RECOMMENDATION

1. THAT Council endorse the following recommendations with respect to the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study - Final Transportation Development Strategy (September 2013):

   a) THAT the Ministry of Transportation be requested to commence the necessary Class Environmental Assessment Studies for improvements to existing highway corridors as soon as possible.

   b) THAT the Ministry of Transportation be requested to continue to work with Regional and Local staff through planning and implementation to ensure that the impact of proposed improvements to existing facilities and the environment is minimized.

   c) THAT the Ministry of Transportation be requested to work with Regional and Local staff in the development of the separate future study as recommended, to address the long term transportation needs beyond highway widening recommendations.

   d) THAT the Ministry of Transportation be advised that in accordance with Halton’s stated and continuing position, the Region strongly opposes the establishment of a new facility crossing the Niagara Escarpment to address transportation demand in the West Area.

2. THAT the Regional Clerk forward a copy of Report No. PW-51-13 to the Ministry of Transportation, the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area Corridor Project Team, the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the City of Hamilton, the City of Burlington, the Town of Halton Hills, the Town of Milton, and the Town of Oakville for their information.
REPORT

Executive Summary

- The Ministry of Transportation has released the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area Final Transportation Development Strategy Report (September 2013) for a 60-day review period ending on November 4, 2013.

- The Final Strategy is recommending:
  - Optimizing the existing transportation network.
  - Supporting transit initiatives that are consistent with the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan and the GO Transit 2020 Strategic Plan as well as recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the non-roadway modes of transportation.
  - West Area - Hamilton and Halton - Widening of key highway facilities by two or more lanes to address medium term transportation needs. A future study is also recommended to identify a longer term transportation strategy.
  - Central Area - Hamilton to Niagara – Widening of QEW to eight lanes (including HOV lanes).
  - East Area - Niagara – New highway corridor connecting Highway 406 south of Welland to the QEW near Fort Erie.

Background

The Ministry of Transportation of Ontario is undertaking Phase 1 of the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study to examine long term transportation problems and opportunities to the year 2031 in order to provide for the efficient movement of goods and people.

In March 2011, the Ministry released a draft Transportation Development Strategy that considered alternative solutions to provide better linkages between Urban Growth Centres in the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area Corridor Preliminary Study Area. The draft Strategy outlined several recommendations to expand the capacity of the transportation network that connects Niagara Region and the United States border to the Greater Toronto Area. Recommendations included support for enhanced transit, measures to optimize the existing transportation network, additional lanes on existing highways and new highways.

In June 2011, Council approved Report PW-33-11/LPS44-11 – “Niagara-Greater Toronto Area Corridor Environmental Assessment Draft Transportation Development Strategy” which included a recommendation stating: “THAT the Minister of Transportation be advised that, in accordance with Halton’s stated and continuing position, the Region strongly opposes the establishment of a new facility crossing the Niagara Escarpment to address transportation demand in the West Area.”
In response to objections raised by the Region and the City of Burlington, the Province undertook additional analysis to further evaluate transportation options within Halton.

The additional analysis and consultation has been documented by the Province in the Final Transportation Development Strategy Report (September 2013) with the final Strategy being released for a 60-day review period ending on November 4, 2013. The completion of the Transportation Development Strategy represents the conclusion of the first stage of the Environmental Assessment study and allows the Ministry to commence Phase 2 of the process. Comments received during the review period will be addressed in Phase 2.

Discussion

Transportation Development Strategy (September 2013)

In response to comments received following the release of the draft Transportation Development Strategy in March 2011, the Province undertook additional analysis in order to further consider the complex issues and trade-offs associated with each portion of the study area. The additional analysis considered the study area in the following three sub-areas (see Attachment #1):

West Area–Hamilton and Halton – A more focused assessment of major highway widening and new corridor alternatives based on more refined corridors and a more detailed assessment of the potential impacts of each alternative. The alternatives considered included a major widening of Highway 403 through Hamilton, as well as various new highway corridor alternatives between Highway 403 and Highway 401, 407 ETR and Highway 6.

Central Area–Hamilton and Niagara – A review and assessment of the recommendation to widen the QEW to eight lanes (including two HOV lanes) between Hamilton and Niagara.

East Area–Niagara – Refinement of the recommended study area for a new provincial highway connecting Highway 406 and the QEW.

