

Southern Ontario Gateway Council

Comment on NGTA Transportation Development Strategy Draft for Consultation, February 2011.

Background

The Southern Ontario Gateway Council (SOGC) is a non-profit association made up of members from all modes of transportation that operate to, from, and within the boundaries of the Southern Ontario Gateway. SOGC aims to be the voice of the goods movement sector – a major enabler of the Southern Ontario Economy. SOGC has been a participant in several workshops and open houses associated with the Niagara-to-GTA process. The study followed a four stage incremental evaluation process--optimization of existing networks, new, Expanded non-road infrastructure; widening existing roads and finally—planning new transportation corridors. Its preliminary recommendation is to delay the construction of a new route between the GTA and the US border and instead widen the QEW.

We are pleased to provide our comments on the Transportation Development Strategy Draft for Consultation, February 2011.

A. Executive Summary

Transportation should Lead an Economic Vision For Ontario and Canada

The construction of the Queen Elizabeth Way 7 decades ago, and the construction of the 401 in the 1960's were examples of government looking into the future and determining the future transportation needs of the province, recognizing the economic development and jobs that would ensue from infrastructure development. These visionary projects transformed the economy of Ontario and enabled the ensuing transformation of the province into an economic powerhouse. Without these two projects we could not have experienced the tremendous growth that has resulted from the NAFTA agreement and globalization. We simply wouldn't have been ready to fulfil our share of the bargain. Today, with competing demands on resources, transportation, especially highway transportation has regrettably been developed on a more reactive basis, its potential as a critical economic enabler, not fully realized. It is through that lens that we comment on the *Transportation Development Strategy Draft for Consultation, February 2011*.

Southern Ontario Gateway Council Recommendation:

Our trade links to the United States are key to the sustainability of the Southern Ontario economy. The Niagara Border Crossing is the Number 2 NAFTA corridor in Canada. The federal government is investing heavily in Border infrastructure aimed at increasing the flow of commercial vehicles across the border. Presently Canada and the United States have announced plans for a perimeter border policy that will further speed the flow of commercial traffic across our shared border. Against this backdrop what is being proposed is the widening of an already overburdened 80 year old road system. In the interests of reliability and redundancy, our recommendation continues to be that an all-new route should be developed prior to widening of the QEW and that the project be staged, starting with the Hamilton to

Niagara portion, with an ongoing detailed examination of the western connection issues. Our recommendation then,

- 1. Proceed with planning NGTA Central and East portions now, protect potential corridors, move to the next phase of the EA in order to refine the actual route.**

Toronto, unlike nearly every large metropolitan centre in the United States, lacks a goods movement bypass or ring road system. In our view the east-west congestion problems with Highway 403 do not obviate the need for a better connection from Niagara to the 401 corridor and thence to the GTA West Corridor. Such linkage would provide Metro Toronto and the GTA with at least a partial solution to the lack of a bypass. 407 ETR is a failure in terms of goods movement and will do nothing to solve goods movement congestion issues. Meanwhile in Hamilton, widening of the existing 403 poses constructability and environmental challenges. The proposed Ancaster-Burlington bypass route, across the escarpment is strongly opposed in part because the study area is too broad for objective consideration. The study area needs to be narrowed. Your research has demonstrated clear need for expansion, so the issue is how and where. Our recommendation:

- 2. Explore connecting 4-2 to the 401, to determine its ability to divert traffic from the QEW, at the same time move to the next phase of the EA for the 403/bypass road alternatives in order to seek out an acceptable route solution. Consideration should be given to developing cutting edge design, engineering and routing solutions that will leave the smallest environmental impact possible in and around sensitive escarpment and agricultural areas. This is an opportunity for Ontario to showcase best practices in green design.**

B. Transportation Development Strategy Draft for Consultation, February 2011.

Synopsis of Comments:

- 1. The detailed narrative does not always support the conclusions and the application of weighting.**
- 2. The 2031 planning horizon is too short. *Places to Grow* is about urban sprawl. It should not trump serious long-term transportation issues. You should not be confined to this timeline.**
- 3. Your studies, both the current one and previous studies indicate that eventually it will be necessary to widen the QEW AND construct a new route. The only issue, then is which to commence first, not whether. SOGC thinks the all-new route is the optimal solution.**
- 4. Federal initiatives and investment will increase traffic flow across the Niagara border crossings. North American perimeter initiatives now underway will increase that flow.**
- 5. The current study comes to almost the opposite conclusions to your 2003 study, *Niagara Peninsula Transportation Needs Assessment Technical Summary Report – Update (2003)*. While this latter study predated Greenbelt Legislation, there is provision in the Greenbelt**

legislation for infrastructure corridors through the greenbelt that support economic development. Otherwise the 2003 study uses similar “building block” methodology as the current study to conclude that the all new route should proceed without delay.

