GTA West Transportation Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study

Draft Overview of Environmental Conditions and Constraints Working Paper Update

June 2015

GTA West
Planning *with* Vision | Planning *for* People

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1. OVERVIEW OF STUDY PROCESS

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Corridor Environmental Assessment (EA) is being undertaken by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) in accordance with the *Ontario Environmental Assessment Act*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, and the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Terms of Reference, approved March 4, 2008. The EA is being conducted in two stages. Stage 1 consisted of three phases all of which are completed: the EA Terms of Reference; the Area Transportation System Planning; and Preliminary Planning to identify a Route Planning Study Area. Stage 2 of the EA was initiated in early 2014 and will continue until 2018.

As noted, the first phase of the GTA West Study was the preparation of an EA Terms of Reference (ToR). The *GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Terms of Reference* (EA ToR) outlines the framework for completing this EA study. The EA ToR document was submitted to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) under Section 6 (2)(a) of the *Environmental Assessment Act* on July 15, 2007, and approved on March 4, 2008.

The EA ToR outlined the level of detail to be used in documenting existing environmental conditions in the first stage of the EA process and includes supporting documentation on environmental factors and sub-factors. This report provides an update on the Existing Conditions in the route planning Study Area which was developed during Stage 1 and which is illustrated in **Exhibit 1-2**. The main purpose of this report is to document the existing environmental conditions and constraints. This updated compilation of existing conditions information is intended to present a summary of the environmental data collected through Stage 1 of the Study and build upon initial Stage 2 work that has been completed to date.

The environmental investigations that take place during the study will identify significant and sensitive features of the natural, socio-economic and cultural environments. The findings will be documented in separate reports for specific environmental factors (i.e., fisheries, terrestrial, noise, air, land use, agriculture, Stage 2 archaeology and Built Heritage) in future phases of this study.

Ultimately, the contents of this report will form the “Existing Conditions” Section of the Individual EA (IEA) Report that will be submitted to the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) for review once complete (anticipated timing is 2018). More information regarding the work completed as part of Stage 1 and the work to be completed as part of Stage 2 of this EA is provided in **Sections 1.3** and **1.4** below.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades Central Ontario has evolved from a Toronto-based employment centre to a large geographic region with many centres of economic activity, employment, and population. Travel demand is now more dispersed, with travel occurring between many employment and residential areas

within and outside the GTA. Future population and employment growth in major urban centres will result in an increase in travel demand for both people and goods movement between the centres that are spread across the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH).

One of the Province of Ontario's (the Province) efforts to deliver a long-term sustainable plan for transportation and better transit in the GTA – Hamilton area is Metrolinx (formerly known as the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority), which has been established to create a seamless, integrated transportation network.

Additionally, the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure released the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (the *Growth Plan*) in June 2006. The *Growth Plan* outlines a set of policies for managing growth and development and guiding planning decisions in the GGH over the next 30-years. This plan represents a planning "vision" for the Province. *The Places to Grow Act* (2005) requires that planning decisions made by the Province, municipalities and other authorities conform to the policies contained in the *Growth Plan*.

To realize the *Growth Plan's* policy directions, MTO initiated the study of people and goods movement in the GTA West Corridor through the EA process. The study is intended to identify and validate the transportation problems and opportunities within the Study Area and evaluate a variety of alternatives to address them. As part of Stage 1 for the study, a multi-modal Transportation Development Strategy (TDS) was completed in November 2012. The TDS considered all transportation modes in the initial planning corridor, and assessed their ability to address the future (2031) transportation demands. The TDS recommendations included optimizing the existing transportation network, improvements to non-roadway transportation modes such as transit and rail, widening of existing highways, and a new transportation corridor.

In continuing with the EA study and completing Stage 2, MTO will coordinate with Metrolinx, the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, and other ministries and municipalities.

