TO: Mayor and Members
   Committee of the Whole

WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE

COMMITTEE DATE: September 14, 2010

SUBJECT/REPORT NO:
Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and EA Study Update
(PW05054a/PED10113) - (City Wide)

SUBMITTED BY:
Geoff Rae, MBA, P.Eng.
Acting General Manager
Public Works Department

Tim McCabe
General Manager
Planning & Economic Development Department

PREPARED BY:
Alan Kirkpatrick
(905) 546-2424, Extension 4173

Neil Everson
(905) 546-2424, Extension 2359

SIGNATURE:

RECOMMENDATION

That the General Manager of Public Works be authorized to forward correspondence to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) with regard to the Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study, and indicate:

(a) That in principle, the City of Hamilton supports the Study’s “Group 1” concept of optimizing the existing transportation network prior to undertaking additional work;

(b) That in principle, the City of Hamilton supports the Study’s “Group 2” concept that New/Expanded Non-Road Infrastructure be implemented;

(c) That the City of Hamilton has significant concerns with the proposed widening of Highway 403 through Hamilton identified in “Group 3” with regard to

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potential impacts on the Niagara Escarpment and any improvements that would conflict with the City’s current plans to provide Light Rail Transit (LRT) infrastructure across this corridor in the King Street and Main Street areas;

(d) That the City of Hamilton has concerns with regard to the Study’s proposed “Group 4” concepts to consider the provision of a new Transportation Corridor through Flamborough to the Region of Halton;

(e) That the City of Hamilton has concerns that the Study has not proposed a direct transportation system connection to the Niagara area from the Airport Employment Growth District (AEGD) area;

(f) That the City of Hamilton has concerns that the Study is suggesting that Highway 6, adjacent to the AEGD, be protected for four-lanes, when a previous MTO pre-design report suggested that this highway section be six-lanes;

(g) That the City of Hamilton has concerns with transportation projections in the study that will result in the use of roadways under the jurisdiction of the City without consideration for operational and maintenance costs that would be borne solely by the City as a result of this additional traffic;

(h) That prior to the MTO finalizing their current NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Study, Ministry representatives provide a presentation to the Committee of the Whole.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is currently undertaking a detailed review of the transportation system needs in the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area (NGTA) corridor. The Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study is a comprehensive planning process to investigate, evaluate and present preferred options to address the forecasted transportation impacts as a result of continued growth in the area and to support the projected population and employment demands. This area is the central point and key link for one of the fastest growing areas in North America. In order to foster continued prosperity, a sustainable transportation system must include a wide-variety of features to support the economic growth but also be sensitive to environmental and social impacts that growth includes.

The NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study is presenting a range of suggested improvements, referred to as “Groups”, with the understanding that the process would undertake and implement a group and not move to the next group until a need has been demonstrated and further investigation is conducted. Overall, the study acknowledges that the transportation system will experience forms of congestion, but will not move into a new group until justified. However, some of the solutions require long-term planning that could involve widened corridors and/or new corridors. These improvements need to be identified now so that details can be worked out and land set aside for future uses. If appropriate actions are not taken early-on,
opportunities could be lost resulting in unnecessary processes required in the future for the corridors.

Staff supports the majority of the Group 1 and 2 solutions that the study has identified as being useful and meaningful. Issues of concern involve Groups 3 and 4 when dealing with the Niagara Escarpment crossings; potential widening of Highway 403; potential impacts to the City’s proposed Light Rail Transit system crossing Highway 403; that a corridor adjacent to Airport Employment Growth District (AEGD) has not been identified; that Highway 6, adjacent to the AEGD, is planned for four lanes instead of 6 lanes and that some of the future transportation forecasts in the study could result in the use of the City of Hamilton’s transportation infrastructure being utilized instead of new provincial infrastructure without any compensation identified for the City.

The City is aware that the NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study project is undertaking an extensive public consultation process and including key stakeholder groups. Both the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and the Southern Ontario Gateway Council have expressed concerns to the MTO and City with regard to the study’s purpose, timelines, options and preferred solutions.

This report is summarizing the current status of the NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study project and recommends that the City’s concerns be identified and documented for the province prior to the preparation of a final report on this phase and moving onto subsequent phases. Staff is recommending that a representative from the MTO be requested to make a presentation to the Committee to provide additional information and answer Committee’s questions.

