



Delegation Presentation to Hamilton Council – Committee of the Whole
By Chamber Transportation Committee Chair – Dan Rodrigues Tuesday, October 14, 2010
(Check against delivery)

Summary of Chamber Response to the Provincial Niagara to GTA Study & EA

1. In the NGTA assessment, in the conclusion of the Central Area, an illustration is made that there would be no significant economic gain through either a 'new corridor' or 'widening' of the QEW. This assumption fails to capture the City of Hamilton's Official Plan, which includes the continued development of two significant Business Parks (Airport & Red Hill), which lie directly in the path of the 'new corridor' as outlined. Certainly, with the addition of a new corridor aligned with business park developments would have positive gains in the employment sector, over simple widening of an existing expressway located away from the business parks. The study contradicts economic growth by asserting the 'downtown' of Hamilton will be a stronger growth area versus the Airport Employment Growth District, yet the AEGD is recognized later on for its growth potential in the building of the new 'west' corridor. No linkage is made between the AEGD and the east portion, but rather the AEGD and GTA west.

2. The same assessment summary slide also notes that there would be little environmental impact to widening the QEW. This conclusion is vacant of supporting documentation, as there are areas around the QEW that are environmentally sensitive (wetlands, marshes, et al), some of which have already experienced a recent expansion. Further expansion would only place additional harm on these areas. Consideration must also be made for existing infrastructure such as on & off-ramps, and a newly constructed pedestrian overpass. The addition of lanes on the Burlington Skyway also poses concern, as this would either be accomplished through the construction of additional road space, or the tightening of the existing lanes to accommodate an additional lane(s). The latter option would require extensive review as the bridge commonly sees warnings of 'severe' or 'high' winds, which creates further hazards for vehicular and truck movement. Tighter lane use under windy conditions creates higher risks for collisions, which would equal further delays and closures. Increasing the traffic volumes in a compressed area, such as the widening of the QEW recommendation offers dramatic increases in harmful particulate and gases, which would undoubtedly have negative affects on the sensitive fruit lands surrounding the QEW. To minimize this environmental footprint impact as being less than utilizing the vast amounts of unusable lands in the proposed corridor continues to contradict the reasoning behind building corridors in the east and west portions of the study area.

3. On the list of concerns respecting the Central Area Assessment Summary page, is the identification that widening the QEW carries greater transportation benefit than a new corridor. As the options indicate, there is no real connection between the GTA and Niagara. An expanded corridor in the 'west area' only promotes increased transportation movement between the GTA and westerly destinations like Windsor and Sarnia due to increased access to the 401 & 407. This recommendation does little to promote the benefits of a Niagara to Toronto trade corridor. Furthermore, widening of the QEW contains bottlenecks in the areas of highway separation (i.e.- recently the QEW was widened from Burlington to Oakville to accommodate an HOV lane; this expansion fails to recognize the merging of the 3-lane 403 & 3-lane QEW eastbound into 3-lanes, or the separation of the now 5-lane QEW to 2-lane QEW & 2-lane 403 westbound. A similar 'real-time' example is the continuous traffic jam at the 2-lane 403 merging into the 3-lane QEW in Oakville) Absent of a consistent application of road use and design, the study recognizes that the 'central area' of the study is without a redundant roadway to handle congestion or closures. Recognizing that widening of the QEW will result in lane reductions while construction takes place, traffic will have no alternate route other than to travel on rural roads not designed to manage the increased resulting traffic. Construction of a new corridor in the central area will have no negative impacts on the current QEW congestion, and will offer a much-needed redundant route when completed.

4. The last item of concern is the illustration that the community would be impacted the most, and with the least of benefits from a new corridor. A new corridor that runs through the City's planned business parks carries with it new jobs for the region. New jobs generate new development, and increased population, which in turn leads to new business development. This in turn assists in the tax burden, shifting from the residential base to the commercial base. In basic terms of community planning and growth, the success of a community does not solely lie with the single commercial development, but rather it include the residual benefits and growth from that commercial development? When you open a commercial facility, you open up a multitude of additional commercial growth opportunities.

In conclusion, the NGTHA in its simplest of interpretations is a plan to expand westerly growth for the Montreal-Windsor corridor to allow for easier movement of goods and people, while increasing the Niagara-Upstate New York border accessibility to allow for expanded movement of goods and people. The offering of a widened QEW does little to address the connectivity between the Niagara Region and Hamilton & Toronto; instead it marginalizes the importance of the development of a true Trade corridor between the two Countries within this Region.

The Hamilton Chamber cannot support the direction on this study for the aforementioned reasons.