



**Sherry Martell**

## Not a question of “if”, but “when”?

By *Sherry Martell*

The Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce is seeking support from the national Chamber organization to protect vital trade infrastructure on the Chignecto Isthmus.

In early June, the Truro Chamber submitted a national policy resolution to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce that will be debated for advocacy action in October by more than 400 chambers across Canada. The Truro Chamber is firm in its position securing the trade corridor is an absolute priority and government at all levels must immediately put an action plan in place to address it.

The Isthmus of Chignecto is the narrow, low-lying neck of land spanning approximately 21 km, providing the only land connection between Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada and the principal transportation connection to Newfoundland and Labrador. The isthmus is composed primarily of marshlands located at the head of

the Bay of Fundy, the home of the world's highest tides. The area is protected by a system of dykes and berms, some dating back more than 250 years.

As the only land link to Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, there are numerous transportation and energy transmission linkages that, if interrupted, would have enormous economic impacts on people and businesses in and outside Atlantic Canada. The Trans-Canada Highway, the Canadian National Rail Line, the High Voltage interconnect, fibre-optical cables, a wind farm and the Maritimes and Northeast Gas Pipeline all traverse this narrow stretch of land.

The value of this land connection is enormous to the local and national economy. The estimated \$35 billion per annum value of goods and services through the corridor, inclusive of revenues generated by in-corridor economic activity, is at risk. The origin and destinations of transported goods span well beyond markets in Atlantic Canada, handling goods from across Canada to international markets and the island of Newfoundland.

The key challenge in this area is flood protection is provided by a system of dykes managed by two provincial government departments and CN Rail. A significant portion of the system relies solely on the existence of a raised rail bed that parallels the Trans-Canada Highway for about 8 km. The balance of the system is provided by very old dykes.

The value of this transportation infrastructure to the national economy is significant and the threat to its operation is real. The value of goods transported across the isthmus is estimated at roughly \$50M a day and growing. More than 400,000 containers and 230,000 new cars pass through the isthmus on their way to and from the Port of Halifax every year. The cost of protecting this vital link can be easily justified when compared to the economic and social impacts of allowing the primary links to NS and NL to be damaged by increasingly frequent extreme weather.

If we look at just the impact of imports and exports to and from the port of Halifax in 2022, 21 per cent of exported goods originated from Midwest US, 39 per cent from Central Canada and 33 per cent from Atlantic Canada, the remaining export markets include Western Canada and other areas of the US. When looking at imports of containerized cargo last year, nearly half of the cargo arriving at the Port of Halifax was sent to markets in Central Canada, about a quarter of it remained in Atlantic Canada and 19 per cent was sent to the Midwest US, with the rest was shipped to western Canada, and other US markets.

A 2022 study costing more than \$700,000, cost shared between the federal government and provincial governments of NS and NB, identified 10 potential options, then shortlisted to three with the highest cost option being \$300.8 M. The study indicated a 10-year timeline to put solutions in place. It has been suggested the project would be cost shared by the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick along with the federal government, which has indicated it would consider covering about 50 per of the cost, approximately \$150 M.

It is not a question of if there will be an extreme weather or tidal event that breaches the dyke system, simply a question of when. Since the study completion, Hurricane Fiona in the fall of 2023 caused further destruction to coast lines. The study assumes that, if the status quo persists, over the next 30 years there will be an extreme weather event which results in the closure of the Chignecto Isthmus for two days' duration once every five years. In other words, 6 events or 12 days in total over the period. Based on the an-

nual trade value of \$35 billion the 12-day interruption has a total value of \$1.2 billion (no discounting)

To ensure an all-season trade route to PEI, in the past 30 years Ottawa has contributed more than \$1.257B, through an annual subsidy to Strait Crossing Development Inc., compensating for the construction of the Confederation Bridge, exclusive of ongoing revenue from tolls. The federal government should consider the Chignecto Isthmus of equal importance to the country's trade infrastructure.

The Truro Chamber, supported by several Chambers in Atlantic Canada is recommending the federal government consider the vulnerabilities in this vital trade corridor a national priority to implement improvements in both public and private sector flood protection infrastructure while committing to reliable timelines for project completion. It furthers asks that they work with all provinces and territories to establish an equitable funding model removing the unfair burden of repair cost from the two provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick that reflects the national significance of this corridor on trade and utilities. In addition, it seeks to ensure that CN is consulted in the process of evaluating and recommending minimum necessary flood protection standards, and is part of any funding arrangement.

The Truro Chamber will present its position the to national organization in Calgary, during the national organization's AGM in October.

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Lisa Matthews, left, Office and Membership Coordinator, for the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce, and Executive Director Sherry Martell, right, recently participated in the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce AGM and Conference in Charlottetown, PEI. Author and motivational speaker Jody Urquhart, centre, was a special guest presenter during the conference. – Submitted photo



The Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce recently hosted a Business Breakfast with Economic Development Minister Susan Corkum-Greek, right. Other guests at the breakfast were, David Ritcey, left, MLA Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River; Sgt. Ashton HJ Redding, Recruiting and Attractions, The Nova Scotia Highlanders; Chamber Executive Director Sherry Martell; and Larry Harrison, MLA Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley. – Submitted photo

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