Alternatives for Consideration - See Page 17

**FINANCIAL / STAFFING / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial:** Extent of City’s financial involvement has yet to be determined as this is an inter-regional transportation system planning exercise dealing mainly with the province’s inter-regional transportation system infrastructure. However, subject to final decisions on the transportation system corridor needs, there could be some impacts to the City of Hamilton’s transportation infrastructure as some additional traffic may utilize the City’s roadways.

**Staffing:** N/A

**Legal:** N/A

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Niagara to GTA (NGTA) Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study is a planning study that is considering a wide variety of options to expand the capacity of the inter-regional transportation system between the Niagara Gateway and the Greater Toronto Area by 2031. This study has been divided into three zones;

East - Fort Erie, Welland, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines
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Central - West Niagara to Stoney Creek/Hamilton
West - Hamilton, Burlington, Oakville

The transportation infrastructure of the NGTA is considered to be vitally important to the on-going economic success and prosperity of the area through the efficient movement of commuters and goods and services within the area and also to markets in the Niagara Gateway, Quebec and beyond. The City of Hamilton is in the centre of one of the fastest growing regions in North America and requires a dynamic transportation system. Therefore, in order to support continued economic growth and manage increased transportation demand, innovative improvements and major capital investments are required to the transportation network.

The following chart illustrates the projected growth in population, employment and traffic in the GTA for 2031:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2031</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,277,000</td>
<td>1,853,000</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>570,000</td>
<td>874,000</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total PM* Peak Person Trips</td>
<td>686,264</td>
<td>1,107,418</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM* Peak Period Auto Trips</td>
<td>536,489</td>
<td>814,590</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM* Peak Period Transit Trips</td>
<td>27,625</td>
<td>79,701</td>
<td>189%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM* Peak Period Transit Mode Share</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* refers to afternoon/evening

Source: GGH Model land use allocation and trip data, October 2008

Phase 1 of the NGTA study, initiated in December 2006, examined transportation problems and opportunities the area will be faced with to 2031. Phase 1 of the study examined all modal options to increase capacity to the transportation systems and explores the role of rail, road, transit, marine, and airports in the future transportation strategy. The transportation alternatives have been assessed based on the environment, community, economy and overall transportation benefits.

In June 2010, the MTO issued a draft Transportation Development Strategy (TDS) identifying the preferred future transportation alternative within the Study Area and hosted Public Information Centres (PIC) to explain their progress in the study and requested comments.

The NGTA Environmental Assessment Study has identified four groups of options to address the future traffic demands. In general terms, the groups include:

**Group 1 - Optimize the Existing Roadway Networks**

Develop an Active Traffic Management Strategy that improves performance of the existing transportation system by reducing demand and improving system efficiency, i.e.
Improving access to transit stations for pedestrians and motorists and advancing the concept of mobility hubs;
- Transit vehicles utilizing highway shoulders;
- Improving schedule and fare integration between transit providers;
- Providing real time information to transit riders in stations and vehicles along with remote access via telephone and the internet;
- Optimizing use of commuter rail system through the use of longer trains, (12 cars);
- Making active transportation a viable choice - secure bike storage at transit terminals, bicycles on transit vehicles;
- Providing drivers with real time trip planning information;
- Adjustable highway speed limits
- Highway Ramp metering
- Reversible lanes during peak hours
- High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) initiatives: use of technology, carpooling, policies, etc.

Group 2 - New/Expanded Non-Road Infrastructure

Focus on improving existing and/or providing new non-road infrastructure and transit, building on the recommendations of the Metrolinx - Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and GO 2020.

The transit recommendations embodied in the RTP as well as GO 2020 strategic plan illustrate the MTO plans to making transit a viable alternative to the automobile.

Group 2 includes significant transit, air and marine service expansion initiatives envisioned by the RTP and GO 2020, i.e. Hamilton International Airport (HIA) and Port of Hamilton that serve the study area. Group 2 initiatives include:

- Express rail service along GO Transit Lakeshore Corridor;
- GO Transit Lakeshore extension to downtown Hamilton;
- GO Transit expanded service to Niagara Falls;
- Improved connections between GO Transit services, other inter-city carriers, and supporting local transit services;
- Rapid transit in Hamilton area;
- Rapid transit along Highway 5, along Trafalgar Road, along Brant Street;
- Bus Rapid Transit and Transitway along Highway 407/403;
- Undertake a Hamilton Focused Inter-Regional Transit Service Study - transit service bringing commuters to Hamilton’s City-centre from outlying areas
- New Inter-Regional Transit Links between Western Urban Growth Centres such as Guelph and Waterloo;
- Expanded and improved parking facilities at some transit stations.
- Port of Hamilton Infrastructure Development Strategy;
- Sea3 - container feeder service between Hamilton and Montreal;
• Hamilton International Airport - expansion of existing taxiways and terminal;
• Improved access to Hamilton’s port and airport