6. Environmental and Constructability issues with the QEW widening option are grossly understated, while environmental issues with the all new route are over-weighted in comparison to the detailed narrative.
7. The all-new route was envisioned as a toll road. The tolling option has disappeared in the consideration of relative cost of this option vs QEW widening.

C. Detailed Commentary

1: Metrics. Although the document provides a more extensive re-statement of various assertions, and provided some insight into methodology; the rationale for the application of the critical weighting that led to the recommendations was missing. But in our view the visual application of weighting through, (for lack of a better term), the “green dots” is in some cases, not supported and occasionally is contradicted by the actual narrative contained in the document. We will list numerous examples of this disconnect in the appendix.

2. Policy Framework-Planning Horizon. SOGC continues to be concerned about the narrow planning horizon of 2031 used in this study. 2031 may suit the requirements of the *Places to Grow Strategy* but it does not adequately allow for the lengthier planning horizons needed to develop transportation infrastructure. *Places to Grow* has very specific forecasts about the amount of population growth the region will experience. We argue that without the provision of adequate transportation infrastructure to support those projections, the anticipated growth may not occur. The draft document acknowledges that, the necessary conditions to justify a new corridor could exist shortly after 2031 or possibly even before 2031.

3. Environmental Issues. While the detailed backup narrative provides, with exceptions, a reasonably balanced view of environmental factors to be considered, the summary documents culminating in the final recommendations tend to understate the environmental impacts of widening and overstate the environmental impacts of a new corridor—especially in the central region of the study area. See the appendix for several examples.

4. Conflict with Previous Studies

The Niagara Peninsula Transportation Needs Assessment Study, 2001—a joint venture of MTO, Hamilton and Niagara recommended an all new route connecting Fort Erie and Hamilton as a key element of a long- term transportation strategy for the region and recommended that a detailed EA and corridor protection take place as soon as possible. In 2003 the more detailed *Niagara Peninsula Transportation Needs Assessment Technical Summary Report – Update* was released recommending a new route across the peninsula connecting to Hamilton and beyond and that any QEW widening be restricted to what has subsequently been completed to the present date. Two of the authors of this report were URS, and MRC, authors of your current transportation strategy, now recommending exactly the opposite sequence of events. Like the current study, the 2003 study also followed the ‘Building Block’ scenario, is supported by extensive metrics and background but came to much

different conclusions. There appears to be an impression that the Greenbelt Legislation would prohibit the all new route. This is not true. On the issue of Greenbelt prohibiting ancillary development along road corridors, the fact is that only 30 KM of 4-2 actually lie in the greenbelt. There are many opportunities for ancillary employment development.

5. Constructability, Community and Cost

We believe the study has seriously underestimated the constructability issues inherent in the QEW widening option, especially in the Hamilton Area. What is being proposed is as follows:

- Reconstruction or replacement of the Burlington Skyway
- Major reconstruction of the Freeman Interchange
- Major reconstruction of the QEW/Red Hill/Burlington Street Interchanges
- Possible widening or reconstruction of the Garden City Skyway
- Reconstruction of 14-17 interchanges between St Catharine's and Hamilton

A massive construction project of this magnitude with this many complicated components, would disrupt the local economy, tourism and commuter traffic for years. The Red Hill/QEW/Burlington Street exchange was only recently reopened after years of construction nuisance. This exchange is a major access-egress point for the Hamilton steel industry. The cost of rebuilding two skyways cannot be accurately estimated using standard cost formulas in our view. A major re-build around the Freeman Interchange will disrupt Toronto-bound commuter traffic, goods movement and tourism. Any one of the major features of the widening option would be enough to cause serious disruption and community impacts. In combination they would be intolerable in our view. "Staging" would only prolong the misery. An all-new route would reduce or delay the need for many of these major construction initiatives and, unlike the widening option could proceed without disrupting our only trade link with the US from this region. When the Hamilton community understands the magnitude of the local impacts of widening, significant political push-back can be expected. In the appendix that follows is some elaboration and further supporting documentation for our comments.

