



**REPORT TO:** Chair and Members of the Public Works Committee

**SUBJECT:** **Niagara to GTA Planning and Environmental Assessment Study:  
Transportation Development Strategy Report**

---

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That this Committee recommends to Regional Council:

1. That Council support the route planning for a new multi-use transportation corridor connecting Highway 406 in the Welland area to the QEW in Fort Erie:
  - a) That this route planning study be advanced from the medium term (5-15 years) to proceed immediately;
  - b) That the Ministry of Transportation co-ordinate their environmental assessment for this corridor with the Region's ongoing Class EA for the South Niagara East/West Arterial; and
  - c) That the construction of this corridor be advanced from the long term (15-25 years) to the medium term (5-15 years).
  
2. That Council continue to support the need for a new multi-use transportation corridor between Welland and Hamilton:
  - a) That the MTO continue to study growth patterns and transportation system performance to determine when this new facility will be required; and
  - b) That this monitoring be tied to the results of the required five year review of Official Plans and the ten year review of the Provincial Places to Grow Plan.

3. That Council endorse the following elements from the Draft Transportation Development Strategy:
  - a) Continued expansion by Metrolinx of GO bus and train service for Niagara;
  - b) Support for marine goods movement initiatives;
  - c) Removal of constraints to allow for more efficient movement of people and good by rail;
  - d) Development of an Active Traffic Management Plan to optimize the use of existing road networks; and
  - e) Support for an inter-regional transit service which links urban areas.
4. That Council advise the MTO that they agree with the recommendation to revoke existing highway designations on Highway 3 and Highway 20 as identified in Section 5 (a) of the Study, provided there is agreement from the local municipalities where these are located.
5. That this report be circulated for information to all twelve Local Area Municipal Clerks, Planners and Public Works Officials.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report explores the NGTA Phase 1 Report and Draft Transportation Strategy released for comment in March, 2011, and summarizes responses from Niagara Region as a stakeholder. The report briefly explains the NGTA Environmental Assessment, and the building blocks upon which the Draft Transportation Study was built. The report then presents a number of recommendations based on support of the Group 1 and Group 2 options, support for the Gateway Economic Zone and Gateway Economic Centre, connection to mandatory Provincial review processes and proposed removal of provincial interest in various Highways throughout Niagara Region.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The provincial NGTA (Phase 1) report considers inter-regional transportation infrastructure planning. While the report does not address the financial aspects of the Draft Transportation Strategy, it is likely that the planned upgrades and new infrastructure will be financed by upper level(s) of government.

Niagara Region can still expect short-term and long-term financial implications. In the short term:

- There will be financial implications for the Region in the likely scenario of a partnership to expedite the Phase 2 EA, to connect the QEW and Highway 406 in the Welland area.
- There will be financial implications for the Region for infrastructure enhancements on Regionally-owned assets to support the Group 1 and Group 2 alternatives (discussed below), designed to make more efficient use of existing infrastructure.

Long-term financial implications will be determined through the final Phase 1 report and the upcoming Phase 2 work.

## **PURPOSE**

To receive endorsement from Regional Council of staff comments related to the Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study - Draft Transportation Development Strategy (NGTA Phase 1).

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2003, Regional Council passed a resolution expressing support for building a transportation corridor (mid-peninsula) extending through Niagara past the Hamilton International Airport, connecting a number of 400-series highways through the Environmental Assessment process. In 2005, the MTO initiated the NGTA study. The EA process started in 2007 and the Draft Transportation Strategy report was released at the end of February 2011. During the consultation phases, Regional Staff advised the NGTA study team that a South Niagara East-West Arterial Corridor EA had been initiated. Regional staff identified the joint interest and need for the corridor and also the willingness to partner to expedite the QEW to Highway 406 corridor.

This report provides an update on the Transportation Development Strategy for the NGTA study, with specific recommendations for Regional Council in light of Niagara's previous work and future planned growth.

## **REPORT**

The NGTA EA was approved to be undertaken in two phases. The NGTA Phase 1 report identified transportation problems and opportunities in the study area and evaluated proposed alternatives to determine a preferred solution. This process included extensive public and stakeholder consultations and culminated in the identification of a Draft Transportation Strategy.

Phase 2 will be focused on further developing the recommended alternatives of the Draft Transportation Strategy. This will include the location of actual infrastructure and further planning and monitoring in areas where no clear alternative could be recommended in Phase 1.

### **NGTA Phase 1**

In order to evaluate the alternatives generated in response to the transportation problems and opportunities, a triple bottom line approach was adopted. This meant that, in addition to traditional transportation and engineering considerations (cost, constructability, etc.), the evaluation considered criteria related to the environment, the economy, and the community.

