His Worship Bob Bratina  
Mayor of Hamilton  
71 Main Street West, 2nd floor  
Hamilton, Ontario L8P 4Y5

Dear Mr. Mayor:

Thank you for your letter of October 16, 2013, regarding a multi-use pathway on the Burlington Canal Lift Bridge (hereinafter “the Bridge”).

As you are aware, Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) and its predecessor departments have owned and operated a bridge at this site for well over a hundred years. During this time, the citizens of Hamilton, Burlington and the general area have benefited from the access this structure provides, and from the millions of dollars invested in its operation and maintenance.

However, over time, ownership of similar infrastructure has been divested by my department and PWGSC has been directed to divest of the Bridge as it does not serve a program purpose. Infrastructure like the Bridge can be operated more efficiently and effectively by other levels of government, which have both more expertise and far larger inventories of infrastructure. In this way, I believe divestiture can be a win-win solution for both local stakeholders and the federal government.

Due to the divestiture directive, federal funding for the Bridge is limited to projects that address immediate operating and maintenance risks. In my view, the best and perhaps only way to improve the services the Bridge provides is for a local stakeholder to assume ownership of the asset.

PWGSC officials have been in informal discussions with the city managers of Hamilton and Burlington regarding the future of the Bridge. In these informal discussions, and in recognition of the costs associated with owning and operating an asset such as the Bridge, they indicated that the federal government would be willing to negotiate a fair funds transfer to cover costs associated with the Bridge.
Departmental officials will be writing to your city manager and to the city manager of Burlington shortly, to provide more information on the current condition of the Bridge and to request that the cities enter into divestiture discussions with PWGSC. I believe that divestiture to local governments will be the most effective way for you to respond to community interests regarding cyclist access, and to those of other local stakeholders such as the Hamilton Port Authority.

Thank you again for bringing this matter to my attention.

Sincerely,

Diane Finley, PC, MP
Minister of Public Works and Government Services