

CENTRES & CORRIDORS

Growth Management in the GTA



December 2003

For more information please contact:

Alex Georgieff, M.C.I.P., R.P.P., Chair
Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario
The Regional Municipality of Durham
P.O. Box 623, 1615 Dundas St. East
4th Floor, Lang Tower, Whitby, ON L1N 6A3
Tel: (905) 728-7731 ext 3231 • Fax: (905) 436-6612

Email: alex.georgieff@region.durham.on.ca



**Regional Planning
Commissioners of Ontario**
GTA CAUCUS



Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario GTA CAUCUS



nine MOVING FORWARD

All levels of government and the private sector agree on what needs to be done. Now is the time for action. Centres and Corridors are the heart of our urban systems. They help promote economic vitality, create quality of life, and play a key role in effective growth management.

A number of critical steps are needed to create a strong and connected system of Centres and Corridors across the GTA. This includes better co-ordination, dedication of resources and investment by all levels of government to create policy guidelines and focus investment to take GTA Vision 2021 to the next level of success.

This paper identifies the key actions that need to be taken in the areas of policy, infrastructure investment, financial tools and programs. Municipalities have taken the first steps in identifying the major 17 centres across the GTA and in putting forward rapid transit proposals. Municipalities have also prepared development plans for centres like the Mississauga City Centres and Markham Town Centre as well as corridor initiatives like the "Avenues" in Toronto. Now is the time to act on the other key action areas.

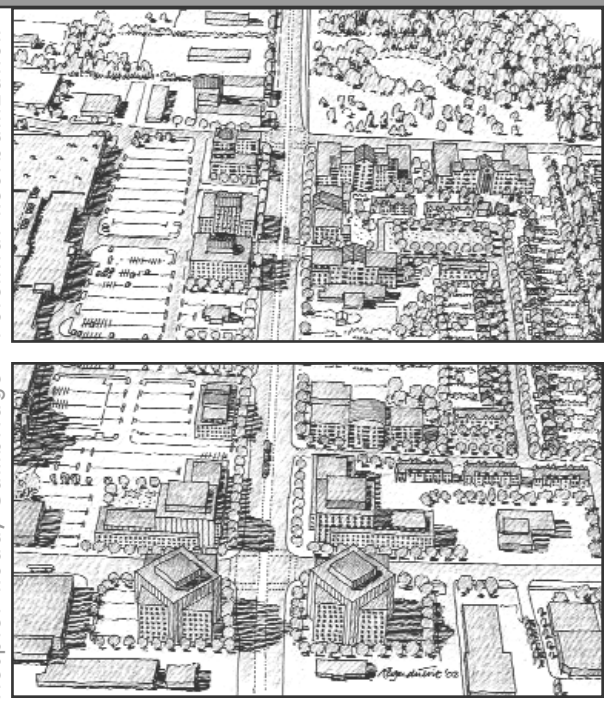
Long-term financial investment priority must be given to transit systems by the Provincial and Federal governments as well as the tax capacity for municipalities to take action. Furthermore, the Province needs to support the process of creating a system of Centres and Corridors by working with municipalities to create the fiscal and policy tools to further implement GTA Vision 2021. The GTA Regions and Cities are working together to identify common ways to monitor on the ground progress.

A combination of all of the actions will create a climate that is attractive to private sector investment, and one which will encourage public private partnerships.

Finally, all three levels of government along with the private sector need to work together strategically to manage growth in a way that encourages livable urban areas that will remain economically strong and globally competitive.

