



## Headbashers of Atlantica, rejoice!

After 200 years of waiting, what's another 20 or so to see the East-West Highway become a reality

Atlantica and ancient Rome have something in common—and I'm not thinking of a fondness for gladiator sports or a weakness for fruits of the vine. So here's the link: Just like that ancient Roman society, our latter-day Atlantica isn't about to be built in a day.

Indeed, Atlantica—our common cross-border economic zone—is a slow build, or a “slow reveal,” as they say in the movie business. This thought struck me like a pound of asphalt after I talked early this fall to a man bent body and spirit on getting a good highway corridor built from Calais, Me., to Upper New

capita income, and high unemployment.

This devil's trinity sounds familiar to those of us living north of the border. You know the border I mean—the one that Atlantica fans insist should never have been put on a map in the first place. In fact, attempts to wipe that boundary out—for the purpose of commerce and transportation—date back to the early years of the 18th century.

After the British-American War of 1812, British diplomats were assigned four priorities in the peace talks, and one was a trade link between the Maritimes and Upper Canada via a

the East-West Highway as a high-priority economic and security corridor.

Now that, my friends, is important stuff, because when you recognize that a highway is important to a nation's security and economy, you better build one that doesn't beckon drivers into the ditch every mile or so along the way. (Many east-west roads through New England do just that.)

Of course, the new Atlanticans also have to make an economic case for the trade corridor. That's why Maine is embarking on a \$1-million (U.S.) study of the potential of improved intermodal transportation services in the northeastern United States. (The contract for that study should be awarded by early 2006.)

That research should verify that if we build better transportation ties with the rest of the continent, our economy in Atlantica will flourish. This in turn should help convince mandarins in Ottawa and Washington that this trade corridor is good for national interests on both sides of the line.

None of this means the East-West Highway is a done deal. Mr. Blitz says that businesspeople and politicians will have to keep thumping tubs and bashing heads for the next 20 years to complete this great corridor to the heartland of the continent. Success in this mission is possible, but it will take some persistent, annoying, and effective lobbying to get the job done. Fortunately, the headbashers of Atlantica are uniting behind this project.

So let us endure and help them create a new Rome on the north Atlantic. Atlantica won't be built in a day—or a decade—but we're not about to give up in a hurry, either, after two centuries of trying. 🌐

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York State. Sandy Blitz is the executive director of the East-West Highway Association, the Maine-based organization that has taken on this daunting task. This job is perilously important to a number of border jurisdictions, including Quebec, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Upper New York State, and the three Maritime provinces,

Why perilous? Because without decent transportation links between the port of Halifax, Toronto, and the rest of the continent, good old isolated Atlantica will wither on the vine.

According to Mr. Blitz, the proposed East-West Highway would pass through areas of northern New England distinguished by three economic “distress factors”: high out-migration, low per

“connecting road” through Maine. Well, we've only been waiting 200 years or so for a decent East-West trade corridor. And before this column sinks too far into history or remorse, I should add that we can now see hope on the horizon.

Better still, we have a little money to help take us to a glorious future. This summer Washington finally anted up \$25 million for the East-West Highway and \$7 million for a new border crossing between St. Stephen, N.B., and Calais. Now scoffers will call this a piddling amount; a real-deal East-West Highway would cost, after all, more than \$1 billion to build. But according to Mr. Blitz, the U.S. has done something more important than throw a little conscience money at the highway project—it also has recognized