

Addressing the Niagara to GTA Transportation Corridor

Authored by the 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.

As of September 4, 2013, the final transportation development strategy includes the following multimodal elements:

- Optimizing the existing transportation network
- Supporting transit initiatives that are consistent with the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan and the GO Transit 2020 Strategic Plan, as well as recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the non-roadway modes of transportation.
- Several highway widening and new highway corridor recommendations, including:
 - Hamilton and Halton: Widening of key highway facilities by two or more lanes to address medium term transportation needs. In addition, a future study is recommended to identify a longer-term transportation strategy.
 - Hamilton to Niagara: Widening of the QEW to eight lanes (including HOV lanes), and continuing to monitor traffic volumes on the QEW to determine capacity requirements beyond 2031.
 - Niagara: New highway corridor connecting Highway 406 south of Welland to the QEW near Fort Erie.

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 Niagara to 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 (including transportation safety issues).
4. Implement the strategy as quickly as possible to address the immediate transportation needs of the region.

Estimated Financial Impact to the Province

Entail a small cost to government (less than \$10M)