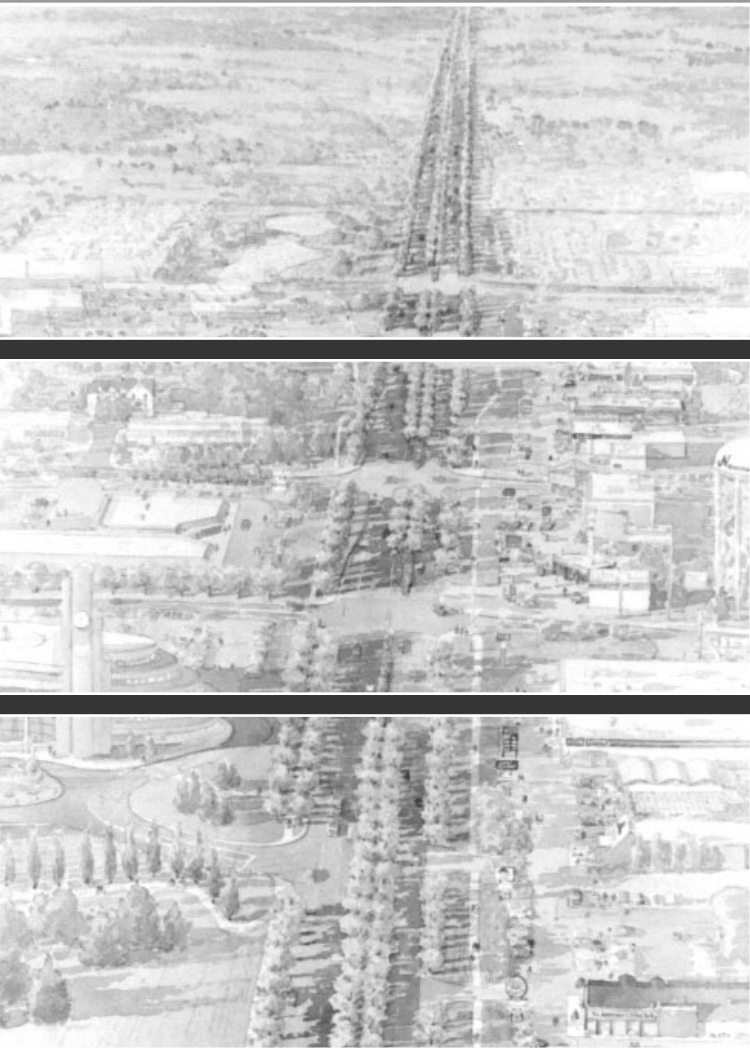
This paper will be circulated to key stakeholders. Working together, we need to focus on these priority activities and investments and to identify the next steps in achieving a successful system of Centres and Corridors in the GTA.

Hespler Road, Cambridge - Potential Reurbanization



Vaughan Corporate Centre - Concept





Newmarket Regional Centre - Concept

eight A CO-ORDINATED EFFORT IS REQUIRED

A system of Centres and Corridors is a key ingredient of Smart Growth in the GTA. A traditional land use approach to creating Centres and Corridors is not, on its own, effective. A combination of progressive land use policies, strategic infrastructure investment particularly transit connected centres, supportive financial policy and a system of supportive programs is required.

MUNICIPAL ROLE

Municipalities have played a key role in the success of a number of Centres and Corridors initiatives as outlined earlier in this paper.

Municipalities need to create a new generation of strong local policies and guidelines to ensure focussed growth management, civic investment and public awareness of Centres and Corridors. Municipalities will continue to strengthen the local "toolbox" of supportive by-laws, financial partnerships and performance measurement.

And of course, municipalities will continue to work with the provincial, federal and private sectors to help focus investment as well as policy and legislative reforms on a system of Centres and Corridors that will support smart growth management as well as ensure that the GTA remains the liveable, economic engine of growth for the province as well as Canada.

THE PROVINCIAL ROLE

In order for Centres and Corridors to be successful, the Province must invest in transit and provide municipalities with the tax capabilities to operate transit systems.

The Province also needs to overhaul key pieces of provincial legislation, including the Planning Act, Development Charges Act and the Building Code Act in order to create a fiscal and land use climate that promotes Centres and Corridors.

The Provincial government should also issue a Provincial Policy Statement that links transit with land use and articulates a Provincial interest in supporting transit-supportive development.

Finally, the Province needs to focus investment in housing and transit in Centres and Corridors.

THE FEDERAL ROLE

The Federal government has a crucial role in supporting growth in Centres and Corridors, particularly through long-term sustained investment, specifically in affordable housing (including rental), transit and infrastructure (including infrastructure renewal) as well as developing creative financial tools such as location efficient mortgages, and transferring more tax resources to municipalities.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Significant public investment and policy will reduce private sector costs, enhance demand and reduce investment risk.

In case studies in the United States as well as in our own urban areas, it is evident that co-ordinated and focussed public sector investment attracts significant private sector involvement in building Centres and Corridors.

Innovative public sector/private sector development and marketing are required.

Executive Summary

All levels of government and the private sector agree - Centres and Corridors are the heart of our urban systems. They help promote economic vitality, create a better quality of life, and play a key role in effective growth management. However, no single action will create centres. A broad series of actions are needed by all levels of government and the private sector over a long period of time.

This paper calls for the creation of 17 Regional Centres across the GTA that are high density, mixed use areas, well connected by rapid transit corridors.

