



C.O.P.E. News Letter: May 2004

Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE) is a group of people who have come together to fight the development and destruction of the Niagara Escarpment. The threat that has spurred us to action is the Provincial Government's proposed Mid-Peninsula Highway (MPH).

The Niagara Escarpment has been designated as a World Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations. We believe that it should be cared for in a manner befitting this honour.

COPE is dedicated to:

- 1. Preserving The Niagara Escarpment.**
- 2. Ensuring that no new highway corridors are paved across the Niagara Escarpment.**
- 3. Ensuring that all viable alternatives to the proposed Mid Peninsula Highway are fully considered.**

The planned highway is over 130 kilometers long, running from Fort Erie to Burlington, and will cut through uncounted farms, houses, businesses, wetlands, streams and forests. In the Burlington area, the road is slated to cut the Escarpment diagonally, through valuable green space that the City of Burlington has preserved since time immemorial. In our view, the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has failed to justify the need for this highway, and is proceeding based on many invalid assumptions regarding potential user demand, the adequacy of other modes of transport, future transit utilization by commuters, etc. Furthermore, they have failed to incorporate the easing of traffic congestion that will result from coming changes and improvements to other major arteries in the area.

Also deeply disturbing to our membership has been MTO's apparent disregard for environmental issues during the process to date: Air quality, noise, light pollution, water pollution from runoff, disrupted or destroyed wildlife corridors and habitat, damage to wetlands and significant forest areas, encouragement of car usage rather than transit, Government dollars taken out of transit improvements to pay for roads, and urban sprawl to name but a few.

COPE is further concerned with the impact another highway would have on congestion and urban sprawl in Burlington, Oakville and the Greater Toronto Area. Rather than easing congestion in this area, it would promote more traffic and funnel it into an already severely congested region faster.

These are some of the ways in which COPE has been fighting to date:

- With the recent change in provincial government, COPE has focused most of our energy on educating new political representatives on the MPH issue, meeting with politicians and monitoring the direction the current government is taking on the MPH.
- COPE has also worked to educate Municipal and Federal politicians on the MPH.
- Dialoguing with the new provincial government to ensure the promise of a full environmental assessment for the MPH is kept. This means completion of a legitimate and earnest examination of all alternatives such as not building the highway and actually determining if a highway is needed.
- Burlington Mayor, Rob Maclsaac has been appointed as chair of the Greenbelt task force; an initiative to create a green belt from Niagara Falls to Peterborough. COPE has requested to be part of the consultative process to understand if and how the MPH fits in with this initiative. The task force is set to commence work in the spring of 2004. We encourage our members to submit their recommendations on cleaner, smarter living.

Current Political Situation:

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- After much public outcry, the previous conservative government withdrew the proposed MPH environmental assessment (EA) terms of reference in June 2003.
- The current Liberal government has confirmed their election commitment to complete a full EA for the MPH.
- In a letter (March 2004) to COPE from Transportation Minister Takhar, he stated "his ministry will prepare and consult on a revised EA Terms of Reference for a full EA prior to resubmitting the Terms of Reference to the Minister of the Environment for review and approval."
- Although COPE views the commitment to a full EA as a positive step, we are cognizant of the fact that we are still dealing with the mindset of the Ministry of Transportation. We may have won a battle – but certainly not the war.
- The next step is to review what the MTO considers a full environmental assessment and to ensure it is in keeping with the legal definition.

We Need Your Help Now and in the Future

- Write your politicians to remind them of what a full environmental assessment means: your local councillor, MPP, Premier McGuinty and Minister of Transportation, Harinder Takhar. It is important our voice be heard.
- Talk to your family, neighbours, friends and co-workers. With the recent government initiatives including the Green Belt and federal dollars for transit, the MPH is obviously a step in the wrong direction.
- Help keep the MPH issue alive. When you read an article in the paper on the MPH, gridlock, urban sprawl or the green belt, please take the time to write a letter to express your views. If it's a talk radio show, call it. Every little bit helps.

C.O.P.E. You can visit our website to get up-to-date information on our fight. Please note that we are in the process of revamping the site: stophighway.com

We need your help, your participation and your financial support.

Please take the time to complete the form below, and please give what you can. All funds go directly towards the fight -- the executive committee takes no salaries or honoraria and have thus far contributed substantial amounts of their own time and money. Please join us in our fight. There is strength in numbers and only as a united group can we continue to fight this poorly-thought-out plan to pave great portions of the Niagara Peninsula and Escarpment.

Mail your membership fee/donation to:

C.O.P.E.
P.O. Box 40548, Upper Brant Postal Outlet
Burlington, Ontario. L7P 4W1

Enclosed is a membership/donation fee of \$10.00 OR I prefer to contribute \$ _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-Mail: _____

Thanks. If you have any expertise to offer or any advice or recommendations, please let us know via our website or by mail.