## Niagara to GTA Corridor

(Submitted by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Burlington Chamber of Commerce, and OCC Taskforce)

### Issue:

The need to move ahead with the Niagara-to-GTA Corridor (also known as the Mid Penn Corridor), which includes an essential highway component, is critical and urgent in order to meet the evolving needs of residents, industry, tourism, transportation and governments in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and surrounding communities.

The government’s actions in Niagara to GTA corridor should go beyond the current plan to increase existing infrastructure capacity along the QEW, 400 series highways, and Highway 6. A new mid-peninsula corridor with connections to neighbouring communities would facilitate the creation of a transportation multi modal hub between Canada and USA and foster economic opportunities across the entire province.

### Background:

The stated principal goal of the government’s transportation strategy for the Niagara to GTA (NGTA) Corridor is to provide an efficient trade and transportation linkthat connects the“Continental One” Highway in the USA, the Niagara Frontier, South-Western Ontario, and the Greater Toronto Area into one seamless transportation corridor. Meeting the needs of all communities that rely on for their prosperity on the GTA corridor requires an economic development approach that factors in regional economic development priorities and ensures coordination with regional planning and investment activities over a long-term time horizon. A highway that links the Niagara Frontier to Hamilton and the GTA and has connections to neighbouring business communities such as Brantford, Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener Waterloo, and Milton, is vital to meeting the overall transportation needs of the affected regions and the Ontario economy.

The Niagara Peninsula area is strategically located within South Central Ontario and acts as an international trade and tourism gateway between the Greater Toronto Area and southwestern Ontario and the United States. Some 120 million people and major industrial markets in Ontario and neighbouring states in the U.S. lie within 500 kilometres of the NGTACorridor. With the Niagara frontier accounting for 16 percent of total Canada-US trade, efficient international trade and goods movement through the Niagara Peninsula into Canada’s economic heartland is fundamental to trade, tourism and economic growth in Central Ontario, the province, and the country.

As population and employment grow in the Niagara/GTA area and surrounding municipalities, levels of traffic congestion on existing highways will continue to increase. Studies show that in 30 years, the demand for travel will exceed the capacity of the existing regional transportation system. The results would be increased congestion, higherfuel consumption and air pollution, a decline in productivity and a lower quality of life.

In 2007, Wilbur Smith Associates conducted an independent study commissioned by the Niagara Economic Development Corporation, Niagara Region, and the City of Hamilton. The study looked exclusively at the economic opportunities of a new highway in the NGTA Corridor, and concluded that:

* Global and domestic trends include a shifting focus in freight transportation needs
* There will be an increase in demand for package, airfreight, and customer direct truck services
* There will be an emphasis on reliability and predictability of transportation services
* All industries require a multi-modal transportation system
* The NGTA corridor would not only address capacity deficiencies, but would complete a multi-modal system for port, airport, and US border crossings, including connections from east to west as well as the North.

The addition of a new highway to the NGTA corridor would not only benefit the residents in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), but would also play a pivotal role in ensuring an efficient, multi-modal goods movement network that connects the GGH to the rest of Ontario, including connections from east to west as well as to the North.

In order to address the capacity deficiencies of the region, the Ministry of Transportation commissioned a feasibility study which looked at several alternative options, including the construction of a new highway from the Niagara frontier to the GTA. The results of Phase 1 of the study were released in 2010. MTO has since indicatedthat it will be moving ahead with a hybrid alternative that includes some strategic widening of provincial highways as well as the development of some new transportation corridors. The government’s plan is to widen and improve highways along sections of the QEW Niagara, the 403, 401, 407, and Highway 6, and develop new transportation corridors from Highway 403 in Ancaster to Highway 407 at Walkers Line in Burlington, and from the QEW (Fort Erie) to Highway 406 in Welland.

The OCC supports the Ministry’s work in these areas. As part of its small-scale infrastructure improvements, the Ministry should also address the ongoing need for a redundant roadway between the 406 and 403, to ensure that the rise in use of the QEW does not impact local municipal roadways. However, the OCC believes that simply widening existing infrastructure and building new corridors at the boundaries of the NGTA corridor does not fully address the needs of the region or the intent of the NGTA corridor strategy. As illustrated, the construction of a new highway between the Niagara frontier and GTA with westward, eastward, and northward linkages would not only address capacity and structural deficiency in the region, but would allow the region to act as a multi-modal system for port, airport and US border crossings. Through allowing more goods and people to pass through the two boarders, the corridor would foster economic development opportunities for the entire province.

In order to achieve the necessary improvements, the government should immediately move ahead with implementation of a new mid-peninsula corridorwhile pursuing its infrastructure plans in the Niagara Region. A legacy project of this extent requires the government to take an economic development approachthat incorporates planning and investment activities in surrounding communities over a long-term time horizon. The current 20-year assessment is too limited. A more complete and detailed long term plan should look at a 30 year target, which emphasizes the importance of goods movement, transportation and logistics economic development and trade forecasts beyond 2031. Such a plan would also extend the geographic boundaries of the study to incorporate all areas that have direct links to the region, such as Brantford, Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Milton.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:**

1. Acknowledge the strategic importance of the NGTA Corridor to the creation of a multi modal transportation hub through immediately commencing with a long-term (30 year) plan for the region. The plan should be based on an economic development vision achieved through coordination and consultation with civic leadership, policy-makers, and planners from all surrounding communities.
2. Expand the geographic boundaries of the study to include surrounding areas such as Brantford, Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Milton.
3. Construct the NGTA corridor project in two stages:
	1. Include the Niagara Frontier-Hamilton portion of the proposed mid-peninsula highway in the Environmental Assessment phase of the existing infrastructure improvement projects, and commence with construction of stage one as quickly as possible.
	2. Concurrently with the construction of stage one, begin a feasibility study using a 30 year time line for the Hamilton to 401 portion and connections to all surrounding communities.
4. Engage business leaders and other representative groups including civic leadership, other levels of government, and planners to ensure that the broader community supports the long-term regional transportation strategy. In consulting the business community, consideration must be given to rail, truck, air, and marine transportation representatives, to create an overall multi-modal transportation strategy.
5. Encourage all regional leadership structures, including all levels of government, business leaders, and economic and social institutions to become champions for the corridor project.
6. Take into account the sensitive biosphere and heritage of the Niagara Escarpment, designated Greenbelt areas, and public health issues.
7. To address early designation and protection of future transportation corridors to ensure availability of acquisitions.

**OCC Comments:**

**The Policy Review Committee supports this resolution**