

Ministry of Transportation
Asset Management Branch

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Ministère des Transports
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March 12th, 2021

Mr Wayne Emmerson
Chief Executive Officer and Head of Regional Council
The Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street Newmarket,
Ontario, L3Y 6Z1

Dear Mr. Emmerson:

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) would like to provide information that supports the need for the proposed new highway, GTA West, for consideration by Regional Council in advance of the York Region Council meeting, scheduled for March 18th, 2021.

As the preliminary design and Environmental Assessment (EA) study proceeds, the Province would like to reiterate its commitment to an open and transparent process that provides opportunities for stakeholders to help shape the project outcome and arrive at a solution that best balances benefits and impacts for the local communities and the users of the transportation system. To accomplish this and as part of the EA process, the Province will continue engaging our municipal and agency partners in open two-way communication that leads to meaningful discussions, proactive information exchange and a constructive working relationship.

The Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) is an economic driver for the province and addressing transportation needs in the region is essential to the competitiveness of our economy. If built, this multimodal transportation corridor will deliver greater connectivity between urban growth centres, enhance people and goods movement, and create greater economic vitality. The Province remains committed to completing the Route Planning and GTA West EA for the corridor which will ultimately determine if this is a viable project.

Transportation-related construction is vital to Ontario's economic recovery as a major driver of economic activity and a significant source of employment. The GTA West highway will support, on average, up to 3,500 jobs each year during construction of the highway. The GTA West highway is expected to generate, on average, between approximately \$235 and \$350 million in real GDP (in 2020 constant dollars) per year, during construction of the highway.

Reducing Traffic Congestion

Without the necessary transportation infrastructure, greater gridlock is anticipated, especially in York and Peel Regions where the major highways are all forecasted by the Province to be operating over capacity by 2031, even with significant investments in transit. MTO's traffic modelling data shows that by the year 2041, the level of congestion in the GGH during the a.m. peak hours would more than double what it is today. Additionally, updated population and employment growth forecasts indicate that the GGH's population is projected to grow to 14.87 million by 2051. This includes significant growth within Peel Region, from an estimated 1.57 million in 2021 to a forecasted 2.27 million in 2051. We need our roads infrastructure to keep up with that kind of growth.

The EA Study Analysis completed to-date indicates that motorists and trucks that travel the entire GTA West highway, a distance of approximately 56 km, in rush hours are expected to save approximately 30 minutes (60 minutes via GTA West, compared to 90 minutes via Highway 401 and Highway 400). This will provide a significant, tangible benefit to commuters and goods movement in Peel and the entire GTA.

It should be noted that, the statistic from the Independent Panel Report commonly reported in the media, which indicated 30 seconds of travel time savings, is misleading for a number of reasons.

The 30 second figure relies on a number of assumptions that reduce the benefits of the corridor. It does not count benefits of improvements to the highway system connecting to the GTA West corridor that were rigorously evaluated and consulted on as part of the environmental assessment. It also relies on modelling that did not capture the benefits of the corridor for truck trips. Because of these factors the 30-second benefit figure quoted in the panel report is nearly 70% lower than the full travel-time benefit of the corridor, as shown by the panel in some of their truck-focused analysis.

Finally the 30-second figure is misleading since it averages travel times across the entire GGH Region and includes many unrelated trips in other parts of the GGH region not affected by the GTA West Corridor (i.e. Region of Niagara). This deflates the very real benefits of the corridor to relieve congestion in the Western Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Environmental Assessment

The GTA West EA study is being undertaken in two stages. Completed in November 2012, Stage 1 of the EA focused on taking a broader look at the transportation needs in the western GTA. The findings of this work indicated that while there were opportunities to optimize the existing transportation network, a new highway corridor extension was still required to address future transportation demands.

The GTA West EA is currently in Stage 2, which focuses on further refining the route and developing the preliminary design for a new multimodal transportation corridor within the study area. The GTA West corridor will include a 400-series highway, transitway, goods movement priority features, and associated infrastructure such as transitway stations and truck parking. The importance of transit is recognized as part of the transportation corridor, as the GTA West EA also includes an adjacent transitway that will run parallel to the highway and allow buses to operate on express schedules with linkages to Municipal Transit systems in the future. The GTA West Project Team publicly announced the Preferred Route and 2020 Focused Analysis Area (FAA) on August 7, 2020.

Consultation

As the project proceeds with preliminary design, the Project Team will continue to consult with stakeholders at key stages of the study. The Project Team has developed a comprehensive consultation program that provides stakeholders with access to study information in a timely manner and enables them to provide input and participate in a meaningful way. This will promote a cooperative and productive consultation environment utilizing innovative strategies and methods to maximize the outreach and engagement of study stakeholders. It includes Public Information Centres, Community Workshops, as well as meetings with municipal and agency staff, members of the public and Indigenous communities which have been taking place to date.

A key element of the consultation program involves the development of Community Value Plans (CVP) in consultation with members of the local communities. The CVPs are being developed during the preliminary design phase and will feature context sensitive design that will transform community goals and expectations into concrete design proposals. Members of our CVP Team will recommend design elements that reflect the social, cultural, historical and environmental interests of their communities (covering such things as heritage commemoration, aesthetics, landscaping, trails, connectivity, wildlife crossings, artistic elements at the gateways, etc.). The CVP is focused on how best to implement the proposed new highway and transitway in the most context sensitive manner, given the identified Preferred Route.

Impacts to the Greenbelt

The Province recognizes the importance of the Greenbelt to Ontarians. The route selected for the GTA West highway was chosen, in part, to mitigate impacts to the Greenbelt. As the project study moves ahead, the project team will carefully consider all impacts and will continue to work with environmental agencies and other concerned stakeholders to identify principles and recommendations for mitigating the impacts of placing new or expanded provincial highways and transitways within areas of the Greenbelt.

Please note the Greenbelt Plan does permit existing, expanded or new infrastructure in the Greenbelt provided that the infrastructure serves the significant growth and economic development expected in southern Ontario beyond the Greenbelt by providing for the appropriate infrastructure connections among urban centres and between these centres and Ontario's borders.

Impacts to Agriculture

A new GTA West highway cannot completely avoid impacting agricultural land in some parts of the study area since this land use is predominant in some sections. To arrive at a Preferred Route, several route alternatives were considered in each section to allow the consideration of impacts and benefits to a variety of factors. As we go through the preliminary design phase, the project team will be consulting with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and undertaking an Agricultural Impact Assessment in accordance with OMAFRA requirements. Further mitigation, compensation and/or enhancement measures related to agriculture are being considered during the preliminary design phase of the study in consultation with stakeholders.

As the preliminary design and EA process moves forward, the Project Team will continue to consult with municipalities and stakeholders with respect to accommodating local needs and keeping a dialogue open regarding the goals and objectives of the study. Should you have any additional concerns or questions please feel free to contact the Project Team directly at project_team@qta-west.com.

Sincerely,



Martin Michalek
Head, Major Planning Projects
Transportation Infrastructure Management Division
Ministry of Transportation

Cc:

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