SUBJECT: Opportunities for Collaboration with the Ministry of Transportation Regarding Additional Access to Westbound Highway 403 (PW09086) - (Wards 1 and 12)

**RECOMMENDATION:**

(a) That the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) be advised of the City of Hamilton's desire for additional westbound access to Highway 403, and that the investigation of future ramps from the Ancaster area and from Main Street, West, should be a collaborative effort between the City of Hamilton and the MTO; and,

(b) That the Ministry of Transportation be requested to provide a list of their requirements for Transportation Master Plans in areas adjacent to, or including, one or more provincial highways, in advance of the official project initiation meeting, and that MTO representatives be invited to participate on project steering committees for such projects; and,

(c) That a meeting be requested with Minister Ted McMeekin, MPP, Sofia Aggelontis, MPP, Councillor Brian McHattie, Ward 1, Councillor Lloyd Ferguson, Ward 12, Gerry Davis, General Manager of Public Works, senior Public Works Department staff and the Regional Director from the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) and associated senior MTO staff to discuss opportunities for additional westbound access to Highway 403 from the City of Hamilton.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Staff has been working with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) on a variety of issues dealing with consideration of additional westbound access to Highway 403 at Aberdeen Road and also at Golf Links Road in Ancaster. There have been a number of issues that have not been resolved at the staff level and it would be pertinent to advise the local MPP’s of the issues under consideration and look for ways of introducing creative solutions to provide the additional access points to westbound Highway 403 and options to move forward or to determine that the issues cannot be resolved and to move onto other solutions. This report is summarizing these issues and recommends that a meeting be established with key individuals to explore these opportunities.

BACKGROUND:

Interchange of Aberdeen Road/Main Street West and Highway 403

At this time, there is no westbound access to Highway 403 from Main Street (adjacent to Columbia International College, 1003 Main Street, West). This issue of limited access was documented in the 2003 Ainslie Wood/Westdale Transportation Master Plan. Committee will recall that during upcoming bridge repairs/replacement along Highway 403, the MTO will be providing a temporary westbound access to Highway 403 at this location. Staff is of the opinion that if the MTO can provide this temporary access facility, they can provide this westbound access from Main Street on a permanent basis. The proposed access will be connecting with an existing westbound ramp accessible from Aberdeen Road and therefore there should be limited impact to the Highway. The provision of this additional westbound access location will be extremely useful and a direct route for motorist from Main Street, who are currently required to make a circuitous movement to Longwood Road and Aberdeen Road to travel westbound on Highway 403 and creating more traffic through the McMaster Innovation Park area. The location of the proposed ramp to westbound Highway 403 is illustrated on Appendix “A”.

Proposed access at Golf Links Road and Highway 403

The Public Works Department have been working on the Ancaster Transportation Master Plan (ATMP) since 2008. A Steering Committee of technical staff and key stakeholders have participated in meetings to discuss technical issues and review the consultant's analysis and alternatives. The MTO has a representative on this steering committee.

The consultant completed a detailed review of the transportation network options related to Ancaster and has concluded that with the anticipated increase in traffic, and the potential traffic congestion, alternatives are necessary to provide a suitable traffic level of service on the key arterial and collector roads in the community. The consultant and staff emphasized that improvements to the transportation network in the area was important to provide the residents with options and opportunities to travel within their community and to provide convenient and reliable access for business/commercial-related trips.

One noted deficiency is the lack of full movement connections to Highway 403 in the Ancaster area. Currently there is only one full movement interchange, namely Highway 403 and Wilson Avenue. The Highway 403 interchange with Mohawk Road/Rosseaux Road is not a full-movement interchange as there is no direct access from Rosseaux
Road to westbound Highway 403 or direct access to Rosseaux Road from eastbound Highway 403. In order to make these traffic movements, motorists must use the Lincoln Alexander Parkway/ Mohawk Road/Golf Links interchange.

The consultant proposed the consideration of an additional access at Golf Links Road and Highway 403 to assist with the traffic destined to and from the highway. No specific timing was proposed regarding the construction of the westbound access to Highway 403, but it is to correspond to the anticipated decreasing level of service on the area road network as traffic volumes and congestion increase. The access concept was described to the steering committee for their consideration in the fall of 2008. The steering committee considered this proposal and based on extremely limited options to access the highway elsewhere within the community, indicated to the consultant, that although not ideal, this idea was worth pursuing further. At this point the MTO were aware of the proposed westbound access to/from Highway 403 at Golf Links Road and did not indicate any concerns to the steering committee. The location of the proposed ramp to/from westbound Highway 403 is illustrated on Appendix “B”.

Unfortunately, in late January 2009, when the steering committee was reviewing refinements to this highway access alternative, the MTO representative contacted the City’s project manager to say that the proposed additional access to Highway 403 had several problems and that the MTO was not in favour of the city pursuing this access point along Highway 403.

