City Council in the debate over the border crossing. The city does not support the bridge company’s goal of building a second bridge and has not permitted the demolition of the houses the company owns in order to clear the way for this span. Nor has Moroun won his legal case against the city. In September 2011 an Ontario Superior Court ruled in favour of the city and against the bridge company and the local landowners’ group (Chen 2011; Vander Doelen 2011). After initially launching an appeal of this ruling, the company and group dropped their case in August 2012 and paid damages of over \$1 million to the city (see Schmidt 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; Vander Doelen 2012b). The company has not, however, abandoned its plan to demolish these houses (Brownell 2012), or to construct a second crossing.

There are several reasons that explain Moroun’s apparent lack of influence over Windsor City Council. The first relates to municipal campaign finance laws in Ontario (Cobban 2003). Although there are several sources that point to evidence of Moroun’s financial influence within Windsor (see Schmidt 2012a; Jarvis 2013b),<sup>4</sup> the Ontario Municipal Act place a \$750 limit on the amount that an individual or business can donate to a municipal candidate and a total maximum of \$5,000 that can be given in one municipal jurisdiction. Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis’ financial report indicates that none of Moroun’s Canadian companies or family donated to the mayor’s 2010 election campaign. A sample of elected councillors and defeated candidates also fails

to turn up evidence of donations by Moroun. This limited or non-existent financial impact on the Windsor municipal elections stands in stark contrast to the amounts that Moroun and his family and companies have donated to politicians at the state and local levels in Michigan. In the 2009-2010 Michigan election cycle, which include the gubernatorial election, Moroun's family and businesses donated over US\$1.5 million to Michigan state and congressional candidates (Christoff and Gray 2011; Battagello 2010d; Lessenberry 2010). Moroun's donations to politicians' election campaigns are in addition to the money spent on independent advertising with respect to the border debate (Battagello 2011c), including over US\$30 million spent on the 2012 Proposal 6 campaign (Egan and Gallagher 2012).

Moroun also donates heavily to politicians at the municipal level in Michigan, including Detroit. Significantly, for example, Moroun donated to the scandal-ridden Kwame Kilpatrick, who was Mayor of Detroit between 2001 and 2008, and had frequent meetings with the mayor (Battagello 2008b; Nelles and Sutcliffe 2013). While it is impossible to prove conclusively that these donations swayed Kilpatrick's political opinions, it is the case that he opposed the Detroit River International Crossing project and advocated in favour of twinning the Ambassador Bridge (Henion 2007). More recently a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, Fred Durhal, who unsuccessfully ran for Mayor of Detroit in 2013, launched a lawsuit against the DRIC crossing arguing that the Michigan Governor had no right to sign a deal with the Canadian government without the Michigan legislature's consent. Durhal received several thousands in campaign contributions from the Moroun family (Battagello 2013d; Jarvis 2013c). In spite of these examples, it is important to note that Moroun has not consistently secured the unanimous support of Detroit City Council for his Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project or its opposition to the DRIC bridge (Nelles and Sutcliffe 2013).

Ontario's Municipal Act therefore prevents Moroun from making campaign donations in an attempt to influence Windsor's municipal decision-making on the scale evident in Michigan. A second factor that helps to explain Moroun's relative lack of influence is the extensive community opposition to the Ambassador Bridge Company's Enhancement Project within Windsor, and particularly within the Sandwich community, where there is vocal opposition to any prospect of a new crossing being built in the location of the existing Ambassador Bridge. In 2005, for example, Hildegard Ashe (then executive director of the Sandwich Community Health Centre and chair of the Sandwich Towne development corporation) stated that if the "goal is to facilitate trade at the expense of the people in Sandwich...this community is not going to stand idly by and let it happen..." (Battagello 2005b). This absolute opposition to the Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project is echoed by a number of local residents and business owners (interviews with author). In these views the company has "not provided a penny" towards the community and rather seems intent on devastating the community through the loss of housing stock and the damage being caused to the neighbourhood's reputation. One local business owner, Mary Ann Cuderman, is frequently vocal in her criticism of Matty Moroun. In one such comment, she asserted that Matty Moroun "has decimated a whole community and made us look like a ghetto on his own whim" (quoted in Battagello 2008c).

While it is not the case that the entire city, or even the whole of the Sandwich community, is opposed to the Ambassador Bridge's proposal (as is evidenced by the Boarded Up Homes Action Group noted above), community consultation data as well as election results indicate that the majority of the community are opposed (Detroit River International Crossing Partnership 2008: 15). The city council, including the councillor representing the Sandwich community, Mayor Eddie Francis and the major city newspaper, *The Windsor Star*, all oppose the Ambassador Bridge Company (see, for example, Land freeze 2008; New bridge 2012). There is, then, a correlation between popular opinion and the positions adopted by city council and the mayor and both run counter to the goals of the Ambassador Bridge Company.

