



**CITIZENS OPPOSED TO PAVING THE ESCARPMENT**

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September 26, 2007

TO: The Mayor and Members of Hamilton City Council

FROM: Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE)

RE: Niagara to GTA Corridor – Opening New Economic Opportunities and the Niagara-GTA Corridor Economic Impact Study (PED07266) (City Wide)

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- I have been following the Mid Peninsula Highway / Niagara GTA issue since 2002.
- First reaction to – Opening New Economic Opportunities – I had read it before – but the cover's different.
- Referring to the MPH Needs Assessment.
- Why was an American firm used to compile it?
- Checked the Wilbur Smith website. Although they advertise a capacity for corridor planning, 2 brief paragraphs describe their work with rail.
- A paragraph, along with 27 points of expertise, describes their work on highways.
- The focus on a highway as the main option provided in this report isn't surprising.
- This is the same mistake made with the MPH process.

- Since that time the reality of environmental degradation, which has been labeled as catastrophic by the world scientific community, has become daily reality.
  - Hard to believe that such a major issue has been ignored in this report.
  
  - Next reaction was my hope that this report didn't cost taxpayers too much for 3 reasons:
    1. For the purpose of making an informed decision on the economics of this project – it is insufficient.
    2. The report ignores the 800 lb gorilla in the room; climate change and highways as major contributors.
    3. It is premature. This NGTA project is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation. Phase 1 of the Planning and Environmental Assessment Study is currently being conducted. It started in December 2006 and is expected to take 2 years to complete. A full range of options to provide additional transportation capacity within the corridor is suppose to be examined. Not just highways.
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#### General Comments:

- Poor political optics. This report was commissioned by Hamilton and Niagara Region and was completed while MTO study in the NGTA is still in progress. The inclusion of Hamilton and Niagara, to the exclusion of other regions, in the MPH process lead to controversy and legal action by Burlington and Halton.
  
  - Comments on page 6-2 are most telling: regulate “development in a manner that accommodates both freight and passenger needs and make decisions based on the impacts to industrial lands” as opposed to those made on a community level. Those who actually live here are left out.
  
  - There has been talk of the NGTA corridor being the extension of the Mexico / USA trade route. Much momentum for Hwy 69 and the completion of ring roads in the US has been lost in the last 5 years. It's time for us to think twice too.
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#### What's Missing from this Report:

- The report talks about the cost of lost opportunities.
- From a business perspective, I expect more when making a decision: a full cost / benefit analysis.
- A few costs I can think of that have not been considered here but would alter the numbers and outcome of this report greatly are the cost of:

- Choosing a mode of transportation that contributes further to the climate change and increases the cost of dealing with environmental degradation and health impacts. This is twofold – increased expense for government and loss of production for businesses.
  - Choosing a transportation method which relies on oil when it is predicted we'll reach peak oil production anywhere from 4 to 40 years. Not long considering the 30-year horizon for this corridor.
  - Not seizing on other means of transportation now, when we're not desperate.
  - Not exercising due diligence in a decision making role. Climate change has become real and personal to people – although scary.
  - Dealing with land claims.
  - Building and maintaining infrastructure to support a highway.
  - Loss of production to agriculture – a \$1 billion industry - annually.
  - Dealing with an increase in traffic accidents.
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#### Recommendations:

- DO NOT endorse the report. It is premature and highly deficient for making an informed decision on such an important issue with a 30-year horizon.
- Accept that we must deal with the clear disconnect between the myth of the benefits from highway investment and the actual performance of such projects at the regional level.
- Work with the MTO on this project, and push for a process that considers more than the economics of development. Consideration of other societal and environmental factors, that also have huge economic impact, must be included.
- Piggyback on the MTO process being conducted and paid for by the province rather than duplicate effort. Especially considering that the city budget is already in a deficit position for 2008.
- Demand that the NGTA process include a complete and full cost / benefit analysis to support good decisions.
- Work with the current process under the MTO and work in concert with other government bodies such as the Greater Toronto Transit Authority to develop a sustainable transportation plan.

