

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF KAHNAWÀ:KE

The Mohawk Council of Kahnawake wishes to inform and update the community on the issues relating to the current repair work taking place on the Mercier Bridge. As there has been a great deal of misinformation and speculation surrounding this, it is important to clarify and, in some cases, correct this misinformation.

General Information

As many people are aware, the largest bridge repair contract in Canadian history (\$66 million) was awarded on April 25, 2008 and a contract signed with a group of five Kahnawà:ke contractors (known as the Mohawk Bridge Consortium – or the MBC) for the first phase of the project (known as Part A).

The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges, Inc. (JCCBI), a federal crown corporation, is managing the project on behalf of Canada.

Two separate contracts for repair works

The works for the Mercier Bridge have been divided into two contracts, though the MCK's preferred position was to issue a single contract for the entire job. Part A was awarded on a "sole source" basis to the MBC, while the JCCBI and MBC reached a negotiated understanding that Part B (the second phase of the work, which will occur from the Seaway to Lasalle) was to be a publicly tendered contract to which entities from Kahnawà:ke be eligible to bid.

The successful bidder for part B will have the sole authority for implementation of the contract – the same conditions that are in effect for Part A.

The role of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke

For purposes of clarity, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke is NOT a signatory to the contracts. The MCK did NOT have the authority to decide who received the contract for Part A, nor does it have the authority to decide who receives the contract for Part B.

The MCK was involved in the government-to-government negotiations to ensure that Kahnawa'kehró:non are given priority to participate in the works and to assert our jurisdiction in that Mohawk Self-Insurance, and not CSST (Quebec Workers Compensation), would be the sole provider of insurance for our workers. These discussions resulted in an Intergovernmental Tri-Partite agreement signed between the MCK, the JCCBI and the Quebec Transport Ministry (usually referred to as the MTQ).

As the contract for Part B will be awarded this month it is necessary to clearly inform community members and ironworkers of the MCK's involvement in the negotiations or contract agreements.

Discussions with JCCBI and CCQ

From the beginning, the MCK has been involved in ongoing discussions with the JCCBI and the CCQ (Quebec Construction Commission) with respect to worker qualifications, employment for Kahnawa'kehró:non, and the contracts for the bridge works.

In these discussions with government agencies, they have agreed with the MCK that contractors will be obligated to utilize the workforce in Kahnawà:ke to carry out the bridgework in both Part A and Part B. The selection process and how the men and women will be hired for Part B has not yet been finalized. However, it is the position of the MCK that any Kahnawà:ke ironworker should have an equal opportunity to be employed for the work taking place on our Territory.

Issues and Problems

As many are aware, representatives of Local 711 have been pressuring the governments and their agencies to take action against the MBC (and Kahnawà:ke) for a number of issues, including perceived shortcomings in insurance, worker qualifications and environmental matters. They held a press conference in late October to make their claims.

CCQ is currently in a process to limit the pressure from Local 711.

The issue of Local 711 has been a point of contention since the beginning of the project. (It should be noted that a sizeable number of Kahnawa'kehró:non are members of this union). Local 711 representative Jacques Dubois has been very outspoken in his criticism and concerns about the bridge works. The MCK has taken issue with Mr. Dubois' methods and has disagreed with some of his statements, such as:

- Claims of workers being uninsured
- Claiming that CSST has jurisdiction on all Mercier Bridge works
- Claiming the CCQ has jurisdiction in Kahnawà:ke

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- Using scare tactics to question bridge safety

The MCK issued a media release to explain that Mohawk Self Insurance has been in effect in the community since 1981, as Mr. Dubois should be aware. As well, the Canadian and Quebec governments are actually part of the agreement that sees Kahnawà:ke jurisdiction respected in terms of workers' insurance and overall job safety.

Suggested solutions

While there are issues that need to be resolved at a local level, it is clear that the MCK's real purpose has been (and will continue to be) to defend Kahnawà:ke's jurisdiction. That does not, however, mean that community members, entities and businesses will be allowed to compromise safety, fairness, environmental concerns, etc.

Therefore, we need to be clear that the MCK (through its various agencies) continues to monitor these issues and will continue to act in the best interest of all

Kahnawa'kehró:non. The following are some of the problems that still need to be resolved, along with some suggested actions that should help in creating solutions:

- Communications issues: There are far too many half-truths, misconceptions and rumors circulating in the community. It is important that all facts be gathered before statements are made. The MCK has been, and will continue to be, transparent and forthcoming in this matter. Better cooperation between all parties involved is essential.
- The MCK would like the MBC to increase its managerial capacity, as some of the problems being encountered are clearly matters of inadequate planning.
- The JCCBI and the MBC have the obligation to ensure that workers meet qualification requirements. The MCK is still willing to assist in this matter.
- The MCK has an interest in making sure that workers receive fair compensation, have a safe environment and are treated fairly without undue pressure for speaking out. We will remain diligent in this matter.
- The MCK, through its Community Protection Unit, will continue to conduct its own safety inspections as part of its obligations for Mohawk Self Insurance.
- The MCK will continue to assert Kahnawà:ke's jurisdiction and de-

mand that representatives from Local 711 remain truthful and fair in their dealings. While there are areas of dispute in regard to the current bridge work, we must also realize that a significantly large number of ironworkers are or have been card-carrying union members and that legitimate concerns should not be disregarded.

In Closing

It is in everyone's best interest to complete the repairs in a manner befitting our history. This job, due to its size and scope, will no doubt be the benchmark of our trade for years to come. If the project runs into problems, it will be a reflection on all Kahnawà:ke ironworkers, not just the current contractors or workers.

No one individual, group or organization can work with complete independence. Each entity needs to be accountable for the work that it is responsible for. With the safety of the public at stake, it is unacceptable that any issues or concerns go unheard and unresolved. Our legacy and heritage is something that must be protected and cherished by all of us. As the current governing body, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke will continue to work diligently to ensure this.

Thanks to everyone for their attention in this matter.

Michael Ahrihrhon Delisle, Jr.
Grand Chief, Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke