

## **ATLANTIC GATEWAY : LOOKING FORWARD TO HARMONISE PLANNING?**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The recent achievement of a national policy framework for strategic gateways and trade corridors officially designated three Canadian gateways. As many papers were to discuss about the gateways eventuality, stakeholders now gathers to figure out strategic intermodal planning. This paper is about the case study of the Atlantic gateway, in order to assess the benefits of gateway planning on partnership among stakeholders, using public declarations. It makes use of a comprehensive press review to reconstruct the development of the Atlantic Gateway project, focusing on the dialogue.

The trade corridor concept is indeed integrated management regrouping a logical group of stakeholders among the supply chain but so far, all of the three gateways did not happened to proceed in the very same manner. Even though they are all referring to the national policy framework, each gateway has a combination of challenges of his own. The Atlantic gateway case demonstrate an interesting development. After a period of advocacy regarding to the pertinence of a gateway designation, we have seen the multiplication

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of different trade corridor committees. Does the trade corridor concept leads to a better harmonised planning?

### **GATEWAYS IN CANADA**

For about twenty years, the trade corridor concept in north America is quite emerging. It basically drives some very geometric purpose. Simply link the stakeholders of a major logistic chain, disregard to the sum of jurisdictions. That way, a better planning of transportation systems is possible.

The very rationale of trade corridors as been well documented yet<sup>2</sup> but basically, corridor and gateway planning is expected to bring dialogue and cooperation, stakeholder representation, background material, strategy alignment, infrastructure financing, marketing, policy adjustment, access to global markets and a profitable competitiveness between trade corridors. Overall objectives are met on case by case basis as they are dispersed through specific issues and also corridor dual objective of easing commerce and fighting congestion. As shipments are the results of trade, we could resume the concept as planning wisely for a stronger economy. Indeed, it is a matter of national interest but not only for those of the private sector leaders.

The general idea of corridor and gateway is straightforward but the coordination of the dialogue is a limitation to success. There is in fact many factors of inefficiencies but the organizational aspect of the gateway and corridor planning is the corner stone of the whole idea. The creation of committees is a primary step. However, it occurs within the means to claim an area to be the delegate. The designation is quite controversial on the base that logistic chains happened to exist at different scales. The national policy framework for strategic gateways and trade corridors officially throw some light on the designation of three official Canadian gateways. Since a substantial amount of federal investment is available for gateways, the

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<sup>2</sup> We have expand the discussion on the trade corridors key concepts in a previous paper (Lapointe F. & Guy E.: Corridors de commerce; solution clef en main?, 2008).

designation as been an issue for the last years. We know now that three Canadian areas are recognised to be located as natural gateways for north America transoceanic trade. The national policy on gateways then invite stakeholders of those areas to gather and organise in gateway committees.

Among the three official Canadian gateways, the Pacific gateway is the earliest of all. For the last thirty years, actions have been taken toward the idea of developing a partnership among a pacific gateway. The Great Vancouver Gateway Council, formed in 1994, was meant to build and act on a vision that makes of the greater Vancouver a worldwide renown exchange gateway. Hence, the council as set a workspace for strategic planning. It was indeed a fundamental recognition to consider a logistic chain work scale for transport planning. Over the benefits of the concept, the project was pushed by the urge of settling congestion issues on the west coast. The instauration of a gateway planning process involve a great deal of dialogue challenges. Compare with the two other gateways, that process was eased in the Pacific gateway by the fact it originally involved only one province.

The so-called “Continental gateway” is the traditional Saint-Lawrence access to the Great Lakes and is huge demographic agglomeration. The seaway goes strait to the north America industrial centre but isn’t open all year round. The water deepness issue combined with the year long access matters illustrates that beyond those significant limitations, the direct access to market is a prevalent factor for shippers.

Stakeholders from Quebec and Ontario provinces answered the call to organise in committees and are proceeding to a strategic planning exercise. The structural design of the committee puts together delegates from both public and private sectors. However, the committee is driven by the alliance of the three governments (Ontario, Quebec and Federal), in order to guide the research and consulting activities related to the gateway strategic planning. So far, the private sector representatives (St. Lawrence-Great Lakes Trade Corridor and Southern Ontario Gateway Council) fulfilled their

engagement to provide an enumeration of issues and recommendations. The two-year based memorandum of understanding is still ongoing and diverse development as been announced.