The additional analysis considered impacts related to the Socio-Economic Environment/Land Use; Cultural Environment; Natural Environment; Transportation; Economy; Road Design/Constructability; and Cost. Based on this analysis, the Province’s project team identified the following highway expansion recommendations (see Attachment #2) within the West Area to meet travel demands (2021 to 2031) as documented in the Strategy:

- Highway 403 Hamilton – widen by two lanes from King Street/Main Street to Jerseyville;
- Highway 403 Oakville - widen by three lanes from the Ford Oakville Plant to 407 ETR;
• 407 ETR – widen by two lanes between the Freeman Interchange and Highway 403 interchange in Oakville;
• QEW Halton – widen by two HOV lanes from the Freeman Interchange over the Burlington Bay Skyway to the Red Hill Valley Parkway interchange; and
• Highway 6 (New) – widen by two lanes between Hamilton Airport and Highway 403.

It should be noted that these improvements build upon the highway improvement recommendations that the Ministry of Transportation has already identified as part of its Southern Ontario Highways and Program (2012 to 2016).

The Strategy does not identify a new transportation corridor within the west area.

**Further Study**

In addition, the Strategy has recommended that a separate future study be undertaken in order to address the longer term transportation needs. The scope of the future study is still to be determined and will be developed in consultation with municipalities and stakeholder groups. As noted in the Strategy, elements of the future study may include:

• A longer planning horizon (e.g. 2041 or later);
• An expanded study area;
• Expansion of the transportation problems and opportunities based on the expanded study area and planning horizon;
• Opportunities for increased mode shift and integration of non-roadway transportation service providers; and
• Other elements as determined through consultation.

Beyond infrastructure improvements and future travel demand studies, the Strategy continues to emphasize the need for optimization and non-road alternatives to support the development of the provincial transportation network. Further study will be required by the Ministry and will include the development of an Active Traffic Management Plan that will consider the following key elements:

• The expanded use of bus bypass shoulders along sections of the provincial highway network forecast to experience recurring congestion;
• The development of an enhanced incident management and congestion management system which builds on the existing MTO COMPASS system;
• The expanded use of ramp metering at key interchange locations and as part of the planning and design of all future interchanges;
• The implementation of transit/HOV bypass lanes at existing ramp locations to provide expedited access for transit and HOV vehicles to commuter parking lots;
• Further study of the potential to introduce speed harmonization along the provincial highway network; and
• Investigation of the feasibility of contra-flow lanes and moveable barriers.
The Active Traffic Management Plan will serve as the basis for integrating strong Transportation Demand Management and Transportation Systems Management principles in all future transportation planning initiatives. The Strategy also assumes and supports the full implementation of the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan.

**Next Steps**

In terms of next steps, there are three possible streams for the subsequent stages of this project as illustrated in Attachment #3. These streams include:

- Class Environmental Assessment for Routine Projects – applies to the highway widening components of the Strategy;
- Environmental Assessment Phase 2 – applies to the new highway component of the corridor; and
- Alternatives to be pursued to implement improvements not under the Ministry of Transportation jurisdiction. This would include service enhancement to be delivered by Metrolinx.

**FINANCIAL/PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of reviews undertaken to evaluate the Province’s work is funded through project R2262A - Ontario Ministry of Transportation Highway Studies. Sufficient funding is available within the approved budget to complete the required work.
RELATIONSHIP TO HALTON REGION’S 2011-2014 ACTION PLAN

Key Action (2012)
Develop and submit a Regional position to the Province on the Niagara-GTA Corridor and GTA West Corridor to ensure the interests of Halton Region, Burlington and Halton Hills are considered.

Key Initiative
Advocate to the Province on road and transportation matters.

Priority Area
Transportation - Plan, construct and maintain a regional transportation system that includes 900 lane km of major arterial roadways, signalized intersections, lighting, signs, 122 bridges and structures.

Respectfully submitted,

Director, Transportation Services  Commissioner, Public Works

Approved by

Jane MacCaskill
Chief Administrative Officer

If you have any questions on the content of this report, please contact:
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Attachments:  Attachment #1 – Geographic Specific Assessment
Attachment #2 – Highway Expansion Recommendations
Attachment #3 – Study Process