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Friday, August 29th 2025

The Hon. Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Transport and Internal Trade
Government of Canada

The Hon. Gary Anandasangaree
Minister of Public Safety
Government of Canada

The Hon. Mélanie Joly
Minister of Minister of Industry
Government of Canada

Subject: Working Together To Strengthen Canada's Supply Chains And Unlock Our Growth Potential Through Hwy H2O

Dear Ministers Freeland, Anandasangaree, and Joly,

We are writing to express our collective support for a renewed Canadian trade and transport strategy — one that harnesses the full economic and logistical potential of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway network, also known as Hwy H2O. As representatives of key port cities, we believe this corridor is essential not only for diversifying Canada's global trade connections but also for building a more integrated, resilient, and competitive national economy.

In the context of global instability and growing pressure on our supply chains, freshwater maritime transport — and particularly short sea shipping — represents an underutilized but strategic solution. It offers real potential to reduce overdependence on road infrastructure, increase trade access to overseas markets, and strengthen east-west and north-south linkages among Canadian regions — helping to advance the federal government's vision for “one Canadian economy” and a more self-reliant “Canada Strong” approach.

However, **a critical barrier persists: clearance of international containers along Hwy H2O** is concentrated in one port facility, no complementary capacity elsewhere on the Canadian side of the system. While this existing capacity is essential, the absence of additional confirmed clearance options at other ports — including Hamilton, Québec City, Windsor, Picton, Port Colborne, and Goderich — leaves the system less flexible and under-utilized. The recent withdrawal of services by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) from the Port of Valleyfield in 2024 has further reduced our collective capacity.

This is happening in a context where American ports on the East Coast are gradually taking over business destined for Canada, with containers from ports south of the border then being transported by truck and rail to our region. This not only creates congestion but also prevents the development of logistical chains that support a Canada Strong economy and well-paid jobs for our residents.



GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE
CITIES INITIATIVE
L'ALLIANCE DES VILLES
DES GRANDS LACS ET DU SAINT-LAURENT

This constraint has become a growing concern among our member cities, particularly in light of the government's recent announcement that CBSA will be expanding its mandate to fight organized crime and auto theft. While we fully support action on these issues, we are concerned that enhanced enforcement responsibilities may come at the expense of CBSA's trade facilitation role — at a moment when expanded marine access could be a transformative tool for regional and local economic development.

In these times of economic uncertainty, Canada must remove barriers that are within our control. That includes upgrading our ports, strengthening intermodal trade infrastructure, and **ensuring CBSA is resourced and empowered not only to secure borders but also to facilitate trade and have its performance on economic growth measured**, among the agency's indicators. Otherwise, we risk turning a potential competitive advantage into a chokepoint.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of municipal and Indigenous government executives representing communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region, working to promote economic prosperity in our communities and protect our freshwater for the benefit of current and future generations. Our coalition represents over 170 municipalities and communities in Ontario and Québec, many of which benefit from a strong freshwater marine transport industry.

The Cities Initiative, our member cities, and partners are therefore committed to being part of the solution. We are currently working in collaboration with industry, researchers, and maritime stakeholders on a regional Economic Transformation Action Plan for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region. A key pillar of this plan is the transformation of our regional transportation network to be sustainable, equitable, and water-wise — one that fully harnesses the economic and environmental opportunities of inland shipping and Hwy H2O. We look forward to sharing the full action plan with you once it is unveiled on September 24, 2025.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your officials to explore how we can work together to modernize Canada's trade infrastructure and unlock growth across Hwy H2O. A coordinated approach to port investment and customs clearance capacity would not only support national trade objectives but also deliver meaningful economic benefits to communities across the country.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Mat Siscoe

Co-Chair, Great Lakes and St.
Lawrence Cities Initiative
Mayor, St. Catharines, ON

Valérie Plante

Board Member, Great Lakes
and St. Lawrence Cities
Initiative
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