

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Grand Opening Canadian Plaza At The Peace Bridge

FORT ERIE, June 20, 2007 - On Wednesday June 20, the Government of Canada and the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority will open the new Canadian Plaza at the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada.

With buildings designed by NORR Limited, Architects and Engineers, this new border crossing facility is a Canadian landmark, reflecting the history of the crossing in a distinctive design for the plaza and buildings.

The Grand Opening Ceremony celebrates the conclusion of a multi-year, complex redevelopment of the Fort Erie plaza, including the construction of three primary buildings and surrounding plaza. Redefining the image, efficiency, and experience of cross border travel, these construction projects were initiated to improve border infrastructure and reduce congestion, while enhancing security and improving the free flow of trade and commerce between Canada and the U.S.A. at the Peace Bridge.

The Peace Bridge Border Crossing

Opened to traffic in 1927, the Peace Bridge spans the Niagara River between Fort Erie, Ontario, and Buffalo, New York, and is a key international border crossing. It is owned and operated by the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, a bi-national bridge authority, governed by a 10 member board with an equal number of representatives from Canada and the United States.

The Peace Bridge is a vital link to international trade and tourism. As many as 5,000 trucks are processed each day and the value of trade crossing the Peace Bridge is about \$700 million each week. Thousands of tourists cross the bridge daily to reach local and international travel destinations. Daily, residents living and working in different countries experience a cross-border commute. This crossing must promote safety and security while advancing commerce and tourism.

Redevelopment Objectives

The redevelopment of the crossing was initiated in response to the following conditions:

1. The location of the American Plaza in Buffalo afforded very little room for expansion to allow efficient vehicle processing.
2. Delays in vehicle processing in Buffalo caused commercial vehicles to back-up over the bridge at peak times to over 6 km along the Q.E.W. Rear-end collisions at the back of the truck queue were frequent.
3. Changes in processing requirements in Canada required modernization of the inspection lanes and administration buildings.
4. The inspection booths at the Canadian Plaza were too close to the bridge. At peak times, traffic would back over the bridge onto the American side, affecting traffic flow on the local streets and freeways in Buffalo.

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Redevelopment Timeline

January 2004: An 18-member architectural jury selected the entry from NORR Limited over two competing designs. All three designs were on public display in Fort Erie for a week and the community response informed the jury. The decision was ratified unanimously by the Peace Bridge Authority Board.

May 2004: Toll booth relocation from the United States to Canada began. Phase one of the Canadian construction projects also included the construction of a new truck road exiting the customs booths, a truck staging area and a FAST by-pass lane, and relocation of the Authority's Commercial Vehicle Processing Centre to the Fort Erie Truck and Travel Centre.

April 2005: The new toll booths became operational.

May 2005: Phase two of the work in Canada began, including three main buildings, as follows: Canada Customs and Immigration Building, Secondary Vehicle Inspection Canopy and associated inspection booths for cars, buses and recreational vehicles; Refugee Processing Facility, and a new Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority Administration building.

June 2007: Phase two is completed on schedule.

Redevelopment Benefits

The redesign speeds the flow of traffic in both directions on the Peace Bridge. The Canadian plaza is approximately 2.5 times the size of the previous plaza. More automobiles are able to get to the inspection booths more quickly. Automobile traffic must no longer line up behind trucks heading for the commercial inspection facility. Less congestion results in fewer trucks idling on the U.S. plaza and the bridge. Specifically,

1. The plaza design accommodates more car queuing capacity in the plaza and improved bridge egress for commercial vehicles.
2. Toll relocation to the Canadian plaza has dramatically improved the severely congested U.S. approach to the bridge, eliminated traffic backups.
3. A dedicated lane allows carriers with FAST (Free and Secure Trade) registration to by-pass the truck queue and enter the U.S. more quickly.
4. A longer, dedicated NEXUS lane provides much greater utility for the NEXUS card.
5. The additional NEXUS lane provides for better traffic management and improved throughput during peak commuter periods. NEXUS expedites the border clearance process for low risk, pre-approved travellers into Canada and the United States.
6. The three new U.S. Customs and Border Protection lanes increased commercial processing capacity by 75%.

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Plaza Design Features

The plaza reflects Canadian values and attitudes while building on the culture and history of the Niagara region and the town of Fort Erie.

The striking and timeless architectural design is a composition of sculpturally evocative landmark buildings integrated with the landscape.

The design also makes strong reference to the historic stone construction of the local buildings and fortress. The limestone foundation material of the buildings and the landscape grounds the design in the terrain of the Niagara Escarpment and indirectly refers to the local flint bearing rocks that supported the early indigenous tool-making industries.

Blurring the separation between landscape and buildings, the curved traffic barriers share the same treatment as the retaining walls and, in some places, rise up to form the building walls.

Contrasting with the earth bound nature of the limestone, silver roofs float on steel and wood structural systems, creating a modern and contemporary silhouette that is inspired by the designs of native long houses and wooden canoes.

The strongly configured site plan defines and restricts the paved plaza. Spatial layering that aligns aesthetics with security zones brings the entire site into focus. Within the security envelope, traffic is contained by retaining walls, buildings and landscaped edges. This is surrounded by a public buffer zone that includes further landscaping, parking and an interpretive walk for the Town of Fort Erie. This surrounding landscaping completes a larger strategy to integrate the plaza into the adjacent Niagara Park system.