- Use Canadian sources of expertise with in-depth knowledge of our laws, political climate, and environmental significance along with knowledge of commerce.
- Create thousands of construction jobs for years to come by completing badly needed repairs on existing infrastructure in Hamilton. Encourage the province to do the same.
- For city-implemented research on the NGTA, ensure any future stakeholders groups represent all segments of the city's residents – business and residential. A list of stakeholders interviewed for this study was provided in Appendix G. I couldn't find this appendix in the report and formally request a copy at this time. Other comments on the stakeholders only referred to manufacturing, freight and other industries.
- Increase investment in transit for Hamilton proper and push for enhanced transit between Hamilton and Toronto. Existing infrastructure is not being used efficiently; maximize what we have before building new.
- Focus on developing a sustainable, long-term vision for the city of Hamilton that includes sustainable transportation.

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### **Concerns with the Report:**

Problems in this report similar to that of the MPH process:

- The report discusses how the \$5.5 billion dollar highway will be financed. It refers to private capital and "budgetary constraints".
- This translates to a toll road.
- In the MPH study, option C (similar route as this report) was ranked as the 10th best option out of 11 with a \$.10 toll per km.
- Widening of the QEW to 10 lanes was option #1.
- This report states that hundreds of millions of dollars in business and tax revenues could be generated over a 15-year horizon with a NGTA highway.
- As a businessperson, would you locate on a road that requires your customers, suppliers and employees to pay a toll to get to your location?
- Also, what the report doesn't factor in is the loss to the agricultural industry resulting from development along the highway. In Hamilton-Wentworth, agriculture generates approximately \$1 billion annually – a large sum to be ignored.

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- Congestion in the area is cited as a deterrent to business.
  - The major congestion is between Burlington and Toronto.

- The NGTA Corridor is between Niagara and Hamilton.
  - The only recommendation in this report to address congestion is to build a highway between Niagara and Hamilton that targets the wrong area.
  - The current initiative to increase transit between Hamilton and Toronto is a sustainable method of addressing the issue. The impact of this is not factored into this report.
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- Providing a trade corridor is one of the main reasons provided to build the NGTA corridor.
  - The busiest commerce ports in Canada are Windsor / St. Claire and the Toronto International Airport.
  - Interviews conducted for the MPH study with stakeholders indicated that the majority use the 401 / Windsor corridor and wouldn't change with the construction of the MPH.
  - The inclusion of a toll made the use of such a highway even less likely.
  - With the reality of climate change, the longevity of the "just-in-time" delivery system is highly questionable.
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- The report addresses supposed economic gain for the area.
  - A quick look at the transportation map in Places to Grow raises some real concerns not addressed here.
  - This report focuses on the Niagara to Hamilton section.
  - The NGTA corridor is part of a bigger plan along with the 424 Hwy slated for construction in Flamborough and the TWGTA, which runs north of the 401 along the top of Toronto.
  - When the roads are viewed in their entirety, it appears that Hamilton will simply be a cog in a transportation hub; to be driven around.
  - This may provide some warehousing as an economic source. The down side is that warehousing is becoming increasingly automated.
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- Studies on the impact of highways in creating jobs, create further doubt on the employment return on investment
- There is an assumption that highways lead to economic development.
- A study conducted for the US Department of Transportation and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in found that, "no strong evidence exists demonstrating that beltways improve a metropolitan area's competitive advantage.
- The study concluded that, "because any net gains are likely to be small, potential adverse impacts of beltway construction probably cannot be balanced by beltway-induced regional economic growth."
- In another study it was found that "highway infrastructure contributes little to state or national productivity."

- While new roads are likely to create new economic activity for a limited area, they also tend to shift economic growth from one place to another within a metropolitan region.
  - This limited economic growth is mainly to the benefit of one-time development.
  - Further to this economic shift, suburban areas prosper at the expense of central cities.
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- The report you're considering today sites the creation of construction jobs as a major benefit.
- Specifically - 5000 to 9500 jobs for a 5-year period. Unlike the other estimates, this is pretty reliable – however it sounds like a poor return on a \$5.5 billion investment.
- This employment opportunity could be met by completing the long list of necessary repairs needed to existing infrastructure at the municipal and provincial level.

**Finally:**

I believe Hamilton deserves a better vision for our future than to be a service station and exhaust receptacle.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sue McMaster  
Co-Chair, COPE