Summary

The 2010-11 report and the 2003 report make a clear case for the urgency of developing additional road capacity between Niagara and the GTA. Indeed, both studies say that the ultimate solution will involve BOTH expansion of the QEW and a new corridor across southern Niagara and Hamilton. Only on the issue of the sequencing of the two solutions do the two reports differ. We believe the raw observations in the 2010-11 report simply do not support the conclusion that was extrapolated from that data; namely that the QEW widening should proceed first and, further that the widening should be to 10 lanes. In our view a new corridor starting with the Hamilton to Fort Erie phase, is the best way of supporting the *Places to Grow* job and population growth strategies. We believe the social and economic disruption that will result in the Hamilton-Burlington QEW corridor is of a magnitude that this option requires a much more detailed analysis. The Flamborough-Halton proposals are strongly opposed at the local level. This opposition can only be addressed by identifying a more precise and detailed alignment, or by re-visiting the connection to 401 where the possibility exists to follow existing road, rail and hydro corridors. The economic analysis does not appear to take into account possible benefits of the expected growth in the designated Employment Growth districts planned for both Hamilton and Niagara, but rather appears to base its conclusions strictly on the benefits of congestion relief.

From a policy framework perspective, we think there is too much emphasis on adhering to a 2031 planning horizon set by MAH in *Places to Grow* that was designed to deal with urban intensification issues and was not primarily focused on Transportation issues. While we recognize that no infrastructure project should proceed without rigorous environmental scrutiny we are of the view that that MOE is the lead on Environment and the Ministry of Transportation's primary role has been and should continue to be developing and advocating for transportation solutions that support economic development and tourism. A question worth exploring is: if the current process were in place in past would the QEW or the 401 have ever been built?

APPENDIX

Note: To provide our comments in detail we will follow the format of the February 2011 document: *Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study Draft Transportation Development Strategy, Executive Summary. Document 4-- Assessment of Group #3 and Group #4 Transportation Alternatives*. Generally we compare 3-1 with 4-2 scenarios consistent with our recommendation of a staged approach that would see the central and eastern areas addressed first with the western issue studied further. We have not addressed all sub factors, especially where the findings were inconclusive or repetitive of comments made about other criteria, and where there was no particular advantage to a route.

Definitions

In the discussion that follows, the QEW widening option is referred to as option 3.1, while the all-new corridor option connecting Fort Erie with the 403 at Hamilton is referred to as option 4.2,

1.0: Environmental Issues (Central Study Area)

The study endeavours to compare the potential environmental issues of a precisely known corridor (existing QEW ROW) with the potential environmental issues of a broad swath of territory in Southern Niagara and Hamilton ranging in width from 10 km to over 20 km. Indeed the 2011 report acknowledges the problem and concludes, "*This approach recognizes that future potential routes generated within a given corridor will **not necessarily result in impacts to every natural feature** within that corridor, and that impacts to natural features within a given corridor may be largely avoided or minimized through careful route planning (in the next phase of the EA)*".

1.1.1 Fish Habitat

Widening: The 2011 report points to "*potential for high impacts to fish and fish habitat from 1. Improvements to the QEW / Red Hill Valley Parkway interchange to accommodate additional lanes – which will likely impact Red Hill Creek and Van Wagners Marsh; and widening Highway 403 adjacent to Cootes Paradise, where its tributary parallels Highway 403. Direct / indirect impacts to Cootes Paradise are likely.*"

Alternative 4-2. (Niagara to 403) While the potential exists to traverse many streams and to disrupt fish habitat, the report concludes that many of these issues can be resolved through route selection – "*Good opportunity to avoid / minimize effects through siting and design (e.g., span valleys); and to treat water quality in a Greenfield setting.*"