Plaza Elements

1. Canada Customs Building (CCB): (Two storeys, total gross area approximately 2700 sm). At the heart of the complex, the CCB stands like an island in a river of traffic. Symbolic of the friendship and common underlying values of Canada and the U.S.A. the CCB is made up of two separate yet integrated parts. The facility contains public service counters, a waiting area, interview rooms, bus passenger processing area, detention areas, staff lockers, meeting rooms, lunch room, office and support areas, all designed to meet Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) requirements.
2. Refugee Processing Facility (RPF): (Two storeys, total gross area approximately 1200 sm). This CIC facility contains public service counters and a waiting area, interview rooms, detention areas, office and support areas as well as the Peace Bridge Newcomer Centre. The Newcomer Centre contains family services facilities, an information center and future X-ray and examination facilities.

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3. Public Bridge Authority Administration Building (PBA AB): (Three storeys, total gross area approximately 1850 sm) The PBA AB facility contains executive and administrative offices, board room, print room and storage facilities, toll collection, auditing and IT facilities as well as a public lobby.

The building also contains a First Nations archaeological and interpretive centre called, Mewinzha - A Journey Back in Time, which was developed in partnership with the Town of Fort Erie, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, Fort Erie Museum Services, and the Peace Bridge Authority. The second floor contains a pictorial display of 80 years of Peace Bridge history.

4. The Customs Booths and Canopies: Customs booths flank the CCB. Spanning the entire incoming passenger vehicle flow, the Primary Inspection Area consists of 15 inspection booths and associated equipment and canopies. The covered Secondary Inspection Area extends behind it.
5. Toll Booths: (Approximately 743 sm) Six toll booths serve commercial and passenger traffic. Fabricated off-site, the booths incorporate ergonomic considerations including input from the toll booth operators. An associated building was designed to provide mechanical services and computer facilities to support the toll processing and E-Z Pass transponder systems – the only fully electronic toll collection system on the border.

Sustainable Design Features

The challenge of managing air quality in the custom and toll booths area, which is surrounded by constant idling vehicles, was solved by pressurizing the booths via underground air ducts supplied from dedicated air handling units in the adjacent buildings. These units capture conditioned air from the buildings and supplement it with filtered fresh air. This innovation was environmentally responsible on three levels as it provides better air quality, reuses otherwise wasted conditioned building air, and employs longer-lasting more energy efficient equipment than typical localized roof top units used typically.

Other life cycle and energy use reducing decisions include using high efficiency condensing natural gas boilers, heat wheels, and centralized building control and management systems.

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Archaeological Considerations

Fort Erie has one of the largest archaeological sites in north eastern North America. A 2002 archaeological find proved that the plaza site has been the location of human settlement for at least 9,000 years. Therefore, the plaza redevelopment was undertaken with respect and care for the artefacts and possible human remains that may lie below.

First Nations representatives provided directives that informed the development of construction techniques that minimized disturbance to the underlying layer. Building foundations were built with a caisson and grade beam system and the new roadways were raised above the existing surface to limit excavation. A full time archaeological representative attended the excavation process so as to capture any artefacts or remains.

The gallery and interpretive centre that honours the First Peoples of this area and features tools and weapons dating back 11,000 years as well as contemporary Native art forms the centrepiece of the lobby of the new Peace Bridge Administration Building.

Construction Challenges

This high volume border crossing had to remain fully operational 24 hours a day / 7 days a week during the construction. NORR's design met this challenge employing a concrete canopy design solution that was constructed in two stages: first, the supporting columns, followed by installation of the placement of precast post-tensioned concrete canopy slabs, while maintaining the flow of six lanes of traffic below. The 42m canopy comprises 15 radial units, each weighing approximately 34 tonnes.

This solution was recognized with the 2005 Ontario Concrete Awards, Precast Concrete - Structural Design Innovation Award.

The phased construction approach also involved constructing the new buildings and inspection booths adjacent to the existing facilities, which were then demolished once operations were relocated. Similarly, a temporary supporting services and infrastructure building for the toll booths was developed in such a manner that would allow it to be later engulfed by the PBA Administration Building.

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Building Architects, NORR Limited, Architects and Engineers

Part of the Ingenium Group of companies, NORR Limited is a fully-integrated architectural and engineering firm headquartered in Toronto, with offices in Ottawa and Kingston. NORR's expertise is focused on the aviation, institutional, justice, correctional, educational, sports and recreation and biotechnology market sectors.

In addition to the new Canadian Plaza at Peace Bridge, current NORR Limited projects include the Canadian Chancery, Ankara, Turkey; the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Judicial Building, Ottawa; Calgary Courts Centre; Pembroke Courthouse; Perth Courthouse; Collins Bay Penitentiary Redevelopment, Kingston; and the Blue Water Bridge Canadian Plaza at Point Edward.

Operating under the CION, Giffels, NORR and PMA brands, the Ingenium Group of companies offers an extensive range of engineering, architectural, interior design, construction and asset management services focussed on quality performance, superior client service and on-budget, on-time delivery of innovative solutions. The companies employ more than 1100 professional staff in offices in Canada, the United States, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

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