

Greater Toronto Transportation Plan and Metrolinx

The population growth in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area has contributed significantly to the increase in road congestion. It is now more challenging than ever for commuter travel and the transportation of goods and services. To help address these challenges, the Government of Ontario created a transportation agency to improve the coordination and integration of all modes of transportation in the region.

What is Metrolinx?

Metrolinx, formerly the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, has been given the mandate to create a coordinated, efficient, equitable, and customer-centred transportation system in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Its plan is to create a seamless, integrated transportation network, with a real focus on public transit, so people, goods, and services can move more easily from York and Durham, through Toronto, Peel, Halton and onward to Hamilton.

Metrolinx is considered to be the final piece in a three-part approach by the Provincial Government to prepare the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area for growth and sustained prosperity. The first two steps were the Greenbelt Plan, which protects more than 1.8 million acres (730,000 ha) of environmentally sensitive and agricultural land in the heart

of the region, and the Growth Plan, a plan that coordinates population and job growth.

Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan

The final Regional Transportation Plan will be instrumental in coordinating transportation management and planning in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Conservation Halton looks forward to a long-term involvement in the implementation of the plan and commends Metrolinx for this effort.

The Regional Transportation Plan is a long-term strategic plan for an integrated, multi-modal, (i.e. bus, rail, automobile) regional transportation system. The Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act (2006) stated that the plan must achieve several objectives.

Summary

Conservation Halton's viewpoint on the draft Regional Transportation Plan is it provides social, cultural, and economic gains, but more work is needed to show how net environmental benefits can be achieved. A reduction in automobile use should be a benefit to the environment. However, it is important to consider the impact that additional transportation infrastructure will have on the natural environment.

This includes working towards easing congestion and commute times, and reducing transportation-related emissions of smog precursors and green house gases.

In September 2008, Metrolinx released their Draft Regional Transportation Plan and Draft Investment Strategy, which identified a number of projects within Conservation Halton's watershed:

15-Year Plan

- Express Rail Lakeshore – Hamilton to Oshawa
- Regional Rail – Downtown Milton to Union Station
- Rapid Transit Dundas Street – (Waterdown to Kipling Station) and Trafalgar Road – (Highway 407 to Midtown Oakville)

25-Year Plan

- Travel Corridors – Niagara to Greater Toronto Area and Greater Toronto Area-West
- Rapid Transit – Burlington Fairview GO – Dundas West

Striking a balance between more transit infrastructure and the natural environment

Conservation Halton and the other Greater Golden Horseshoe Conservation Authorities are very supportive of the scope and content of the draft Regional Transportation Plan and Investment Strategy. Including Halton, the other Greater Golden Horseshoe Conservation Authorities are Central Lake Ontario, Credit Valley, Grand River, Hamilton Region, Lake Simcoe, Niagara Region, Nottawasaga, and Toronto. The plan's intent to reduce the number of cars on the roads and increase the use of public transit, should benefit the environment by improving air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Conservation Halton and the other conservation authorities also recognize that the projects and initiatives in the plan

could impact the natural environment in other ways. For example, the addition of a rail line to add trains to carry more commuters may result in a new bridge to cross a creek or stream. This can have an impact on the surrounding natural heritage and hazard areas.

The proposed projects in the Conservation Halton watershed follow existing road and rail infrastructure, but may involve the widening of existing roads or increasing the number of tracks on a rail line. Preconsultation by Metrolinx with Conservation Halton, municipal government and other relevant agencies will be critical to ensure that provincial directions, such as policies related to natural heritage and natural hazards, are not compromised in the implementation of the Regional Transportation Plan.

The relationship between the Growth Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan

Also of note is the connection between the Urban Growth Centres of the Growth Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan. The implementation of the population densities cited in the Growth Plan will result in significant redevelopment in many portions of the Conservation Halton watershed.

Two particular areas of interest are Downtown Milton and Midtown Oakville, both of which are traversed by the Sixteen Mile Creek. Both of these areas were developed many years ago, before the current natural hazard and stormwater policies were put in place to provide more protection to people and property.

Careful consideration will be needed before undertaking any redevelopment in these areas, such as an expansion to a transit station, additional parking or an increase in the impervious (i.e. paved) areas as a result of intensification. Precautions must be taken with stormwater management to ensure there are no negative impacts on the local community, property, or the natural environment.

Conservation Halton Natural Champion for a Healthy Watershed



Conservation Halton is the community based environmental agency that protects, restores and manages the natural resources in its watershed. Conservation Halton has staff that includes ecologists, land use planners, engineers, foresters and educators, along with a network of volunteers, who are guided by a Board of Directors that includes municipally elected and appointed citizens. Conservation Halton is recognized for its stewardship of creeks, forests and Niagara Escarpment lands through science based programs and services.

For more information about the Greater Toronto Transportation Plan and Metrolinx contact Conservation Halton at:
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