**Group 3 - Widen/Improve Roads**

Widening roads and planning multi-use transportation corridors, which will provide opportunities for transit initiatives identified in the RTP and GO 2020 plan
• Highway realignment & upgrades
• Strategic Highway widening
• Enhanced public transit facilities
• New multi-lane corridors
• Monitor growth and system performance

The Group 3 alternative has been developed to address the future transportation problems that have been identified within the study area. As such, the additional roadway widening is based on providing adequate traffic capacity, operations and safety conditions on existing provincial facilities to the year 2031.

Group 3 includes all of the elements from Group 1 and Group 2 as well as the widening of the following existing provincial inter-regional transportation facilities:

• QEW and Highway’s: 6, 401, 403 and 407

The Study indicates that the Group 3 alternative would not fully address many of the transportation opportunities that have been identified. In contrast, the MTO identifies the provision of a new transportation corridor presents the opportunity to:

• Support Niagara’s “Grow South” plans and relieve development pressures on the tender fruit & grape lands.
• Support Hamilton’s plans to develop employment lands around Hamilton International Airport.

Staff do not support this last bullet-statement above as there is no indication of a direct corridor from the AEGD area to the Niagara gateway region and their markets.

The trade-offs between roadway widening and new corridors are challenging and complex. Widening the existing highways can have an impact on neighbouring communities; however, impacts are focused in existing corridors. New corridors will have a larger footprint impact on the undisturbed environment. Subsequent studies will consider how mitigation efforts can be investigated to provide new economic development opportunities while protecting the adjacent communities and the environment.

**Group 4 - New Transportation Corridors**

The study recommends that corridors for the new highways be studied further and protected for. Construction of proposed corridors only after Groups 1, 2 and 3 options are implemented and the transportation network is still at capacity. Considerations for new corridors include connecting Highway 406 to the QEW in the Niagara area and a new corridor connection from Highway 403 in Hamilton to Highway 407 in the Region of
Halton. Details on exactly where these highway connection points will be located would occur in subsequent phases.

Group 4 includes all of the elements from Group 1 and Group 2 and potentially some of the highway widening identified in Group 3, as well as the following new corridor alternatives:

- New corridor connecting either:
  - QEW in Fort Erie / Niagara Falls area to Highway 403;
  - QEW in Fort Erie / Niagara Falls area to Highway 401;
  - QEW in Fort Erie / Niagara Falls area to Highway 407; or,
  - QEW in Fort Erie / Niagara Falls area to Highway 6.
- Upgrade or widening of Regional Road 20 with potential bypasses of settlement areas such as Smithville, Fonthill, etc.
- Combination of new and existing corridors to provide bypass around urban core of the City of Hamilton.
- Upgrade or widening of Highway 406 connecting to a new corridor between Highway 406 and QEW south of Niagara Falls.

Notwithstanding these proposed improvements, by the year 2031, roadway congestion will still exist, particularly at the Burlington Skyway, St. Catharines Garden City Skyway and the Freeman Interchange.

To ensure a functional transportation system that provides user choice and balance, additional roadway capacity will be required: either by widening existing highways (Group 3) and/or protecting for new transportation corridors (Group 4).

The Transportation Development Strategy will include recommendations for Group 3 and/or Group 4 that will include the MTO’s “transit first” priority during implementation.

Group 3 and Group 4 generally address the future transportation deficiencies. Overall, Group 4 is slightly preferred to Group 3 from a transportation performance perspective. Group 4 is better than Group 3 at removing inter-regional trucks and autos from local roads. Group 4 provides additional network flexibility, and presents opportunities for longer-term network planning. Group 4 will better serve the transportation needs beyond the planning horizon.

A new corridor will divert a significant amount of inter-regional traffic from existing facilities, but future congestion issues will remain in some areas, necessitating some highway widening. The containment of future trips within municipalities and future transit ridership are not significantly affected by any of the alternatives.

**NGTA Corridor Study - Preferred Roadway Alternative**

The MTO’s study indicates that the proposed strategy represents a balanced approach and considers impacts on economics, social, natural environment and transportation systems.

- The main components of the strategy are optimizing existing networks, new/expanded non road infrastructure, widening existing highways (including
Highway 403 through Hamilton and the QEW from St. Catharines to Hamilton) and two new corridors.

