TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION: 2005

The Paul M. Tellier Tunnel

On November 30, 2004, CN announced that it had renamed its underwater railway tunnel between Canada and the U.S. the Paul M. Tellier Tunnel. Opened in 1995 as the St. Clair Tunnel, it runs under the St. Clair River between Sarnia , Ont., and Port Huron , Mich. Prior to its construction, a smaller tunnel had served the CN/Grand Trunk Railway transborder traffic moving between the two countries for a century.

Tellier, CN president and chief executive officer from 1992 to 2002, envisioned the St. Clair Tunnel as a vital rail link in international commerce between Canada and the U.S. , the world's largest trading partners.

E. Hunter Harrison, who succeeded Tellier as CN president and chief executive officer, said: "Renaming the tunnel is especially fitting because Paul Tellier realized his vision for CN as a truly North American transportation company by completing the tunnel and successfully extending the railroad's reach into the U.S. " During Tellier's tenure, CN acquired the Illinois Central and Wisconsin Central railroads in the U.S.

When tunnel construction began in 1993, Tellier said that the "tunnel will give CN the efficiencies it needs to become a strong competitive force in North American transportation." During the year 2003 alone, transborder traffic, of which a substantial amount passed through the tunnel, generated 34 per cent of CN's total revenue of $5,884 million.

The Paul M. Tellier Tunnel is 1,868 metres long. Its 8.4-metre interior diameter can accommodate doublestack container trains, multi-level auto carriers and other large rail cars and payloads. The tunnel significantly reduces transit times for rail traffic that previously had to be barged across the river, and opened a strategic gateway for doublestack container traffic between Halifax and Chicago, and the U.S. industrial heartland.

To build the tunnel, a consortium from Canada , the U.S. and Europe used large-bore tunnelling technology perfected during the digging of the Chunnel linking Britain and France . The tunnel's construction has also been recognized as one of both Michigan and Ontario 's most important engineering feats of the 20th century.