

OPINION PIECE

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We need to get our goods moving for Canada's Innovation Corridor to succeed

By Jan De Silva

Canada's Innovation Corridor is *the* economic zone powering our country.

Anchored by the Greater Toronto Area, Waterloo Region and Hamilton-Burlington, the corridor is home to the country's highest density of manufacturing and technology, fully-integrated cross-border supply chains and significant passenger and cargo transportation hubs. It represents more than 20 percent of Canada's economy.

Global businesses like Amazon, General Motors and Google are active in the corridor, attracted by its tremendous talent, research and tech capabilities.

Homegrown success stories like Linamar, The Woodbridge Group and ArcelorMittal Dofasco — all members of Canada's Advanced Manufacturing Supercluster — are making significant investments in the region as well.

They all see tremendous opportunity.

For these and other corridor businesses to compete globally, we know it's critical we tackle our regional growth challenges, above all our ability to move goods seamlessly on our roadways and rail network, and through our ports and airports.

Improvements to infrastructure have not kept pace with the growth of this vital economic zone. As a result, persistent road congestion and delays limit businesses in every sector from moving goods through the region, over the border and to global markets.

As the Toronto Region Board of Trade revealed in a series of reports last year, congestion isn't just the corridor's most pressing challenge, it's also costing our businesses and residents millions each year in higher prices.

Clogged roadways disrupt the 1 million tonnes — \$3 billion worth of goods — being trucked through the region every day, impacting our integrated supply chains and dampening the growth of our economy through trade. Thanks to congestion, a typical household pays on average an additional \$125 each year on goods.

Developing a strategic, multimodal approach to regional goods movement is the key to connecting and building the corridor, providing opportunity at home, enabling global trade among small- and medium-size enterprises, and creating jobs for residents.

We risk losing out on the corridor's unparalleled economic advantages without comprehensive initiatives to address congestion delays in goods movement and ensure we can realize the region's full potential.

We have worked closely with our members in the industry and partners across the corridor — including the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and other Hamilton area stakeholders — to develop solutions.

While we need to make targeted investments to expand our capacity, we know the region can't solely build its way out of congestion. We must make better use of our existing infrastructure and improve the coordination of transportation and land-use planning.

The State of Texas can serve as a model. With numerous border crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border, goods shipped through Texas make their way across the country. The Texas Freight Mobility Council has a mandate to address current pain points in the State to enable future growth.

Texas' context mirrors what we experience with cross-border goods that come through Hamilton and then flow across the rest of the corridor.

As home to Ontario's largest port, one of the largest air cargo hubs in Canada, and with quick access to the U.S. border, Hamilton already plays a pivotal role in the corridor. Are there additional opportunities to strengthen Hamilton's role?

Currently, delivery trucks are transporting goods from distribution centres in Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan and Milton to various destinations across the corridor.

Manufacturers, stores, restaurants and other businesses depend on the timely delivery of these goods. Are there ways to make this more efficient?

These are some of the questions participants will discuss at Canada's Innovation Corridor Summit on June 26 at Royal Botanical Gardens.

It's vital we have these conversations — they matter to our long-term economic prosperity.

To ensure businesses in the corridor can continue to create opportunities for our residents and power Canada's economy, we need to get our goods and people moving.

Jan De Silva is President & CEO of the Toronto Region Board of Trade and Co-Chair of Canada's Innovation Corridor Business Council, organizers of the June 26 summit.