- In terms of job creation, the new corridor and widening options created similar results with highway widening providing the most benefits.
- Economic growth adjacent to a southern connection would not be permitted due to the greenbelt.
- Much of the platform to widen the QEW is already there.
- Without the Highway 403/407 connection, the impacts to Hamilton would be much more significant (ten lane Highway 403 widening with a core - collector system).
- Highway 407 connection is best to alleviate congestion through Hamilton.
- The study would recommend the corridors for the new highways be protected. Construction only after Group 1 and 2 options were implemented and transportation still at capacity.
- The MTO has also been reviewing a hybrid alternative to Group 3 and 4 to include some strategic widening of provincial highways as well as development of new transportation corridors in the east and west ends of the study area. These alternatives include:

  **East Area** - a new corridor from the QEW (Fort Erie) to Highway 406 in Welland

  **Central Area** - widening of the existing QEW from Highway 406 to Highway 403. This would include an ultimate QEW width of:
  - eight lanes (two additional lanes) to Highway 20
  - eight lanes (two additional lanes) to the Red Hill Valley Parkway
  - ten lanes (two additional lanes) across the Burlington Skyway Bridge to Highway 403

  **West Area** - a new corridor connecting Highway 403 in Ancaster to the Highway 407 ETR at Walkers Line (exact locations to be determined)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highway 6 south of Highway 401</th>
<th>Highway realignments and upgrades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highway 6 south of Highway 403 (Hamilton)</td>
<td>Upgrade to four lane freeway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highways 403 and 401</td>
<td>Widening for HOV lanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway 407</td>
<td>Widening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues for consideration**

The City recognizes the importance of conducting study’s of this nature to be in a position to examine and identify the problems and opportunities and to initiate steps to implement the long-term transportation strategy. This draft study has raised a number of issues that staff believes requires additional consideration in order to minimize the problems and provide satisfactory solutions.

**Widening of Highway 403**

The study states, “Operational improvements on Highway 403 in the short term, and a new corridor study to connect Highway 403 to Highway 407 is preferred.”

The staff has the following concerns related to this proposal:
• Expansion into Niagara Escarpment:
  o Bridge replacements (thirteen)
  o Extensive rock cuts and cantilevered road widening in the Escarpment Section
  o Significant property impacts including Combined Storm Overflow tanks
  o Maintaining traffic during construction

Significant issues with the proposed City's B-Line Light Rapid Transit (LRT) project. The current focus of our review is how the MTO roadway deficiency/improvements will impact the proposed BLAST Transit network. The current planning, design and engineering (PDE) and the Feasibility Study of the A-Line, note:

1. There are basically three (3) roadway crossings of Highway 403 in Lower Hamilton over the Chedoke Valley and they are: Longwood, Main Street and King Street. These roadways connect the "west section of Hamilton" to the central and east sections. The Main and King Street structures also include on/off ramps to Highway 403. The initial design of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) has included alternatives of crossing the Chedoke Valley on both the current Main and King Street Bridge structures. If the City constructs the LRT on the current Main/King Street Bridge structures, there will be significant impacts to the LRT line and service interruption throughout the construction phase should the bridges be replaced. Secondly, if the LRT is constructed on the existing bridge structures, the ramp configurations on/off the Highway 403 may require significant alterations/redesign/reconstruction. All this work will be at significant cost and mostly non-recoverable should the MTO replace the bridge structures at a later time.

2. The study suggests that the MTO complete an operational improvement study on Highway 403 to determine what operational improvements can be constructed within the short to medium term. Subject to approval and funding, the City intends to commence construction of the B-Line LRT in 2016. Prior to that, all the planning, design and engineering (PDE) must be completed. It is likely that utility and construction work for the LRT may begin prior to 2016. The City and Metrolinx are working together to complete the preliminary planning, design and engineering (PDE) for the B-Line LRT Corridor for June 2011. It is anticipated that the Transit Environmental Assessment process will begin late January or early February 2011. This timeframe is well in advance of any detailed design or programming for Highway 403 that the MTO will likely complete prior to this time.