The NGTA study, given the large geographical area and the uniqueness of transportation, economic, environmental, and community characteristics of each area, carried out the evaluation process in three distinct geographic areas:

- East - QEW to Highway 406,
- Central - Highway 406 to Highway 403/ Burlington Skyway, and
- West - Highway 403 in Hamilton to the Highway 401 and Highway 407 ETR.

The Draft Transportation Strategy has adopted a 'building block' approach for the development of planning alternatives. An outlined summary is provided in the section below with staff comments and proposed recommendations.

### **Building Block Approach**

NGTA Phase 1 demonstrates a commitment to the vision for planning in the Province. The report is consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, complies with Places to Grow, and reflects the Provincial interest in the promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, supportive of public transit and oriented towards active transportation.

The report recognizes that no single approach will be capable or appropriate to accommodate projected demand across the entire geographic extent of the EA. The report proposes to accommodate projected demand to 203, based on a number of building blocks:

- Manage demand on the existing network (Group 1)
- Add and expand non-road infrastructure (Group 2)
- Widen existing roads (Group 3) and,
- Plan for new corridors (Group 4).

Groups 1 and 2 represent the least cost options to address demand in the near term. These also include an important time element to allow for modal shift, supported by modifications to the existing transportation system that improve choice of travel for the individual at the local, regional and provincial level. Staff agree with the basic building block approach adopted in the report and recommends that the Regional Council with the approach.

Groups 3 and 4 were considered as part of the hybrid approach, which evaluated each of the geographic areas to determine whether the widening of existing corridors or the development of new corridors represented the preferred approach. This approach used transportation and economic modeling, using available data, and confirmed the need for new infrastructure in the East Area, as well as the need for continued monitoring and further study in the Central and the West Areas, respectively. For the Central area, the report prefers the widening of QEW to full capacity over a new southern corridor. However, the report recognizes the need to re-examine the future freight forecasts.

While agreeing with the modeling approach, which considered transportation and economic projections and their effect on future transportation needs, staff suggest that some of the assumptions used in the modeling could be subject to change in the short term with the ongoing efforts on the Niagara Gateway initiatives and Niagara 2031 Growth Management Strategy. These developments will trigger additional demand for transportation, especially in the southern tier of Niagara. Hence, the assumptions used in this modelling effort will need to be tested with the required five-year review of Official Plans, the ongoing work on Schedule 3 (population and employment forecasts) of Places to Grow, and the upcoming ten-year review of Places to Grow, as outlined in a later section.

The connection to the Planning Act and the mandatory review processes will provide an opportunity to review the assumptions of the Draft Transportation Strategy and to offer a means of responding to any changes. The changes could include any decision related to transportation systems, major developments, or any amendments to growth projections based on demonstrated growth or updates to Schedule 3 of Places to Grow. Of particular

Regional interest is the continuing review of the corridor to the west of Highway 406, presently placed under long-term monitoring in the Phase 1 report.

### **QEW to Highway 406 connection must be built in the short term**

The Draft Transportation Strategy recognizes the need to establish a new multi-use corridor connecting the QEW and Highway 406 in the Welland area. This connection will support the Gateway Economic Zone and Centre by building a more resilient provincial road network with built-in route redundancy to the existing International border crossings (bridges).

This new connection also has the potential to utilize existing Welland Canal crossings which could be a factor in the determination of alternatives and traffic contingencies, to support decision making as part of the ongoing Garden City Skyway Environmental Assessment. As identified in the report, the future corridor must consider rail or other higher-order transit connections to the Gateway Economic Zone, as well as consider the opportunities for a bi-national connection to the Empire High Speed Rail corridor.

This connection could also potentially improve the high speed and volume options for goods movement and provide for improved logistics to aid bi-national trade. Niagara crossings are one of the heaviest used crossings for goods movement. For that reason, Regional Council has identified the need for a high-quality transportation connection between Highway 406 and QEW. In support of that identified need, the Region is engaged in an Environmental Assessment for the South Niagara East-West Corridor. Now that the need has also been identified in the Phase 1 report, there are opportunities to collaborate with MTO.

Therefore, staff recommend, as a primary recommendation, that the new multi-use corridor, connecting the QEW and Highway 406 in the Welland area route planning EA (Phase 2), be moved from medium-term (5-15 years) to the short term (0-5 years); that the Ministry of Transportation co-ordinate their environmental assessment for this corridor with the Region's ongoing Class EA for the South Niagara East/West Arterial, and that the implementation of the new corridor be placed in the medium term (5-15 years) .

### **Support for Group 1 and Group 2**

Niagara Region recognizes the importance of modal shift. Shifting modes of transportation does, however, depend on individual choice. Supporting the individual to choose alternative modes of transportation requires coordinated action by multiple agencies and actors.

