

2. Terms of Reference

The Mid-Continent International Trade Corridor Task Force was created in February 1998 for the purpose of "...seeking to foster the expansion of trade in this region to benefit the economy of Manitoba and other parts of Western Canada."

The Task Force was asked to carry out its work to produce a report that would "...identify opportunities and develop recommendations for strengthening the trade and transportation system within Manitoba and the corridor region."

Specifically, the Task Force was asked to:

Examine the current status of the Mid-Continent International Trade Corridor and what impediments stand in the way of enhancing its competitive position;

Make recommendations to improve existing transportation networks that serve trade, including road, rail, air and international border crossings;

Examine opportunities for both Winnipeg and the Port of Churchill to contribute to increased trade in the corridor.

The importance of this corridor is illustrated by the economic development and international trade opportunities it represents. As Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy described the situation: "Trade is vital to the future prosperity of Manitoba ... we are asking the major stakeholders involved in trade to tell us what more we can do to strengthen our transportation and trade system, and improve Manitoba's competitive position."

The Task Force consisted of 25 members who contributed their time on a voluntary basis, and several ex-officio and staff participants, working together within a tight time schedule to report by June 30, 1998. In addition to the participants, who represented a wide range of organizations and interests, the opinions of a cross-section of interested groups and individuals were also obtained through written submissions and presentations to the Task Force. Several federal, provincial and municipal government officials contributed information and expertise on the issues of interest to Task Force members.

The Government of Canada provided funding for the project through the Department of Western Economic Diversification, and engaged the Transport Institute of the University of Manitoba to serve as the secretariat and researchers for the project. As part of its work, the Institute was asked to produce a set of background papers and report summaries. These are being made available for more detailed consideration of what have become, in some cases, complex technical and public policy issues.