The Canada Atlantic trade history is characterized by a set of challenges induced by national trade barriers and an unfavourable location in the domestic trade ideology. What is referred to Atlantica is more than a project, but a whole economic area of the East coast who's interactions are dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Entering the confederation had cut off the trade with New England to switch to a national east-west trade perspective to the major benefits of Central Canada. Much later, NAFTA context brought back the former – perhaps more logic for the region – proximity trade. Next to an enviable market potential, the Atlantic provinces are still suffering of trade limitations, just to mention the cross border, efficient transport network and regulation issues.

The evocation of the Atlantica project engender an important contestation movement which as no equal for the other gateways. The Atlantica project is sometimes describe as a manoeuvre to favour few individuals to the detriment of the population. It is actually required the read the Atlantic gateway project as a rearrangement of resources to match the changing trade patterns. The gateway planning benefits seems to be misinterpret as a loss on living conditions for workers and population. Regulation alignment is too easily seen as a threat. The origins of contestation doesn't seem to consider that the evocated regulation issues are meant to match requirement uniformity in all jurisdictions and not to raise down requirements. Uniformity is necessary to ensure security among the chain and to reduce unnecessary delays. As an example, truck driving hours restrictions may be seen as a security issue where the rules are more severe.

In order to achieve a consensus, leaders need to gather and advocate their requirements. That kind of attempt is mistakenly perceived as complotting manoeuvre by activists. Many stakeholder among a gateway are basically competitors. It is a much more wise and

mature action from leaders to sit down together and be willing for a dialogue rather than act individually fighting for market shares. That is the very essence of trade corridors and it makes sense whenever decision makers are involved. Overall, gateways are about dialogue.

### **THE ATLANTIC GATEWAY**

As the Pacific gateway successfully attracted investments and realisations, the Atlantic transport industry wishes as well to obtain similar development for the transport system. An important differentiation relies on the infrastructure capacity in use. West coast transport system faced congestion difficulties contrasting the Canadian East coast, due to a spectacular growth of Asian imports. Atlantic gateway claim to address anticipated increasing traffic challenges. The cruise activity, the container traffic forecast, new and increasing trade with Central Asia and Eastern European countries, bigger ships, increasing exports and the Panama canal expansion (2015) are different arguments converging to justify the need for greater multimodal integration in the Atlantic Canada. The individual advances of key players in the transport system are not sufficient to globally reinforce the region. The global approach is an asset of gateway planning, where the total is greater than the sum of parts. Speaking of Atlantica, the director of ports and transportation for the Port of Portland and Portland Jetport, Jeffrey Munroe, said in 2005 :

"While we compete with each other, we must also realize that our region of the globe competes with new and emerging markets in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. The time has come for us to sit down as a family of northern Atlantic ports and work together to ensure that our region is successful."

(Peters, T. 2005, *Call for greater cooperation among Atlantic Canada, New England ports*)

The trade corridor and gateway establishment in Canada is beginning with the creation of committees from the private sector, collaborating with local and regional governments to support the idea of a corridor/gateway project to the federal authorities. The advocacy of a

collaboration on the Atlantic coast as been driven by different visions. The Atlantica perspective is to establish a cooperation among Atlantic provinces and New England. Not to be mistakenly taken for Atlantica, the Atlantic Gateway project should focus on becoming a greater Canadian point of entry for merchandises on the East coast. Canada's gateways are the continental part of global transoceanic trade corridors (Lapointe, F. Guy, E. 2008). As it has been said for the Continental gateway, direct access to market is a prevalent factor for shippers. The way to reinforce the Atlantic gateway as a better point of entry doesn't only requires an efficient and reliable intermodal transport system but also to strengthen the region as a stronger economy. Efforts on the trade issues with the Americans are not only to complete the pavement along the supply chain but also to allow regional economic impacts within Atlantica boundaries. On the West coast, the Pacific gateway is competing with US gateway for the same transoceanic corridor heading to the Midwest United States. As it may theoretically look the same on the East coast, the need for an integrated strategy in collaboration with the United States appears to be appointed.