1.2 STUDY BACKGROUND

Prior to approval of the Province's *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (February 2006), a number of studies, including MTO's *Central Ontario Strategic Transportation Directions* (Draft 2002) indicated that MTO should examine long-term transportation needs to address a number of areas, including future growth in the GTA from Highway 400 westerly to the Guelph area. The GTA West Corridor, identified in the *Growth Plan* as a "Future Transportation Corridor", represents a strategic link between the "Urban Growth Centres" west of the GTA, including Downtown Milton, Downtown Brampton, Vaughan Corporate Centre and Downtown Guelph. The Urban Growth Centres identified in the *Growth Plan* are presented in **Exhibit 1-1.**

As economic activities in the GGH evolve from a Toronto-based platform to an economy of multiple centres, the Guelph - Kitchener/Waterloo - Cambridge triangle is becoming an important economic area, in addition to Toronto's downtown (and the several economic centres that surround the latter).

As discussed in detail within the TDS, the concentration of population and employment in the Guelph - Kitchener/Waterloo - Cambridge triangle introduces new transportation challenges in the western portion of the GGH because it is important that these economic centres be adequately linked. This is true not only for the continuing needs of commuter travel, which provide the economic workforces, but also for the increasing needs of goods movement between these centres.

It is important that MTO takes a comprehensive and long-term approach in planning for future transportation infrastructure. Stage 2 of the *GTA West Study* will, therefore continue to reflect the government policy objectives outlined in the *Growth Plan* to identify a transportation network that links Urban Growth Centres through an integrated system of transportation modes, including efficient public

Exhibit 1-1 Growth Plan

Source: Schedule 4 – Urban Growth Centres –Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006).

transit, a highway system for moving people and goods with improved access to inter-modal facilities, international gateways (e.g., border crossings), airports, and transit hubs.

1.3 Study Purpose

Stage 1 of the GTA West Transportation Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study considered all transportation modes and their ability to address the future transportation demands by 2031. The outcome of Stage 1 was a multi-modal Transportation Development Strategy (TDS) which was completed in November 2012, and is available on the study website, www.gta-west.com. This strategy made recommendations for optimizing the existing transportation network, improvements to non-roadway transportation modes, such as transit and rail, widening of existing highways, and a new transportation corridor.

Stage 2 was initiated in early 2014, and focusses on identifying the route and developing the preliminary design for the new transportation corridor. The new corridor will extend from Highway 400 (between Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road) in the east to the Highway 401/407 ETR interchange area in the west, and will feature a 400-series highway, a transitway, and potential goods movement priority elements. The Study Area for the new transportation corridor is shown on **Exhibit 1-2.**

This new transportation corridor is only one component of the full suite of multi-modal recommendations that are documented in the Transportation Development Strategy (TDS) that was completed in November 2012, as part of Stage 1. These recommendations included transit improvements, transportation demand management measures (e.g. expansion of MTO's overhead electronic message signs), opportunities to optimize the existing transportation system, as well as widening of several provincial facilities in the western GTA. All of these recommendations will be reviewed and pursued separately by MTO and other agencies, as appropriate.

In addition to examining alternative routes for the new transportation corridor, the Project Team will examine alternatives for interchanges, bridges, and other key elements of the corridor. A comprehensive analysis of technical and environmental factors will be undertaken in consultation with the public, stakeholders, municipalities, First Nation and Métis communities, and government agencies to identify the preferred alternative for the new transportation corridor.

An Individual Environmental Assessment Report (IEA Report) will be prepared and made available for public review at the completion of the study.