In view of the fact that the MTO has identified corridor capacity deficiencies on Highway 403 in the City and the fact that plans have not been prepared to address these deficiencies, it is imperative that the engineering study to complete the preliminary design of the B-Line LRT Corridor proceed and that the MTO work cooperatively with the City/Metrolinx to accommodate this planning, design and engineering process through the Chedoke Valley. One of the NGTA study options is to expand Highway 403 to a ten lane cross-section and replace all bridge structures.
This option has significant impacts as noted above. The option of constructing a separate LRT structure over Highway 403 and the Chedoke Valley would avoid any future disruptions compared to a LRT transitway constructed on the current structures. This separate structure option would require a one-time construction investment of LRT track and substructure instead of future costs associated with the relocation/reconstruction on the current/proposed bridge structures. Further, maintaining a LRT transit service over the Corridor during future Highway 403 construction will be important in mitigating future construction traffic congestion and will be key in maintaining the travel connection between West Hamilton and the downtown area during this period as well.

The NGTA study also points out the following issues related to the widening of Highway 403:

**Community:**
Widening of Highway 403 through Hamilton will result in major impacts to residences, businesses and community features.

**Economy:**
Group 3 provides capacity to key employment growth areas through widening of Highway 407, QEW, and Highway 403 to the Hamilton Airport area. Group 4 provides new access to south Niagara and redundancy to the border, but does not provide economic corridor benefits or local economic development benefits.

**Environment:**
A new corridor will result in impacts on the Niagara Escarpment and to the Greenbelt but there are more options for mitigation of impacts. Widening of Highway 403 will impact an existing crossing of the Niagara Escarpment, as well as important natural areas such as Cootes Paradise and the Royal Botanical Gardens. While localized, these impacts are likely to be severe.

**Transportation:**
A new corridor will divert a significant amount of traffic from Highway 403, by providing an alternative route. Without a new corridor, widening of Highway 403 through Hamilton to ten lanes will be required within the planning horizon. Beyond 2031 the ability to provide additional capacity in the Highway 403 corridor would be severely limited.

**Flamborough**

The NGTA study indicates: “A new corridor connecting Highway 403 to Highway 407 is preferred.”

The MTO study also points out the following issues related to the widening of Highway 403:

**Community:**
The Highway 407 connection results in greater community impacts based on its location within Waterdown and Burlington.
Economy:
The Highway 407 connection better serves the population growth areas of Hamilton and Halton and provides a more direct connection to the employment areas in the western part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Environment:
There is a higher density of significant and core features along the Highway 401 connection which will make avoidance of major impacts much more difficult than for the Highway 407 connection. The environmental features through the Highway 401 connection are in a more un-disturbed state with limited impact from existing infrastructure and development. The Highway 407 connection results in a new crossing of the Niagara Escarpment, whereas the Highway 401 connection will require a widening of Highway 401 through the Niagara Escarpment. Overall, the corridor connecting to Highway 407 is preferred from a natural environmental perspective.

Transportation:
The Highway 407 connection better alleviates future congestion issues on Highway 403 and generally performs better than a connection to Highway 401.

**Airport Employment Growth District**
The NGTA study indicates: “Widening of existing QEW is preferred. Continue to monitor growth needs for the long-term.”
The 2007 Hamilton Transportation Master Plan (HTMP) states:

“Appropriate goods movement access to the Hamilton International Airport from the north and east has been identified as a significant issue. The 2005 Hamilton Goods Movement Study identifies the need to provide a connection between the Red Hill Valley Parkway and the Airport as a designated truck route. This is due to the current lack of truck access opportunities from the northeast to the Airport, south of the Lincoln Alexander Parkway. Following this TMP, a Schedule C EA should be initiated to identify specific routing alternatives as well as a phasing strategy. It is possible that existing roads could serve to provide this link in the short-medium term. The specific routing also depends to some extent on the location of the proposed Niagara to GTA Corridor”.

The need for this link should be considered in the context of the proposed strategy which does not include a new roadway corridor.

The solutions identified within the NGTA study are proposed to be “incremental”. The first group of priorities optimizes existing networks and the second group of priorities expands or builds new non-road infrastructure (e.g. transit, rail, HOV).

The study proposes a combination of widening existing highways (including Highway 403 through Hamilton, the QEW from St. Catharines to Hamilton, and Highway 6) and constructing new corridors (i.e. connecting Highway 403 to Highway 407 in the west and connecting Highway 406 to the QEW in the Niagara region). Should congestion reach unacceptable levels on the QEW in the Niagara area, a new multi-modal corridor

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between Welland and Hamilton would then be explored. None of these potential projects are proposed to create a direct link with the Hamilton AEGD. The result is that once the Red Hill Business Park is fully developed there will be inadequate transportation infrastructure necessary to realize the economic benefits from Hamilton's last remaining “Greenfield” business park.