The Atlantic Gateway Memorandum of Understanding bring together the Federal government to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador provincial governments. Up till now, four gateway committees have been created within those provinces. The Halifax Gateway Council (2004), the Southern New Brunswick Gateway Council (2008), the Cape Breton Gateway Council (2008) and more lately the Atlantic Gateway Council (2009). McCalla underline the greatest challenge to the Atlantic Gateway concept which is the "lack of agreement on which port, or ports, should be designated as gateways in Atlantic Canada" (McCalla, R. 2007). Thus, after a period of advocacy regarding to the pertinence of an national gateway designation, an emergence of trade corridor committees occurred in eastern Canada, competing for funding and recognition.

The MOU urges the fulfilment of objectives regarding to the production of documents to eventuality come out with a gateway-wise strategic plan. Parties need to align their visions in order to:

- Identify the components of the Atlantic Gateway.
- Identify the analytical and planning work required to develop each of the components.
- Identify the appropriate approaches and timing for involvement of the private sector and other stakeholders.
- Promote the Atlantic Gateway in domestic and international markets.

So far, different studies and background papers have been published. *The Changing Global Economy: The Implications and Opportunities for Transportation in Atlantic Canada* (Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, 2006), initiated by the Halifax Gateway, received an evocative answer from Al Soppitt, President and CEO of the Saint John Port Authority:

“The report highlights the benefits of the port of Halifax but, quite frankly, it misses the boat by failing to recognize the full potential of Saint John as a viable gateway port” (Soppitt, A. 2007).

The Halifax Gateway Council was created in 2004 to promote growth in the transport sector and related industries in the Halifax region. The formation preceded the national policy framework<sup>3</sup> but the council’s website<sup>4</sup> still claim (last consulted on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2009) to be one of the three official Canadian gateways, others to be the Greater Vancouver Gateway Council and the Southern Ontario Gateway Council. That kind of misinformation illustrates somehow the existing competition among the transport sector. Halifax Gateway Council openly claim to promote the Halifax region. Since gateway planning concept seek for a much broader range, it is not surprising to observe the manifestation of Atlantic stakeholders feeling disadvantaged by the Halifax focused gateway vision.

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<sup>3</sup> National Policy Framework for Strategic Gateways and Trade Corridors

<sup>4</sup> [www.halifaxgateway.com](http://www.halifaxgateway.com)

The Southern New Brunswick Gateway Council (2008) and the Cape Breton Gateway Council (2008) are offering additional perspectives to the Atlantic Gateway. But the call for unity arisen even before the emergence of those two Atlantic-based gateway committees. In 2005, Jeffrey Munroe, director of ports and transportation for the Port of Portland and Portland Jetport called for a collaborative attitude among Atlantic ports:

“Encouraging politicians in both countries to develop a continental border to ensure all government officials are playing by the same rules; seeing that officials actively share information, intelligence and expertise so all involved are able to keep up with the changing demands on ports; and encouraging the marine industry on both sides of the border to collaborate on all port issues, address common concerns and expand economic possibilities.” (Peters, T. 2005, *Call for greater cooperation among Atlantic Canada, New England ports*)

A question is raised here about how could an effective dialogue with the US counterpart be possible if there is no common vision among the Atlantic Gateway? We are dealing here with four jurisdictions all having a coastline and major ports are battling for a lead role in the gateway. At the announcement of the Saint John Gateway Council formation (to become the Southern New Brunswick Gateway Council) in 2007, Capt. Soppit underlined the need for merging all ports assets:

"The road to success is an Atlantic Canadian strategy developed through the co-operation and participation of all four provinces. Together, as a region with two major ports and a number of smaller ones, we can jointly tap into global trade." (Williams, C. 2007. *Saint John Port Feature: Saint John Gateway Council will tap into global trade*)



The call for unity still legitimate the existence of the three councils (Halifax, Southern NB and Cape Breton) as they claim to jointly look for respective regional interests in addition of supporting a cooperative approach in a united Atlantic Gateway. As some support the vision that the multiple councils idea ensure a better representation of stakeholders and interests in a context where the share of funding is craved, others believe that the best way to optimise the Atlantic Gateway is to polarise funding and efforts. Charles Cirtwill, acting president of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, addresses the unity issue favouring an Halifax lead, as interpreted by Christopher Williams:

“The \$2.1-billion national trade gateway fund may re-ignite interprovincial fighting instead of helping promote regional co-operation. He sees Halifax as the likely candidate for gateway funding.” (Williams, C. 2007. Southern New Brunswick Gateway focuses on Saint John transportation partners)

The polarising scenario, whoever it favours, faces a big challenge to meet success, regardless to its pertinence, in the context of gateway planning. The past congestion issue at the Port of Vancouver led the authority to gather with partners and governments to eventually come out with a solution way out of their backyard. Did Vancouver port lost in the run? Benefits of gateway planning relies on a global perspective of the supply chain. It is quite obvious that all four provinces will not let easily the whole federal funding to go on a Halifax based scenario. The MOU invites all four provinces to organise and proceed to the planning process. Putting it that way, isn't the debate on scenario planning to early?

The timeline shows advances in the dialogue and the corporate structure of the Atlantic Gateway is slowly taking form. The gateway funding starts from the Pacific Gateway initiative. The Great Vancouver Gateway Council was formed in 1994 and the first council of the Atlantic Gateway in 2004. With a ten year delayed start, it is perhaps very optimistic to expect accessing to a similar funding not in

a matter of amount, but about the phases left. The path to Gateway funding in Atlantic Canada as clearly divided clans. As we said earlier, coordination of the dialogue is a limitation to success. Did the dialogue and general performance of the transport sector had been really affected positively with the adoption of the gateway planning concept? Christopher Williams commented the Southern New Brunswick Gateway creation in 2008:

“Although New Brunswick and Nova Scotia usually take a stab at working together on regional trade, too often the wheels fall off 'Atlantica' and 'Maritime Union' vehicles before things get rolling. Hopefully that won't be the case as the gateway policy makes its way through Parliament.” (Williams, C. 2008. *Southern New Brunswick Gateway partners building true 'Atlantic' strategy*)

To address the apparent division among Atlantica players, former New Brunswick premier Frank McKenna even went to propose a drastic merging solution for all Atlantic ports (Williams, C. 2008. *Winds from Saint John; McKenna offers “frank” suggestion on merging Atlantic ports*), referring to the recent amalgamation of three British Columbia Lower Mainland ports into the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority. The Canada Marine act recent amendments<sup>5</sup> simplifies the merging process for port authorities.

The gateway council chart recently took a step forward by the creation of a new gateway council, acting on the representation of other existing gateway councils under the Atlantic Gateway. The new “Atlantic Gateway Council”, consist of a 13 members committee driven by business leaders.

“The council will seek ideas and project recommendations from the various Atlantic regions and gateway councils before it offers any advice to federal officials.”

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tc.gc.ca/mediaroom/releases/nat/2008/08-h147e.htm>

“The Halifax Gateway Council and the Southern New Brunswick Gateway Council, which already have been working co-operatively on the Atlantic Gateway file, have announced their support for the 13-man body and have established their own committees to work with the new group.” (Peters, T. 2009. *Business leaders to guide Atlantic Gateway Council*)

It appears to be an applicable solution for the division occurring through the gateway key players. Atlantic Stakeholders now benefit of a unified voice the deal with the federal government and a workspace where to execute the MOU requirements and objectives.

#### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Gateway and trade corridor planning is not a “one size fits all” solution. Federal funding is available and makes the development of new gateways a run for funding share, at least in the Atlantic Gateway. What is suppose to be a cooperative approach to raise priority list happened to meet a crooked development. Is their a consensus possible among competitors? And does multiple corridors lead to enhanced competitiveness or efforts and investments replication? What if their was no corridor at all?

Time will tell but so far, everything is still possible and the creation of the Atlantic Gateway Council (2009) remove an apparent barrier in the effectiveness of the stakeholders dialogue. The resolution of the dead-end divisions ends up to be a no port-driven solution. All existent councils stays in place and keep promoting their interests. But the voice of stakeholders now as a forum. The debate on scenario planning was probably to early. Hopefully, the actual councils configuration will be an effective platform allowing achievements toward the MOU.

Overall, gateways are about dialogue. Behind investment and regulation issues, there is basically a matter of partnership.

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