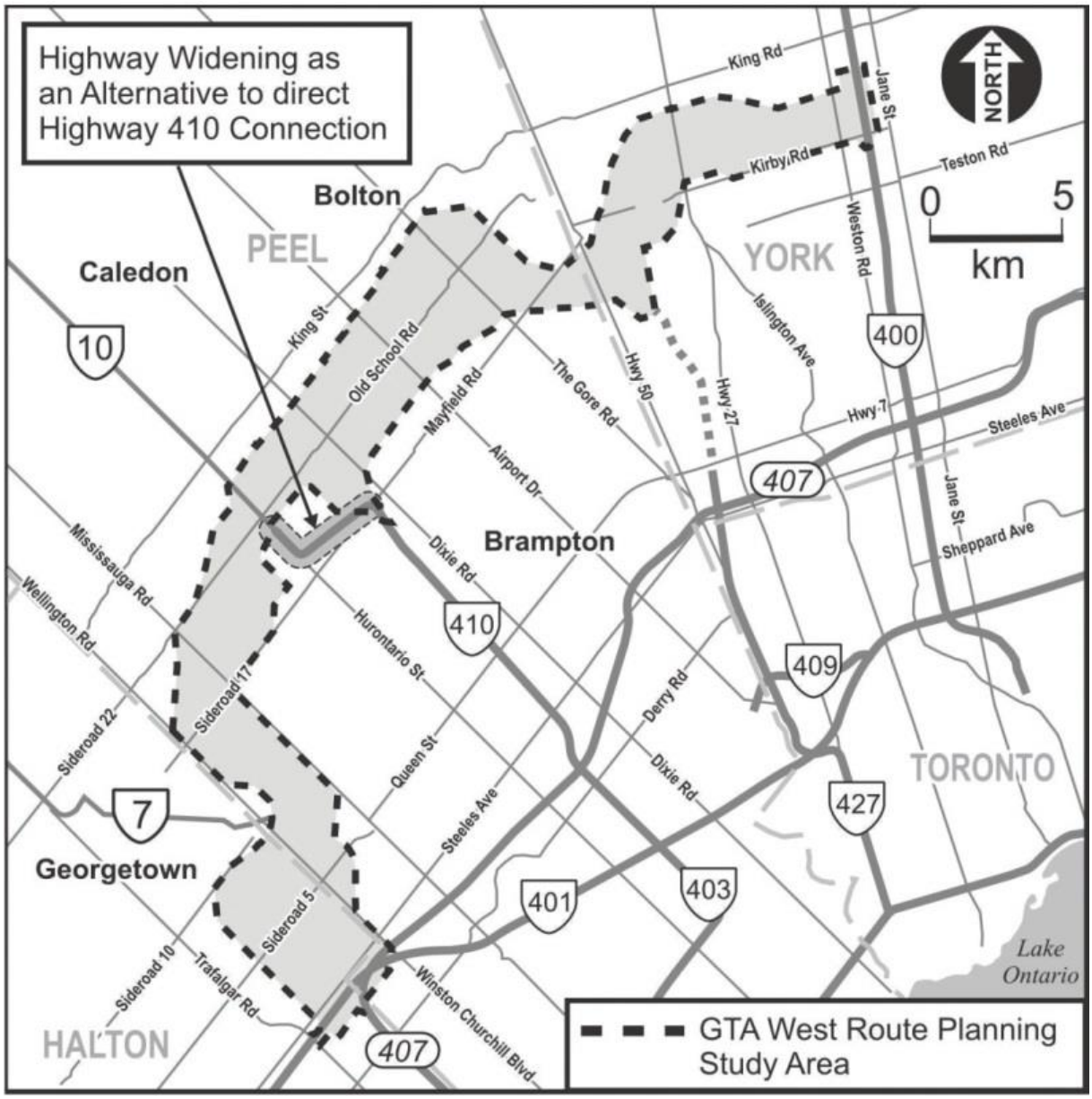
1.4 Stage 2 Study Area

The Stage 2 Study Area can be seen in **Exhibit 1-2.** This area includes the Regions of York, Peel and Halton. These municipalities are home to over 2.3 million people. The area is characterized by a mix of

urban and rural communities (as well as numerous rural residential clusters and settlements), and falls within the area designated under the *Greenbelt Act* and *Greenbelt Plan* (February 2005).

