

Gordie Howe bridge opens amid Trump's tariff blackmail against Canada

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The Gordie Howe International Bridge opened to traffic on July 27, establishing a second major crossing between Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario along one of North America's most important industrial corridors.

The six-lane bridge is expected to relieve congestion at a crossing that has long been a bottleneck for freight moving between the United States and Canada. This is especially important for the auto industry, where just-in-time production depends upon the rapid and predictable movement of parts across the border.

The bridge's opening demonstrates the extraordinary integration of production across North America. At the same time, the conflict surrounding it exposes how the economic nationalism of the Trump administration, the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy collides with the interests of the working class and the international character of modern production.

The Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association estimates that \$29 billion worth of US-made auto parts enters Canada every year, much of it through Windsor. MichAuto, an organization representing the Michigan auto industry, said the bridge and its highway connections would improve the reliability of just-in-time supply chains.

The new crossing connects Interstate 75 in Michigan directly with Highway 401 in Ontario, bypassing the city streets used by trucks approaching the nearly century-old Ambassador Bridge.

Days before the bridge opened, US President Donald Trump threatened to impose 50 percent tariffs on a broad range of Canadian goods. The Canadian government responded by canceling a planned joint inauguration and holding a Canada-only ceremony on July 24.

Trump then denounced Canada for supposedly "disinviting" the United States and declared that the tariffs meant the original bridge agreement "no longer stands." He claimed his administration had changed the agreement so that the United States would receive "50% of the Profit."

The statements were another exercise in imperialist blackmail. Trump sought to use the opening of a piece of critical infrastructure as leverage to extract concessions from Canada and intensify a trade war whose costs will be imposed upon workers in both countries through higher prices, factory

closures, layoffs and demands for wage cuts.

Trump began publicly campaigning against the bridge in February, declaring that he would prevent it from opening until the United States was "fully compensated." He presented the project as another supposedly one-sided agreement inherited from previous administrations, even though planning began more than two decades ago and Canada financed its construction.

Behind Trump's intervention was the direct influence of a billionaire whose private toll monopoly was threatened by the new publicly owned crossing.

Matthew Moroun and his family own the Ambassador Bridge, the older and less expansive Detroit-Windsor crossing. The opening of the Gordie Howe bridge threatens to divert a significant share of commercial traffic away from the Ambassador Bridge and reduce the lucrative toll monopoly the family has controlled for decades.

The Morouns have fought the project through lawsuits, lobbying and ballot initiatives. In 2012, the family spent more than \$30 million promoting a failed Michigan constitutional amendment designed to block the project unless it received approval in a statewide referendum.

As the new bridge neared completion, the Moroun-controlled Detroit International Bridge Company renewed its relationship with Ballard Partners, one of Washington's most powerful Trump-connected lobbying firms.

Federal lobbying records reviewed by CBC showed that the bridge company paid Ballard Partners \$250,000 beginning in August 2025 to lobby the White House, Congress and the State Department on "issues related to construction and operation of international bridges." Ballard previously employed Trump's White House chief of staff Susie Wiles and Attorney General Pam Bondi. The Detroit International Bridge Company has paid the firm more than \$3 million since 2018, according to federal disclosures reported by the *Financial Times*.

In July 2025, Moroun donated \$250,000 to the Republican National Committee. On January 16, 2026, he gave another \$1 million to MAGA Inc., the super political action committee supporting Trump.

Weeks later, Moroun reportedly met Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick in Washington. Within hours of that meeting,

Trump escalated his threats against the Gordie Howe bridge and demanded that Canada surrender additional control and toll revenue to the United States.

The deal eventually reached by Washington and Ottawa reportedly gives the United States a share of future profits after Canada recovers the cost of financing the bridge, along with greater influence over toll increases. Trump then used the agreement to proclaim another victory for his policy of threats and economic coercion.

Like every relationship between the US and another country, Trump's intervention has been nakedly nationalist, seeking to subordinate the joint project to blackmail and recast the transit corridor as a bargaining chip to be measured by the benefits it brings to the US alone.

Trump's intervention was not simply a favor to one billionaire. It formed part of a broader effort to subordinate Canada economically and politically to US imperialism. Every international relationship is treated as an opportunity for plunder, with tariffs, access to the American market and control over vital infrastructure employed as weapons.

The Canadian ruling class offers no progressive alternative. Its response combines appeals to Canadian nationalism with retaliatory trade measures and negotiations over what concessions can be granted to Washington. Whatever agreement is reached, the corporations and governments on both sides will seek to make workers pay through attacks on jobs, wages, social programs and living standards.

The Democrats have criticized Trump while advancing the same basic program of economic nationalism. Michigan Democratic Party Chair Curtis Hertel declared that the bridge must protect "Michigan workers" and warned that blocking it would harm the state's auto industry.

This nationalist framework accepts the lie that the interests of workers are identical to those of the corporations headquartered within the same national borders. The differences between the Democrats and Trump are tactical and concern how trade war should be conducted and which capitalist interests should receive its benefits.

Both parties defend protectionism, trade war and the use of American economic power to maintain US global hegemony. These policies lead inexorably toward military conflict.

The bridge itself demonstrates the opposite of the nationalist mythology promoted by both ruling classes. Auto parts cross the border repeatedly during production. Factories, suppliers, logistics networks and assembly plants operate as components of an internationally integrated system.

The bridge is named after Gordie Howe, the Canadian hockey player born in Floral, Saskatchewan in 1928 who spent most of his career with the Detroit Red Wings. Howe became one of the most famous and beloved figures in professional sports on both sides of the border. The bridge's towers were designed to evoke hockey sticks swinging through a slap shot.

Its engineering scale is substantial. The 853-meter main span

is the longest cable-stayed bridge span in North America. Construction began in 2018 and involved more than 11,000 workers and over 13 million hours of labor by mid-2024. Workers from the United States and Canada met above the Detroit River in June 2024 when the two sections of the bridge deck were joined.

That achievement was the product of the internationally coordinated labor of thousands of workers. It demonstrates in concrete form that the working class has an objective and organic basis for international unity.

The United Auto Workers bureaucracy has worked continuously to suppress that unity. It promotes "American jobs" nationalism and tells US workers that their enemies are workers in Canada, Mexico and China. Unifor advances the same reactionary argument in Canada, demanding that Canadian workers subordinate themselves to "their" corporations and government.

Economic nationalism has never saved a single job. It divides workers while the transnational auto corporations move capital and production throughout the world in search of the lowest labor costs and the greatest profits.

The bridge also exposes the historic decline of American capitalism. Major infrastructure projects in the United States have become increasingly rare, delayed for decades by private interests, political corruption and the refusal of the ruling class to devote social resources to anything that does not produce an immediate private return.

The US government can allocate trillions of dollars for war, bank bailouts, mass deportation and the construction of a police state. Yet the repair and expansion of basic infrastructure is treated as prohibitively expensive. The Gordie Howe bridge itself was built only because Canada agreed to finance the project.

The opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge exposes the fundamental contradiction between an internationally integrated system of production and the division of the world into rival capitalist nation-states.

The answer to Trump's tariff war is not Canadian nationalism or retaliatory protectionism. Workers in the United States, Canada, Mexico and internationally must reject the efforts of the capitalist parties and union bureaucracies to pit them against one another and organize across national borders on the basis of their common class interests.



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