A third factor explaining the relative inability of Matty Moroun to influence Windsor City Council is the fact that the majority of his companies are located in Michigan and not Ontario. Studies of neoliberalism in urban settings indicate that it is the threat of relocation that is a central reason why business and commercial interests are able to influence municipal councils (Tindal and Tindal 2009; Ruppert 2000). In this case study, because the overwhelming majority of Moroun's business interests are based in the United States, the threat of relocation carries little weight for the Windsor City Council. Moreover, the Canadian Transit Company, the holding company for the Canadian half of the Ambassador Bridge, cannot, by its very nature, be relocated. It is also not possible for Moroun to threaten to allow the existing bridge to become inoperable as this would be counter to his own interests and also add further weight to the arguments in favour of a publicly-owned crossing.

It is also difficult to argue that Matty Moroun is able to exercise the type of influence that is sometimes ascribed to property developers in Canada and elsewhere (Leo 1995; 1997). In this case, although the bridge company is a major property owner in Windsor, it is not a traditional property developer in so far as its objective is to remove the properties and clear the land for a mega-project (in this case a new bridge) rather than to build a new housing or commercial development or redevelop existing residential or commercial property. In the event that it does proceed, the Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project will not add to the city's tax base in a manner that is commensurate with a new subdivision or redeveloped commercial district. It is in part for this reason that the bridge company has not secured vocal support from other major financial and business interests in Windsor. It is certainly not the case that municipal politicians, the bridge company and other business interests are part of a stable and secure governing relationship as described by Clarence Stone in his analysis of urban regimes (Stone 1993: 9). Instead, the relationship has been divisive, as made apparent in the mayor's frequent critical public statements about the bridge and in the bridge's failed legal suit against the city (Chen 2011; Vander Doelen 2011; Schmidt 2012b). They remain divided about the future of these properties and the area in general, with the city maintaining its opposition to a second Ambassador Bridge (see Brownell 2012; Schmidt 2012c).

The fact that the Ambassador Bridge Company is proposing a mega-project has not helped the company influence the municipal council. As noted above, mega-projects are sometimes promoted by municipal councils because they can help to build the municipality's reputation as a world class destination in the eyes of investors and

businesses (see Sassen 2001; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). In this case, the city does support the construction of a new bridge and is therefore in line with the major business interests that also demand a new crossing to facilitate their operations. The city is not challenging the premise that a new crossing is central to the integration of the North American economy, and particularly the automotive sector. The city does support Windsor's position as a trade hub in the North American economy (Sutcliffe 2011). This does not, however, strengthen the position of the Ambassador Bridge Company. A viable alternative to the Ambassador Bridge's proposal exists in the form of the Detroit River International Crossing. The city is therefore not dependent upon Matty Moroun to provide the new border crossing that will facilitate the movement of trade.

### Conclusion

Matty Moroun is an important figure in the economics and politics of the Detroit River border crossing. His importance stems from his ownership of the Ambassador Bridge, which is the single most significant North American border crossing, his proposal to construct a second bridge, as well as his ownership of properties and land. It is certainly the case that newspaper and popular perception assign Moroun a pivotal role in the future of the border (They aren't building that 2012; Fitch and Muller 2004; Jang 2007; Kidd 2005).

Matty Moroun is intent on maintaining control of this vital component in the regional and North American economy for as long as possible and has already spent many millions of dollars in advertising, campaign donations, legal fees and property acquisitions in the attempt to secure this objective. Moroun's influence over the local Canadian municipal government (and indeed the senior Canadian governments), has however been limited. Owning significant business interests and properties in the Canadian municipality has not translated into policy influence. The municipal government is opposed to Moroun's goal of building a new bridge and has used by-laws, its powers with respect to heritage designation, and lobbying senior governments to advance this opposition. Moroun has not been able to use the legal system to reverse this municipal opposition. In short, there is no shared interest between the municipal government and Matty Moroun and certainly no stable network of influence with respect to the border.

The situation in Canada, to some extent, stands in contrast to the United States where Moroun has been able to secure some support at the state and municipal levels (though by no means complete support). The case study therefore points to the importance of the regulatory setting in any examination of the interaction between business interests and a municipal government. In this case, the crucial differences between the United States and Canada are the considerable difference in the quantity of campaign contributions allowed in the former as compared to the latter, and the extent to which Moroun's business interests are located within Michigan rather than Ontario. It is also important to recognize the importance of community opinion in this case and consequently the democratic impulse. Windsor City Council has both responded to and led the local community in its opposition to Matty Moroun's Ambassador Bridge Enhancement Project.

Matty Moroun does not dominate municipal policy-making in Windsor. At the same time, his importance cannot be completely downplayed. He has been able to create roadblocks to the construction of a publicly-owned bridge that will rival his own. He has acquired a considerable property portfolio with a negative impact on the local community. Finally, he continues to push for the construction of his own new bridge. At the time of writing, there is no guarantee that he will not succeed despite municipal opposition.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A recent example of this occurred in Calgary in April 2013. A video released to the media contained footage of a Calgary developer claiming to be able to exert influence over city council (Walton 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The bridge is owned and operated by two companies—the Detroit International Bridge Company and the Canadian Transit Company—but both are owned by Manuel (Matty) Moroun who secured ownership of the bridge in 1979. The Ambassador Bridge Company is used here as a convenient short-form.

<sup>3</sup> This proposal is also sometimes referred to as the New International Trade Crossing.

<sup>4</sup> It is, for example, frequently suggested that Matty Moroun provides financial backing to Ed Arditti who is a prominent local blogger and activist (Jarvis 2013b).

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