1.2 Terrestrial Ecosystems

Similar to Fish Habitat. QEW widening has potential to have impacts in the Red Hill area and Cootes Paradise, but this risk is ranked as “low” relative to the category 4 options even though the authors write: *“Impacts to PSW can be largely avoided through careful route selection. Impacts to Unevaluated / Non-PSW wetlands can be minimized to the extent possible through careful route selection within corridor. No constraint areas requiring mandatory crossings of wetlands identified.*

1.5 Designated Areas: Again acknowledging possible impacts of QEW widening on Red Hill and Cootes Paradise area, again assessing the risk as ‘low’ relative to the potential of an all new route, but with regard to the latter again concluding *“Impacts to designated features can largely be avoided through careful route selection.”*

Environment Summary:

Notwithstanding the points raised above, the study concludes, *“based on the above assessment, the widening alternative was preferred over all in comparison to the new corridor alternatives, although it is recognized that significant localized impacts will occur as a result of widening.”*

In our opinion this conclusion is simply not supported by the actual narrative, in large part because of the problem of comparing a very precise alignment with one of indeterminate size. The underlying narrative is much less definite than the application of “green dots” suggests. It identified serious-- real, not potential issues around the Red Hill and Cootes Paradise area and made little reference to the impact on the tender fruit lands that abut the existing QEW ROW. Indeed the report continually states that environmental issues in the new route scenario can be avoided with proper route selection.

2.0 Land Use/Socio-Economic Environment Factors

2.1 Land use, Planning/Policies. The study noted that, as with the Natural Environmental Assessment, when socio-economic issues are evaluated we are confronted with comparison of a precise Right of Way (QEW) with one of an indeterminate width. This makes specific comparisons difficult. *“the study team understood that every feature in the corridor would not be impacted by future routes, and that some features (i.e., small hamlets, pockets of existing residential areas or agricultural operations, etc.) could be avoided in the next phase of the EA – when route planning would occur. In other instances, it was apparent that the feature was so large that it crossed the entire width of the corridor (or study area) and could not be avoided (e.g., lands designated for future urban expansion in some municipalities).*

Regarding the widening option the report identified as benefits, improved connectivity between the urban growth centres of downtown St Catharines, Burlington, Hamilton and Midtown Oakville; continuing: *This alternative supports planned future land use or growth as identified in the Growth Plan.* The report suggests widening would provide new transit service connections. It is not clear how this is envisioned unless the report is suggesting dedicated bus lanes, or referring to reduced congestion allowing all traffic to move more freely. The fact is that commuter traffic between Niagara and the GTA is light and GO plans to extend rail and bus service to meet the demand that exists. The report says widening would reduce impacts on natural areas, notwithstanding the aforementioned acknowledged but unquantified impacts on Red Hill, Van Wagner’s Marsh and tender fruit lands. With regard to the 4-2 option concern is expressed that the option will traverse 30km of greenbelt, however there are existing highway ROW’s through this section that might form part of the routing solution. Section 4.2.1 of the Greenbelt plan contemplates new infrastructure that supports broader economic development beyond the Greenbelt provided care is taken to avoid significant natural features and that the essential rural character of the area is not destroyed. The report goes on to point out that 4-2 does accommodate planned future growth in

Niagara Region and the City of Hamilton. *“This alternative supports the Gateway Economic Zone and Centre identified in the Growth Plan. (It) supports Niagara’s “Grow South” plans and relieves development pressures on the tender fruit and grape lands. • Supports Hamilton’s plans to develop employment lands around the HIA.”*

2.2 Land Use/Community

The report notes: *“Widening existing freeways has the potential to effect urban and residential areas more than a new corridor. This is because there are developments of urban and residential areas already surrounding the current QEW, 403, 407 ETR and 406 Highways.. the communities of Oakville, Burlington, Hamilton, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines.*

*(The) new corridor alternative has some potential to change or effect the “rural” character. **The impacts of a new corridor in areas that are currently rural can be reduced through avoidance of the most sensitive areas and mitigation. It has the potential to minimize impacts to existing communities along existing freeways through Niagara Region and Hamilton with less widening.”***