The draft AEGD Transportation Master Plan - June 2010, (Dillon Consulting) considered a Trinity Church Connection; Upper James Street and the Red Hill Valley / Lincoln Alexander Exchange, to more accurately reflect the City’s infrastructure proposed to be in place by 2031. Exact alignments for this roadway link have yet to be determined, but a link was included for modeling purposes with the following assumptions:

- This corridor has been identified in the Rymal Road Planning Area Study (ROPA 9) and the Trinity Church Arterial Corridor Class EA (however alignment yet to be determined).
- The connection to the AEGD study area was approximated at Upper James Street between Airport Road and White Church Road.
- The location of this roadway connection to the AEGD would not significantly affect model results.

In the draft AEGD Transportation Master Plan - June 2010 (Dillon Consulting), it is indicated that only a “modest number of vehicles would use a Trinity Church Road connection to access the Red Hill Valley Parkway (RHVP). Upper James Street is the most direct route to RHVP for most road users”. It was further assumed that this connection will be in place in 2031, but if it is not, there will not be a major impact to AEGD traffic”.

**AEGD Highway 6 improvements**

The AEGD TMP modelling undertaken examined travel demand needs and phasing between 2009 and 2031. Results of this modelling indicated that Highway 6 may need six lanes of capacity by the 2031 horizon year. This is consistent with the MTO Highway 6 Pre-Design Report which recommends providing a six lane divided facility for Highway 6 beyond the year 2021.

The NGTA study listed a potential need to widen Highway 6 to four lanes as part of the Draft Transportation Development Strategy as noted above. That may well signal that a more detailed study of phasing for Highway 6 should be undertaken once the NGTA Study is completed.

The need for six lanes on Highway 6 is not explicitly written into the AEGD TMP report. It can be said that the expansion of Highway 6 is likely necessary and that it *may* need to be expanded to six lanes as per the MTO Pre-design report. Staff is recommending that this option be included in the NGTA report and protected for.

The MTO study also points out the following issues related to an additional corridor easterly from Hamilton:
Community:
Adding HOV lanes to QEW can generally be accommodated within the existing right-of-way. A new corridor has the potential to fragment agricultural land and separate small communities.

Economy:
Widening would not provide a redundant route to the border and does not directly serve the Hamilton Airport. A new corridor does not serve some existing and future growth areas in Hamilton and Niagara.

Environment:
Minimal additional footprint impacts as the addition of HOV lanes on QEW can generally be accommodated within the existing right-of-way. A new corridor is anticipated to impact numerous watercourses, provincially significant wetlands, significant woodlands, and the Greenbelt.

Transportation:
A new corridor will not divert enough traffic from QEW to avoid the need to widen QEW. Widening of QEW to eight lanes will incorporate HOV lanes, which support TDM and transit. Further widening of QEW to ten lanes will not be required until beyond 2031. In the long term, a new corridor will help to alleviate future congestion on QEW and provide network flexibility.

Business concerns
Staff are aware that the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and the Southern Ontario Gateway Council has reviewed the Ministry’s draft report and have a number of concerns that the vision of the study is too short and that the proposed transportation network improvements does not satisfactorily address businesses that will rely on the efficient movement of goods and services to remain competitive. In general, the comments include:

- Not sure that the economic development objectives of the province are being considered.
- The widening of the QEW through Niagara will put pressure for development of lands in the tender fruit belt.
- Proposed strategy would provide good access from the AEGD to the GTA, but access to the US market is just as critical.
- The planning horizon (2031) is too short, should be thirty or fifty years.
- The strategy should have more emphasis on economic development rather than moving people and goods.

Summary of NGTA Corridor Planning and EA Study
The MTO's “The Niagara to GTA (NGTA) Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study” has identified the process the Ministry has undertaken and the options the Ministry has been considering to address the future transportation system in this area, i.e. Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the three geographic areas.
It is quite evident that additional roadway capacity is required to realize the vision and transportation needs of the Niagara to GTA Corridor. The study faces the challenging task of deciding whether to widen the existing highways and / or protect for new transportation corridors. Each option presents challenging and complex trade-offs:

- Alternatives for widening existing highways:
  - Make good use of existing transportation infrastructure and maintain origin and destination patterns.
  - Provide the capacity to accommodate long-term inter-regional transportation needs to 2031.
  - Provide limited flexibility to accommodate growth beyond the planned and projected future.
  - Limited system redundancy in the highway network.
  - Require significant expansion to the Burlington Skyway, Garden City Skyway and Freeman interchange.
  - Would result in unavoidable impacts to adjacent natural and community features, including significant displacements along the QEW through St. Catharines and along Highway 403 through Hamilton.
  - Result in widening of existing corridors through the Niagara Escarpment.