Centres and Corridors-Growth Management in the GTA has been prepared by the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (GTA Caucus) to identify the key actions that need to be taken in the areas of policy, infrastructure investment, financial tools and supportive programs by all levels of government including:

- Long-term financial investment priority must be given to transit systems by the Provincial and Federal governments as well as the tax capacity for municipalities to take action.
- The Province needs to overhaul fiscal and policy tools to create centres.
- Municipalities need to create a new generation of specific clear land use and design policies.
- All three levels of government along with the private sector must work together strategically to manage growth in a way that encourages livable urban areas that will remain economically strong and globally competitive.

The detailed actions and roles identified in this paper will create a climate that is attractive to private sector investment, and one which will encourage public private partnerships.

Working together, we need to focus on these priority activities and investments and to identify the next steps in achieving a successful system of Centres and Corridors in the GTA.



seven KEY ACTION AREAS

A number of ideas for action have emerged from the recent discussion on Centres and Corridors. There is agreement that a package of co-ordinated policy, infrastructure, financial tools and related programs is required to build Centres and Corridors across the GTA. There was also agreement that transit was a key ingredient for success.

There is no one action that will create centres. A broad series of actions, by all levels of government and the private sector over a long period of time is needed.

Key action areas include:

POLICY INITIATIVES

- Create locally generated clear, high density, mixed-use graphic visions for Centres and Corridors.
- Prepare detailed secondary plans and urban design guidelines for Centres and Corridors.
- Provide strong planning guidelines for density targets, urban design and streetscaping standards.
- Direct housing, office and entertainment uses to these areas.
- Locate public, community and institutional uses in Centres and Corridors.
- Create close live/work opportunities in centres.
- Issue a Provincial Policy Statement supporting Centres and Corridors.
- Focus on the 17 Regional centres.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

- Provide higher order public transit along corridors to link centres.
- Create special streetscaping that balances transit, pedestrians and traffic.
- Create a pedestrian environment in centres.
- Protect and acquire sites and rights of way for high order transit service along corridors early in the process.



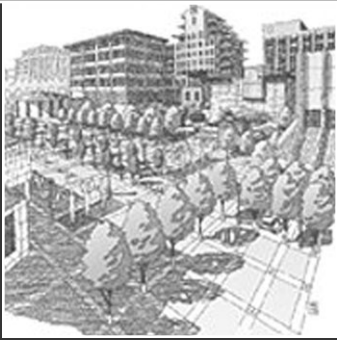
Markham Town Centre
- Concept

FINANCIAL TOOLS

- Federal and Provincial long term investment in transit.
- Transfer permanent tax room or capability to municipalities.
- Examine the development charges system and legislation in Ontario with a view to recognizing the real cost of development in centres versus suburban development.
- Revise the Federal and Provincial tax system to promote the production of rental housing.
- Expand the Municipal Capital Facilities Bylaw capability to include such areas as parking, streetscaping and transit infrastructure.
- Examine legislative changes to allow alternative funding mechanisms e.g. Tax Increment Financing.
- Reduce the multi-residential tax class to a level equal to the residential class.

SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMS

- Invest in housing initiatives in Centres and Corridors.
- Use a variety of transportation demand measures.
- Creation of partnerships through organizations like parking authorities, and development authorities as implementation vehicles.
- Promote innovative use of Planning Act provisions such as bonusing, community improvement plans and development permits.
- Direct human services facilities to Centres and Corridors.
- Create public consultation and education programs to identify the benefits of compact urban form.
- Develop monitoring and performance measurement systems for Centres and Corridors.



North York Civic Centre

SIX

SMART GROWTH: CENTRES AND CORRIDORS

A number of recent provincial and federal reports recognize the importance of Centres and Corridors in growth management.

The Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel Final Report Recommendations - April 2003

The Smart Growth panel was established in February 2002 to advise the Province on the development of a Smart Growth Strategy.

The panel's final report "**Shape of the Future**" was released in April of 2003 and contained a number of recommendations and strategic Smart Growth Directions focussing on nodes and corridors as the preferred approach to growth and settlement, to be supported by public investment in infrastructure, transit, affordable housing and through preservation of employment lands in these areas.

Canada's Urban Strategy: A Blueprint for Action - November 19, 2002

This report released by the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues calls for the Canadian Government to develop a Canadian urban strategy in partnership with provincial and municipal governments; to provide long term funding for housing, transit and sustainable infrastructure; and, to facilitate new fiscal arrangements for municipalities to ensure sustainable funding to undertake multi-year planning.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA): Canada's Primary Economic Locomotive in Need of Repairs - May 2002

(TD Bank Financial Group) notes that investment in the GTA's infrastructure, transportation networks and social housing is needed to ensure that the GTA remains the economic "locomotive running at full steam." Cooperative partnerships at all three levels of government are necessary as well as private sector involvement, which has been a key component of revitalization in American cities.²

Investing for Tomorrow: Moving Forward with Smart Growth in Central Ontario - January 2003

The Urban Development Institute of Ontario also calls for the Province to re-engage in big picture planning including long-term provincial policies and financial commitments for infrastructure and greenlands. Municipalities need to re-evaluate community building from a more holistic view. Finally, the federal government needs to become involved in urban issues again, including funding urban transit and managing major economic assets.³

² TD Bank Financial Group. "The Greater Toronto Area (GTA): Canada's Primary Economic Locomotive in Need of Repairs." May 22, 2002. Page iii.