2.25 Tourism:

With regard to tourism, widening will improve links by allowing better traffic flow along the existing corridor. The all-new route (4-2) : *“Promotes increased tourism by providing a high quality alternate route to the Niagara border and tourist areas through a better linkage to Southwest Ontario (i.e., Niagara to London / Kitchener / Brantford).”*

2.3 Noise: Widening: *“Nuisance / proximity impacts (increased noise, illumination etc.) may occur in built-up areas.”* With regard to the all new route. *“Noise is farther away from where people are located. Less noise sensitive receivers potentially impacted.”*

Summary

The report concludes that from a socio-economic/land use standpoint, neither option is clearly preferred. *“Widening will provide limited ability to accommodate planned future growth in Niagara Region and the City of Hamilton. It requires widening of QEW to eight lanes through St Catharines that will result in significant community impacts with well over 100 residences displaced and major impacts to a number of businesses and industrial areas.”* The all new route (4-2) has the potential to change or affect the ‘rural’ character though Central Niagara and Eastern Hamilton, and requires new Greenbelt crossings of approximately 30 kilometres. But it acknowledges that route planning can mitigate or avoid these potential affects. Despite the conclusion in the report that neither option is preferred, the widening option is nonetheless accorded a more favourable weighting in the application of green dots. Furthermore, the detailed narrative could arguably suggest that the 4-2 option is actually better from a socio-economic/land use standpoint since its impact on communities is significantly less than the widening option.

4.0 Area Economy

The calculation of economic benefits relies on the TREDIS model. In the discussion on methodology TREDIS is described as a tool that can weigh all economic impacts, but in its application to the NGTA the following criteria are stressed:

- Cost savings due to reduced user time delay and expense;
- Cost savings due to enhanced reliability;
- Cost savings from enhanced inter-modal capacity and connectivity;

- Cost savings and scale economies from enhanced market access; and
- Added growth enabled by elimination of capacity constraints at gateways.

These are all congestion-based metrics. There is no mention of potential benefits of the actual development and growth of employment lands in Hamilton and Niagara, i.e new start-ups, relocations that would be enhanced and accelerated by the 4-2 option. The study suggests the 4-2 option would result in 10,600 jobs and \$0.9 Billion in increased economic activity, whereas Wilbur Smith Associates, an internationally respected transportation and economic development consulting firm, in a report commissioned by Hamilton and Niagara suggests 75,000 to 100,000 new jobs and up to \$3 Billion in economic new activity would result from the 4-2 option.

Land Use, Socio-Economic Summary:

Nonetheless, the report concluded that, none of the alternatives are clearly preferred from an economic perspective.

Widening: “Alternative 3-1 serves a significant number of existing population and employment centres with additional highway capacity and expands capacity to most existing industrial areas in the study area. However, Alternative 3-1 does not provide a direct connection between the Hamilton AEGD and the US border. It also does not provide connections to new employment areas planned in south Hamilton, or some areas of Halton Region, and does not support the economic development objectives of south Niagara. Alternative 3-1 does not provide an alternate connection to the US border or a direct connection between the Gateway Economic Centre in the Welland area and the Gateway Economic Zone along the Niagara River that have been identified in The Growth Plan.”

On the other hand, with regard to 4-2 the report says it “*provides a connection between the Hamilton AEGD and the US border, and provides alternate routes and network flexibility for people and goods movement between Hamilton and Niagara. It also provides a direct connection between the Gateway Economic Centre in the Welland area and the Gateway Economic Zone along the Niagara River, and supports the economic development objectives of south Niagara.*” Given these comments a case could be made that the incremental economic benefits are actually greater with the 4-2 option.

5.0 Transportation

5.1 Traffic Operations:

The report suggests that all of the alternatives under discussion would serve to reduce congestion on the non-freeway road system. With regard to the QEW widening the report says it “*does not provide any new alternate routes for inter-regional transportation beyond new transit corridors recommended in the RTP by Metrolinx. This alternative provides increased inter-regional road capacity on existing freeway system.*

It further notes the all new route would “*provide a new alternate corridor between Hamilton and Niagara through a direct connection between QEW and Highway 403 plus new transit corridors and increased roadway capacity throughout the study area. This creates a potential to improve transportation system reliability with a new inter-regional corridor over a portion of the NGTA study area.*”