Metrolinx, an agency created by Provincial legislation (Metrolinx Act, 2006), has a mandate to develop and implement an integrated multi-modal transportation plan for the defined “regional transportation area” including the City of Toronto, the City of Hamilton and the four surrounding regional municipalities (Durham, Halton, Peel and York) and any additional prescribed areas. While Niagara Region is not included within the geographic area included in “The Big Move” Plan, Metrolinx has recognized the potential for the expansion of the GO Regional Rail system into Niagara and other regions beyond the current Metrolinx Plan boundaries.

Niagara Region and five of its local municipalities have taken the first step in the provision of inter-municipal transit in the form of a pilot program connecting St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls. This, and further funding decisions by Regional Council and local municipalities to support inter-municipal transit and connections with the inter-regional transit, will require coordination and planning with the City of Hamilton, Metrolinx, and the Province. Metrolinx has initiated the weekday GO Rail commuter service expansion to Niagara through the EA process and Niagara Region has seconded the preferred station locations and the layover sites within its jurisdiction (PWA 63-2010/ICP 42-2010).

As part of enhancing the inter-regional travel, Niagara Region has also made available lands for the park and ride facility in Niagara Falls. This type of coordination has to be taken to the next level to achieve a seamless transit system in the region.

Regional Council has adopted a Transportation Demand Management Framework, the development of which was supported by the MTO under the Municipal Grant Program. In support of the directions set in the Transportation Demand Management Framework Regional staff are currently in the process of developing Transportation Demand Management policies for the Regional Policy Plan.

The degree of coordinated action will determine the extent to which the first two building blocks of the strategy will enhance the overall performance of the existing transportation system and also the degree to which those building blocks will support both Niagara 2031 and Places to Grow. Enhancing support for alternative modes of transportation and for non-road infrastructure for the movement of people, as well as goods, will also be critical in supporting the Draft Transportation Strategy action calling for an inter-regional, Hamilton focused transit service.

The coordination will be strongly encouraged should the Province, MTO and Metrolinx include Niagara Region as an ‘additional prescribed area’ to deliver programs and services to build support for alternatives to the single occupant vehicle for the individual and enhance non-road infrastructure, both of which are identified as the fundamental components of the Draft Transportation Strategy. Staff recommends that Regional Council endorse the continued expansion of GO bus and train service for Niagara by Metrolinx, the development of an Active Traffic Management Plan to optimize the use of

existing road networks, and support for an inter-regional transit service which links urban areas as outlined in the report.

### **Support for the Gateway Economic Zone and Gateway Economic Centre**

Niagara Region has been identified as having a unique economic importance to the region, Ontario and Canada due to its proximity to major international border crossings. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe defined and identified the Gateway Economic Centre, the Gateway Economic Zone, as well as a conceptual future transportation corridor connecting Niagara with the GTA in recognition of these location advantages and opportunities.

Niagara's singular status as an Economic Gateway in the Growth Plan was the impetus for the development of the Niagara Gateway Economic Zone and Centre report (2008). The report defined the Economic Gateway Zone and Centre concept and developed an economic and planning strategy, which capitalizes on the Region's location along the Canada/US border. The strategy aims to enhance Niagara's existing role as a conduit for bi-national trade and to encourage further economic development.

The Gateway Economic Zone and Centre Implementation Committee established at the Region has been actively leading efforts to bring the strategy to action. Current work has included three related initiatives, including an incentives review, an assessment of employment lands, and work related to the development of a Gateway Community Improvement Plan.

Preliminary findings associated with this work have identified that there are significant opportunities for the successful development of employment lands within the Gateway Economic Zone and Centre. The need for transportation and infrastructure planning has been identified as one of the key elements of a successful gateway.

Manufacturing sector jobs, once the backbone of the region's economy, have declined sharply due to structural changes in the sector. The new emerging manufacturing sectors are looking to locate their facilities in areas that are well served by physical infrastructure, with a particular interest in high quality transportation corridors with identified opportunities to develop the integration of multiple modes of transportation.

### **Rail and Marine modes**

The Draft Transportation Strategy considered all modes of transportation. For supporting the Rail initiatives, the report recommends that MTO will work with CN, CP, and Metrolinx to identify and study potential solutions to resolve freight and passenger rail conflicts and



to provide grade separations at strategic locations. For the marine goods movement, the report, recommends that the MTO will work with Port of Hamilton, Seaway Authority to identify potential access improvements and changes to the current marine transport legislation that affect the competitiveness of short sea shipping.

Staff agree with the basic recommendations but feel that further discussions are warranted to identify opportunities to create a fully integrated multi-modal transportation system. The ports and rail networks both represent key opportunities to act in a coordinated manner with infrastructure planning and investment within Niagara Region , in coordination with the United States. Including Port Colborne as one of the ports for the marine transport planning and creation of a multi-modal hub at the Gateway Economic Centre will have to be followed on at staff level, at the time of further analysis of freight forecasts.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Regional Council endorse the support for marine goods movement initiatives and for removal of constraints for more efficient movement of people and goods by rail.