- Alternatives for new transportation corridors may still require widening of some provincial facilities and would therefore result in some of the impacts associated with Group 3. In addition, new transportation corridors:
  - Provide the capacity and flexibility to accommodate the long-term inter-regional transportation needs to 2031 and beyond.
  - Provide enhanced system redundancy and choice in the transportation network.
  - Provide superior economic growth and development opportunities through an enhanced trade corridor connecting the GTA to the Niagara Frontier and markets in the United States.
  - Result in potentially extensive impacts to greenfield areas, including significant changes to the character and use of undisturbed rural areas, as well as displacement and severance of agricultural lands.
  - Potentially impact undisturbed natural habitats, but also provides the opportunity to minimize and avoid important natural and built features through route planning.
  - Would potentially require a new crossing of the Niagara Escarpment.
  - Are generally more costly alternatives to construct.

Staff is recommending that the issues discussed in this report be forwarded to the Ministry for them to address on behalf of the City of Hamilton and Ministry representatives make a presentation to the Committee of the Whole prior to the final version of the study being completed.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As a result of the current stage of the NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study, there are no policy changes identified at this time. However, as the MTO continues to develop future inter-regional transportation system plans that influence and impact the City of Hamilton, transportation, traffic, economic development and land use planning policies will be affected.

The City’s involvement in the NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study supports the Public Works Business Plan, Innovate Now, through sustainable Infrastructure planning to enhance business and employment opportunities, to be a leader in the greening and stewardship of the City with the protection of the Niagara Escarpment, improved air quality, protection of other natural resources and to engage the community in the awareness of future services and programs that could affect their quality of life.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The NGTA Study has been underway since 2005, at which time a NGTA Staff Advisory Committee was organized. This Committee is comprised of representatives from the Planning Department (Economic Development and Real Estate; Strategic Services - Special Projects; Development Engineering), Public Health Department (Chronic Disease Prevention - Child and Youth), and Public Works Department (Traffic, Transportation and Environmental Planning). This group met on an as-needed-basis and also met with representatives from the Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study project team on occasion to provide comments and feedback as the project proceeded.

ANALYSIS / RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Staff supports the majority of the Group 1 and 2 solutions that the study has identified to; develop an active traffic management strategy that improves performance of the existing transportation system by reducing demand and improving system efficiency and Improving existing and/or providing new non-road infrastructure and transit, building on the recommendations of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and GO 2020.

Issues of concern involve Groups 3; widening highways, and Group 4; new transportation corridors, including potential escarpment crossings; widening of Highway 403 and potential impacts to the City’s proposed Light Rail Transit system crossing Highway 403, no corridor identified adjacent to Airport Employment Growth District (AEGD), that Highway 6, adjacent to the AEGD, is planned for four lanes instead of 6 lanes and that some of the future transportation forecasts in the study could result in the use of the City of Hamilton’s transportation infrastructure being utilized instead of new provincial infrastructure without any compensation identified for the City.

The Group 3 and 4 issues require additional information on the impacts to the City of Hamilton prior to the MTO producing their final report.
ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

The MTO is undertaking an extensive public consultation and stakeholder process to explain the Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study and are requesting feedback and comments. Staff is recommending that the General Manager of Public Works be authorized to forward comments contained in Report PW05054a/PED10113 to the province to be considered and included in the process and final decisions.

If Committee and Council decides not to forward comments to the province on this study, the province will continue with their planning process on the NGTA and not incorporate the City of Hamilton’s concerns in their work plans.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN


Financial Sustainability
• Effective and sustainable Growth Management
• Full life-cycle costing for capital
• Address infrastructure deficiencies and unfunded liabilities
• Generate assessment growth/non-tax revenues
• Sustainable Tri-parti Government Agreement

Intergovernmental Relationships
• Influence federal and provincial policy development to benefit Hamilton
• Acquire greater share of Provincial and Federal grants (including those that meet specific needs)
• Maintain effective relationships with other public agencies

Growing Our Economy
• Newly created or revitalized employment sites
• Competitive business environment
• A skilled and creative labour pool that supports new employers

Social Development
• Hamilton residents are optimally employed earning a living wage
• Residents in need have access to adequate support services

Environmental Stewardship
• Natural resources are protected and enhanced
Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

Values: Honesty, Accountability, Innovation, Leadership, Respect, Excellence, Teamwork

- Reduced impact of City activities on the environment
- Reduce the impact of Hamilton's industrial, commercial Private and Public operations on the environment
- Aspiring to the highest environmental standards

**Healthy Community**
- Plan and manage the built environment
- An engaged Citizenry

**APPENDICES / SCHEDULES**

Appendix ‘A’ - NGTA Brochure
Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

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NEW / EXPANDED NON-ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

**PRIORITY:** Focus on improving existing and/or providing new non-road infrastructure and transit, building on the recommendations of the "RTP" and GO 2020.