Staff and the consultant met with MTO representatives in April 2009, to determine the Ministry’s concerns regarding this proposed highway access facility. The MTO presented a list of issues including interchange spacing, current congestion on the highway, maintenance related restrictions (including winter control activities) and limits to the Ministry’s consideration of future widening opportunities to the highway.

Staff was very disappointed that the Ministry had expressed their concerns so late in the process and effectively requiring City staff and the consultant to redo much of the previous analysis that had been done based on the assumption of the availability of this additional access point to Highway 403. This setback will affect the amount of time it would take to redo the analysis plus the additional cost for the consultant to complete the additional review and analysis.

The MTO representatives indicated that the City could undertake additional interchange and Highway 403 corridor-related studies for their consideration, but continued to express reservations that even if the additional studies were completed that they would have difficulty supporting the feasibility of the proposed access.

The City Manager, Senior Public Works staff and Councillor Ferguson have met with MTO representatives to discuss this proposed access with no change in the Ministry’s position.

Staff and the Councillor would like the opportunity to meet with Minister McMeekin, MPP and Sofia Aggelonitis, MPP, along with senior Public Works staff and senior representatives from the MTO to discuss the issue again and decide whether this concept has any merit or whether additional westbound access to Highway 403 is not possible and that other solutions to the future traffic issues in Ancaster need to be determined.
ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:
The City is interested in meeting with the MTO again to review this project and determine a “yes” or “no” position from the Ministry. This report is recommending that a meeting be established with senior Public Works staff, Councillors, senior MTO staff and the area MPP’s to review these items and consider creative solutions.

On a go-forward basis, the Ministry needs to provide the City with detailed information much earlier in the project schedule so that decisions can be made and the required evaluation/analysis can be completed. Changing critical information during a project can be detrimental to a projects timelines and budget. Timely and accurate input from stakeholders is a necessity in order that options and alternatives can be clearly reviewed and recommendations can be formulated for the project to be successfully completed.

The alternatives for consideration include:

1. Do Nothing

If additional westbound accesses to Highway 403 are not provided, traffic is required to utilize local roadways to gain access to the highway which adds to traffic volume, traffic congestion, travel time, inconvenience, and air emissions.

2. Adding westbound ramps to/from Highway 403

In the case of Aberdeen Road and Highway 403, the request is for a westbound connection to the existing westbound access ramp, therefore this alternative provides for improved access to the highway and reduces traffic congestion, travel time, motorist inconvenience and air emissions.

For the additional westbound access to/from Highway 403 at Golf Links Road in the Ancaster community, the access would be very beneficial in addressing the existing and anticipated future traffic problems in the community north of Highway 403 and the limited opportunities for transportation network improvements.

FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

In proposals of this nature, it is essential that the cost certainty be included so that the project’s budget targets are known and can be achieved. In this case, it would have been important for the MTO to identify the potential difficulties in the Golf Links Road access proposal much earlier and describe additional studies that would be required for the Ancaster Transportation Master Plan in order for the Ministry to provide their position and not change it at a later time. This relevant information would have been useful in the preparation of realistic budget forecasts and study timelines.

POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:

A number of strategic City documents, including, but not limited to, the Corporate Strategic Plan, Public Works Business Plan, GRIDS, Vision 2020, the Hamilton Transportation Master Plan relate to this issue in many ways, including:

- Influencing federal and provincial policy development to benefit Hamilton
- Maintain effective relationships with other public agencies
- Creating a competitive business environment
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- Reducing air and greenhouse gas emissions
- To be innovative through creative solutions
- To be a leader in the Greening and stewardship of the City
- To provide sustainable, strategic transportation infrastructure options

Relevant Consultation:
The steering committee for the Ancaster Transportation Master Plan involved a wide variety of staff and stakeholders to deal with the transportation issues, including the proposed additional westbound access ramp to/from Highway 403 at Golf Links Road. The steering committee included representatives from Public Works (Strategic and Environmental Planning, Traffic, Design, Open Space Development & Park Planning, Transit), Community Planning & Design, Planning & Economic Development, Fire, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Natural Resources. This proposal was also presented to the Ancaster Community Council (ACC).

City Strategic Commitment:
By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, and economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes  ☐ No
An efficient and effective transportation network is important to the community and its residents, including sustainable transportation alternatives, i.e. active transportation, carpooling, in order that they can move within their community at a reasonable level of service and allows business-related transportation, i.e. material deliveries, shipping, to do so in a timely manner.

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes  ☐ No
Direct and convenient highway access reduces the amount of Greenhouse Gases produced from vehicles taking circuitous routes to/from highways and on local roadways and contributing to traffic congestion.

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes  ☐ No
Improved access to/from area highways provides excellent opportunities for businesses to be attracted to the community and offer a wide variety of goods and services. Businesses that establish themselves in the community create employment to build a sustainable economy.

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines? ☑ Yes  ☐ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants? ☑ Yes  ☐ No
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Appendix “A”
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Appendix “B”