5.2 Transit:

The QEW widening option would provide greater reliability of bus service through reduction of congestion, but added , “*it has only minor potential to improve linkages between inter-regional and local*

transit with improved service integration and new opportunities for station locations and service connections. Alternative 3-1 also results in the highest use of local roads for inter-regional trips impacting safety / security for active transportation.” With regard to the all new (4-2) route the report says it would provide a possible new transit option on the corridor but notes that its termination at 403 in Hamilton is a limiting factor. SOGC, in its staged approach, prefers the eventual extension of the corridor to Highway 401. When this option is added the report sees significant transit options saying the route would: “create potential for new higher order inter-regional transit on the new corridor over approximately the entire study area. They improve bus operational performance with improved road network operations and potential for bus rapid transit (BRT) on the new corridor. Both these alternatives result in a very low use of local roads for inter-regional trips, thus improving safety / security for active transportation users.”

5.11 Constructability

The QEW widening option entails major disruptive and costly construction challenges. The magnitude of these construction challenges could result in traffic disruptions and economic impacts serious enough to cause significant medium-term economic challenges in the Hamilton area. The Freeman Interchange would require numerous bridge replacements and ramp realignments. The Burlington Bay Skyway would have to be substantially rebuilt. A “major” reconstruction and reconfiguration of the QEW-Red Hill-Burlington Street exchange will be required. Between 14 and 17 QEW interchanges will require reconstruction or modification between Hamilton and Highway 406. The Garden City Skyway would also require widening or replacement. The all-new option would require less reconstruction of the Burlington Bay Skyway and no new structures required at the QEW/Red Hill/Burlington Street section, and no widening of the Garden Street Skyway. The report says with the QEW widening option, the westbound Burlington Street interchange would have to be taken out of service during the construction phase which could last years. These are all structures and systems that have been substantially rebuilt and refurbished in recent years. When applying costs to the various options some consideration should be given to the cost of rebuilding major traffic systems decades before they have reached their normal lifespan as is recommended in 3-1.









Despite the enormous construction and engineering challenges associated with the QEW widening option, it is ranked ahead of the all-new route option. There is nothing in the detailed narrative that would justify this conclusion, and considerable specific detail that would support the all-new route.

Cost

The report suggests that the QEW widening option will cost \$500Million less than the all-new route notwithstanding the magnitude of the construction and engineering challenges in rebuilding the Burlington Skyway, substantially rebuilding the Freeman Interchange, rebuilding the Garden City Skyway and reconfiguring 14-17 interchanges between Hamilton and St Catharines. Missing in the discussion is the fact that the all-new route was envisioned as a toll road. This option has disappeared in the current analysis. Your 2003 report studied the tolling issue in some detail and concluded that the route would divert sufficient traffic from the QEW to make this option viable. Even the application of moderate tolls, perhaps with a sunset provision would make the all-new route a much more favourable option than the QEW which could not feasibly be tolled after more than 70 years as a free road.

Final Conclusions

The raw detailed descriptions provide reasonably balanced observations about the assumed benefits and challenges with the various options against reasonable criteria. It is when the report seeks to draw conclusions that anomalies and inconsistencies occur. We think the narrative more easily supports the following conclusions with regard to the central area:

Criteria	Widening	New Corridor	Comments
Environment			Many of the potential environmental impacts of new corridor can be mitigated through route selection. Widening poses problems at Red Hill.
Economic			TRIDIS measures congestion savings. Wilbur Smith report projects much higher job creation and overall economic spinoffs
Community			Magnitude of community disruption with widening is accurately described in narrative but seriously understated in weighting and conclusions
Transportation/ Constructability			Serious rebuilds required of skyways, Freeman interchange, Red Hill/QEW. Shutdown of Burlington St Exit. New Corridor costs could be offset by tolling.

In the end the weighting appears subjective when the disconnect between verbatim observations and final conclusions is considered.