- Hamilton Focused Inter-Regional Transit - radial transit services bring commuters to Hamilton city centre from outlying areas
- New inter-regional transit links between western urban areas - potential exists for a "Western Web" transit system
- Explore policy areas to provide additional support for local transit initiatives
- Support freight rail and marine goods movement initiatives

WIDENED HIGHWAYS / NEW TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

**LONG-TERM STRATEGY:** Widening roads and planning multi-use transportation corridors, which will provide opportunities for transit initiatives like those in the “RTP” and GO 2020 to grow and prosper.

In addition to the first priorities of optimizing the existing transportation network and increasing transit ridership, the balanced draft Transportation Development Strategy includes longer term strategic highway widening and new transportation corridor planning.

- **Highway realignments and upgrades** *(required in the short to medium term):* Operational improvement study on Highway 403 through Hamilton; Highway 6 south of Highway 401; Highway 6 south of Highway 403 (Hamilton); Highway 403 from QEW northerly to Highway 407; Highway 401; and complete QEW widening to Highway 420.

- **Strategic Highway Widening** *(required in the medium to long term):* Widening for HOV lanes on QEW (Oakville to St. Catharines), Highway 403 (west of Hamilton) and Highway 401 (east and west of Milton); and widening Highway 407 through Halton.

- **New Multiuse Corridors** *(required in the long term):* New corridor between Highway 406 and QEW; and new corridor between Highway 407 and Highway 403 in Hamilton.

- **Monitor Growth and System Performance** *(required in the very long term):* Actively monitor how the transportation system performs with the strategy elements underway, and how population and employment growth rates and patterns are changing, to determine when corridor planning should be undertaken between Welland and Hamilton.
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### EAST AREA
(St. Catharines/Niagara Falls/Welland/Fort Erie)

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A new corridor connecting Highway 406 in the Welland area and QEW is preferred.

### CENTRAL AREA
(West Niagara area to Stoney Creek/Hamilton area)

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Widening of existing QEW is preferred. Continue to monitor growth needs for the long-term.

### WEST AREA
(Hamilton to Burlington/Oakville)

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Operational improvements on Highway 403 in the short term, and a new corridor study to connect Highway 403 to Highway 407 is preferred.
CONGESTION IS GOOD?

Some level of congestion is inevitable in urban areas, and some urban congestion may actually have a positive effect, as studies have shown that congestion will encourage travelers to get out of their cars and onto transit. On the other hand, severe and prolonged congestion on roadways or on transit can undermine economic growth, limit mobility, reduce safety conditions, and impair our quality of life.

GOOD CONGESTION
Every major city in the world has congestion that builds during the peak period and as you get closer to the core. Many of these cities thrive and grow, and offer quality of life and opportunity (New York, Paris, Rome, Toronto, Vancouver, etc.). These cities continue to invest in a balanced transportation network that includes transit and roadway expansion.

BAD CONGESTION
Many emerging economies and third world cities experience sustained and damaging levels of congestion. This congestion limits the potential of these cities to grow and prosper as quality of life is inhibited and goods cannot get to market in a timely manner. In these cities lack of infrastructure is one of the fundamental barriers to prosperity.

MITIGATION MEASURES
Several types of mitigation measures can be utilized to minimize adverse environmental effects to natural, community and cultural features associated with the widening of existing highways and the construction of new facilities, including:

- Tunnels to avoid sensitive features
- Underpasses for animals
- Below grade freeways
- Rural Cross-Sections

LOOKING AHEAD

Following this PIC, the study team will:
- Review all questions and comments received;
- Revise and finalize the draft Transportation Development Strategy based on input received;
- Draft the Transportation Needs Assessment Report and make available for stakeholder review.

HOW TO CONTACT THE STUDY TEAM

Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study
1.866.690.6441
project_team@niagara-gta.com
www.niagara-gta.com

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