The Study Area was determined through Stage 1 of the GTA West Study and illustrates the initial area in which problems and opportunities were examined and alternative solutions were initially considered, as documented in the TDS. This Study Area will be refined as Stage 2 of the process evolves. As such, boundaries of the Study Area are approximate and subject to refinement as the EA study progresses.

Exhibit 1-2 GTA West Route Planning Study Area



1.5 Purpose of the Overview of Environmental Conditions and Constraints Report

The main purpose of this report is to document the existing environmental conditions and constraints. The environmental investigations that take place during the study will identify significant and sensitive features of the natural, socio-economic and cultural environments so they can be avoided, or so impacts can be minimized and/or mitigated to these areas during the generation and evaluation of route alternatives for the GTA West Corridor. This updated compilation of existing conditions information is intended to present a summary of the environmental data that has been collected to date.

The secondary source information summarized in this report has been used to generate and evaluate the long list of route alternatives, and identify a short list for further analysis. Public, agency, municipal, First Nation and Métis Community input was sought to assist in the identification of the short list of alternatives in late Fall 2014 / early 2015.

Data collection is being undertaken at an increasing level of detail as the study progresses. As such, the next phase of Stage 2 for the EA study includes conducting environmental field work in areas within and surrounding the short listed route alternatives to confirm at a greater level of detail, the location, extent and nature of the sensitive areas. Environmental field work began in 2015 on properties where permission to enter (PTE) has been granted by land owners. The findings will be documented in separate reports for specific environmental factors (i.e., fisheries, terrestrial, noise, air, land use, agriculture, Stage 2 archaeology and built heritage) in future phases of this study and will support the identification and assessment of short listed route alternatives in order to identify a preferred route.

1.6 Environmental Factors and Sub-Factors

The factors and sub-factors that were considered in the evaluation of the long list of alternatives are detailed below in **Table 1-1.** Most of these environmental factors and sub-factors are discussed in the following sections of this report. As the study proceeds from a broad overview of environmental conditions and constraints to higher levels of detail, new factors and sub-factors will be added to evaluate the short list of route alternatives and identify a “preferred plan”.

Table 1-1 Environmental Factors and Sub-Factors for Evaluating the Long-List of Route Alternatives

FACTORS	SUB-FACTORS
1. Natural Environmental Factors	
1.1 Fish and Aquatic Ecosystems	1.1.1 Fish Habitat
1.2 Terrestrial Ecosystems	1.2.1 Wetlands
	1.2.2 Woodlands and other Vegetation
	1.2.3 Designated/Special/Natural Areas
2. Land Use/Socio-Economic Factors	
2.1 Land Use Planning Policies, Goals, Objectives	2.1.1 Municipal (regional and local) land use planning policies/goals/objectives (Official Plans)
2.2 Land Use/Community	2.2.1 Urban and Rural Residential Uses
	2.2.2 Commercial/Industrial Uses
	2.2.3 Tourist Areas and Attractions
	2.2.4 Community Facilities/Institutions
	2.2.5 Municipal Infrastructure and Public Service Facilities
2.3 Noise	2.3.1 Transportation Noise
2.4 Land Use / Resources	2.4.1 Agriculture
	2.4.2 Aggregates and Mineral-Resources
2.5 Major Utility Transmission Corridors	
3. Cultural Environmental Factors	
3.1 Cultural Heritage – Built Heritage and Cultural Heritage Landscapes	3.1.1 Built Heritage and Cultural Heritage Landscapes
	3.1.2 Cemeteries
	3.1.3 First Nation Burials
3.2 Archaeology	3.2.1 Known Archaeological Sites

1.6.1 Environmental Work Plan

The Environmental Work Plan is being carried out in accordance with the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act* and the approved EA ToR for this project.

Field work will be carried out on the short list of route alternatives in 2015.

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