

NIAGARA TO GTA (NGTA) CORRIDOR (Submitted by Burlington Chamber of Commerce)

Issue:

The transportation infrastructure in the Niagara to GTA corridor is insufficient to meet the needs of those involved in commerce in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Government of Ontario's preferred alternative to the draft Transportation Development Strategy (TDS) report issued in June 2010, as part of Phase 1 of the Niagara to GTA (NGTA) Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study, does not respond to the needs of the business community in Ontario. The proposal does not provide an effective strategy to maximize opportunities for businesses that carry on trade within the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) or with businesses in the United States.

Background:

The stated principal goal of the government transportation strategy is to provide an efficient link between the GTA and the U.S. borders in Niagara Region. The Niagara to GTA transportation corridor not only serves the residents in the study area and the GGH, but also plays a pivotal role in ensuring an efficient goods movement network that connects the GGH to the rest of Ontario and to the U.S. market (source: www.niagara-gta.com/faq.html).

We agree with the stated objective, however the latest proposal by the government fails to meet this goal.

In June 2010, as part of Phase 1 of the NGTA Corridor Planning and EA Study, the MTO issued a draft TDS report which included several alternative solutions. The alternatives were reviewed by the MTO and their preferred course of action is a hybrid alternative that includes some strategic widening of provincial highways as well as the development of some new transportation corridors. The result is a proposal to widen and improve highways along sections of the QEW Niagara, the 403, 401, 407, and Highway 6, as well as the development of new transportation corridors from Highway 403 in Ancaster to Highway 407 at Walkers Line in Burlington, and from the QEW (Fort Erie) to Highway 406 in Welland. This alternative abandons the option of a mid-peninsula highway through Niagara that would connect to the new Hamilton-Halton corridor or Highway 401.

There has been opposition to this hybrid strategy from many stakeholders, including municipalities, business and environmental groups, and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. The MTO should take these concerns seriously and consider other alternatives before proceeding with any further development within the Niagara GTA corridor.

Recommendations:

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Extend the geographical boundaries of the study to include neighbouring business communities that use the GTA Corridor such as Brantford, Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Milton to ensure the overall transportation needs of the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe and surrounding areas are met.

2. Engage business leaders and other representative groups including civic leadership, other levels of government, and planners to ensure that the broader community supports the long-term regional transportation strategy. Included in the consultation of the business community, consideration must be given to both rail and truck transportation representatives, to create an overall multi-modal transportation strategy.
3. Take into account the sensitive biosphere and heritage of the Niagara Escarpment, designated Green Belt areas, and public health issues.
4. Implement the strategy as quickly as possible to address the immediate transportation needs of the region.