### **Connection to mandatory reviews required by the Planning Act, Places to Grow Act**

The Draft Transportation Strategy identifies Short, Medium and Long-term periods within which various actions have been placed. The staging of the building blocks is critical, as it is recognized that time is needed to encourage individuals to change transportation behaviours, as well as to test growth projections against actual growth.

The NGTA Phase 1 report recognizes that planning for the new multi-use corridor between Hamilton and Welland should be tied to the results of both growth and transportation system monitoring. The NGTA Phase 1 report also recognizes the broad area of influence that must be considered demonstrated by its close connection to the GTA West study.

Any decision related to the transportation system in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area will impact the entire system and may change the assumptions upon which the Draft Transportation Strategy was built. The monitoring of growth and transportation system performance should begin with the review of Schedule 3 (population and employment forecasts) of Places to Grow, as well as the first ten-year review of Places to Grow (2016), along with the five-year review period for both the PPS and Official Plans. Monitoring should continue with each subsequent review period to recognize the broad area of influence, which acts on the NTGA study area. Linking to these review processes will allow us to test the assumptions upon which the Draft Transportation Strategy was developed and to determine the need to begin planning a new multi-use corridor, independent of being prior to or after 2031.

Therefore, to support the economic development, Gateway Economic Zone and Centres efforts, and the tie in to the multi-modal transportation systems, staff recommends that Regional Council continue to support the need for a new multi-use transportation corridor between Welland and Hamilton; that the MTO continue to study growth patterns and transportation system performance to determine when this new facility will be required; and that this monitoring be tied to the results of the required five-year review of Official Plans and the ten-year review of the Provincial Places to Grow Plan.

### **Highway designations**

The study recommends that, within the study area, some of the designated highways may no longer be of provincial interest due to proposed new corridors and that the Province communicate its intention to the affected municipalities to revoke such designations. The three affected highways are:

- Highway 20 (from west of the 420 terminus to the existing Highway 20 in Pelham)
- Highway 3 crossing of the Welland Canal in Port Colborne
- Highway 20 Smithville Bypass

It is important to consider lifting these designations as these corridors have had an impact on land use and growth patterns in parts of Niagara Region. Niagara Region staff, in cooperation with the affected local municipalities, will be willing to negotiate with MTO on the future of affected highways in order to continue the efficient movement of people and goods throughout the Region.

Some of the jurisdictional issues were identified in the Niagara Region Transportation Sustainability Review Report (2009). Staff recommend that Regional Council communicate to MTO the Region's intent to review the designations, in consultation with the affected local municipalities.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

---

Kenneth J. Brothers, P.Eng.  
Commissioner of Public Works

---

Mike Trojan  
Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix I - Niagara to GTA Planning and Environmental Assessment Study: Transportation Development Strategy, Executive Summary. (Draft for Consultation dated February, 2011).

*This report was prepared by Kumar Ranjan, P. Eng, Associate Director Transportation Planning and Alison Enns, MCIP RPP, Planner, Integrated Community Planning with inputs from Integrated Community Planning, and Niagara Economic Development Corporation, and reviewed by Michael Roach, Public Works Manager of Financial Services and Joe Cousins, Director, Transportation Services.*



## TOWNSHIP OF WEST LINCOLN

318 Canborough Street, P.O. Box 400  
Smithville, Ontario L0R 2A0  
Phone: (905) 957-3346  
Fax: (905) 957-3219



July 13, 2011

Region of Niagara  
2201 St. David's Road, P.O. Box 1042  
Thorold, Ontario  
L2V 4T7

Attention: Mr. Ken Brothers  
Commissioner of Public Works

**Re: PWA 32-2011  
Removal of Designated Highway 20 Bypass at Smithville, Ontario**

Dear Mr. Brothers,

This letter is written in response to recommendation number 4 of the above noted report to the Regional Public Works Committee.

Staff and Senior Management of the Township of West Lincoln are not in favour of the removal of the bypass around Smithville from the Provincial records. Township Staff are concerned that ongoing traffic related issues must be addressed first, including many that are recognized in the Region Road 20 Safety Study. The implementation of the Regional 20 Safety Study and its recommendations is critical. Removal of the bypass from Provincial records prior to Township and Regional Staff addressing the recommendations of the Regional Road 20 Safety Study would be premature.

If the Province does choose to proceed with the removal of the bypass, then the designation should be transferred to the Region so that it is considered as part of any future modifications and upgrades of Regional Road 20.

I trust that this letter is clear. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

---

Brian Treble, MCIP, RPP  
Director of Planning and Building

Cc: Minister of Transportation  
Mayor and Members of the Township of West Lincoln Council  
Derrick Thomson, CAO