Part B: Conflict With Previous Studies

Numerous studies have been conducted on the transportation needs of the Hamilton-Niagara area. Some of the more recent of these include Transfocus 2021- 1995, and the Niagara Transport Needs Assessment Study 2001. Of these we look at the most recent:

**Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor
Environmental Assessment Terms of Reference January 2003**

This document, released in 2003, followed a very similar methodology to the 2010-11 study—i.e. progressive application of non-roadway options, traffic demand, transit, traffic management etc before exploring road widening or new corridors. This is not surprising; given the 2003 report was in part authored by the same consultants who produced the current report. This was a comprehensive report involving a technical study and appendices totalling roughly 130 pages. The study examined the key issue of whether to widen the QEW and/or build a new corridor, and concluded that BOTH were needed. It was the earlier report's conclusion, however that the new route should be built first. In addition the 2002 report recommended a westerly connection with the 401. We reproduce here that report's rationale for its recommendations. While the Green Belt Legislation was not in place in 2003, the Smart Growth Strategy was and is reflected in the 2003 report. In any event, Greenbelt has specific provisions that allow for transportation infrastructure development within its boundaries.

Expansion of Existing Infrastructure - QEW

“Constraints to widening this corridor exist along much of its length, particularly between Hamilton and Halton, at the two Skyway bridges at Burlington Bay and the Welland Canal, and through the built up areas in Burlington, Hamilton, St. Catharines and the other smaller communities along this section. While there may be an opportunity to expand the QEW to eight lanes from the Freeman Interchange in Burlington to Highway 420 in Niagara Falls, the impacts to go beyond eight lanes to address long term transportation needs would be significant. For this study, an eight lane widening is assumed to be the maximum that could be practically implemented. In addition to the basic freeway widening, the following improvements would also be necessary:

- Rebuild the Freeman Interchange in part or entirely to provide effective connections between an upgraded QEW and the Highway 403, Highway 407 and QEW corridors through and beyond the interchange;
- Widening of the Burlington Bay Skyways and the Garden City Skyway to at least ten lanes in order to address truck-climbing requirements.

A second QEW expansion strategy would involve widening the highway to eight lanes from the Freeman Interchange to Highway 406 in St. Catharines, improving Highway 406 from the QEW to the Thorold Tunnel, and extending Highway 420 from the QEW in Niagara Falls to the Thorold Tunnel. This option defers the need to widen the QEW through St. Catharines beyond the approved six lane widening plan and provides an alternate route to the QEW when the Garden City Skyway requires rehabilitation.

While the second option provides advantages by providing an improved, albeit short section of a parallel facility to the QEW, the Highway 406/420 route is less effective as the QEW, especially for truck traffic, due to alignment constraints that require lower operating speeds.”

New /Roadways

“The centrepiece of the Transportation Development Strategy is a new Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor (MPTC) running from the QEW between

Niagara Falls and Fort Erie, westward to south of Hamilton International Airport, and then around Hamilton and connecting to Highway 407 and/or Highway 401 in Halton.

It has been concluded that a new Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor (MPTC) incorporating a highway with a right-of-way for a potential transitway will be required along with strategic upgrading of the QEW through Hamilton and Niagara to accommodate travel demand and to facilitate reliable goods movement, within, and through the Analysis Area. It is recommended that the MPTC be constructed first, with sections of the transitway to serve the urban centres next and that strategic improvements to the QEW through Hamilton and Niagara be considered over the longer term. It is recommended that an Environmental Assessment Terms of Reference be initiated to facilitate protection of an MPTC route. The MPTC represents the platform around which other strategies have been formulated. It should be acknowledged that the needs assessment study is proposing a study area— not a definitive corridor or route. A formal environmental assessment process would be utilized to examine route location options and impacts prior to determining a preferred route.

A new highway around Hamilton could provide access to Highway 401, 403 or 407 and present a congestion free alternative to the Highway 403 and QEW routes through the Hamilton area. Such a highway would "link" Highway 6, near Caledonia and Hamilton International Airport, Highway 403 serving Brantford and southwestern Ontario, and Highways 8 and 6 serving the Kitchener-Cambridge-Guelph area. The highway component of the Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor, whether it leads to Highway 407 or Highway 401 in the west, will provide additional roadway capacity in the corridor/corridors leading to the GTA. It is recognized that the additional highway capacity may require commitment to improvements to downstream facilities as part of a strategic improvement plan. Improvements to Highway 401 through Halton and Mississauga and Highway 407 West along with other regional initiatives will provide the necessary downstream system capacity.”