³ Hemson Consulting for the Urban Development Institute of Ontario. "Investing for Tomorrow: Moving Forward with Smart Growth in Central Ontario". January 6, 2003. Page i.

Contents

ii	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2	ONE INTRODUCTION
3	TWO THE GTA VISION REMAINS SOUND
4	THREE GROWTH MANAGEMENT PROGRESS
5	FOUR WHAT ARE CENTRES AND CORRIDORS ?
6	FIVE UNDERSTANDING CENTRES AND CORRIDORS
8	SIX SMART GROWTH: CENTRES AND CORRIDORS
9	SEVEN KEY ACTION AREAS
10	EIGHT A CO-ORDINATED EFFORT IS REQUIRED
11	NINE MOVING FORWARD



one INTRODUCTION

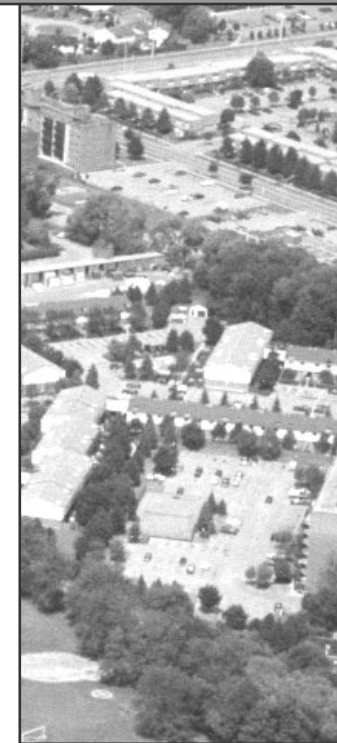
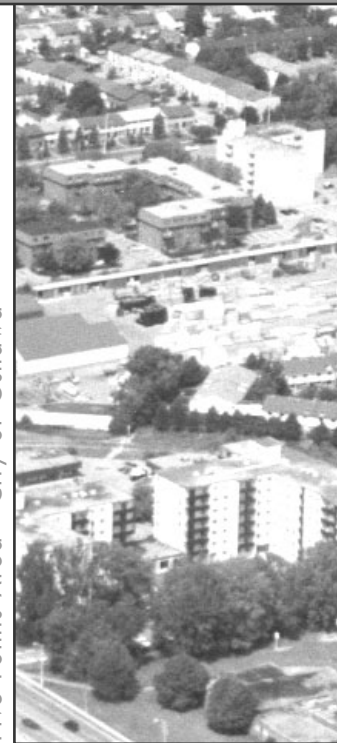
The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is Canada's largest and most dynamic urban region with a growth rate of over 100,000 people annually over the past few years. Growth is projected to continue at this pace for the next ten years and beyond. Forecasts project an additional 2 million people will be living in the area by 2031.

In order to maintain and enhance the GTA's strong economic competitiveness into the 21st century, it is critical for government to set the stage through policy, investment and private sector partnerships to encourage effective urban growth management in the form of vibrant, liveable Centres and Corridors that support transit, affordable housing, and employment.

The Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO- GTA Caucus) have, over the last 18 months, hosted a number of workshops and prepared several discussion papers, focussing on growth management and in particular, examining Centres and Corridors.

While there have been many growth management successes across the GTA, a system of Centres and Corridors has not been realized. A new, more co-ordinated, long-term approach for creating Centres and Corridors is required.

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the successes and challenges to date, the work that has been done to support and advocate sound growth management through Centres and Corridors, and to propose clear action areas to move forward on.



VISION TO REALITY: NODES AND CORRIDORS GREATER TORONTO AREA SYMPOSIUM

In October of 2002, a second symposium was held with over 100 elected officials, municipal staff and experts to build on the first symposium by identifying and discussing fiscal and financial tools that can be used to encourage and stimulate employment and residential investment within the GTA's nodes and corridors.

Consensus on further actions focussed on the need to look at existing and available financial incentives further as well as identifying new ones, including the preparation of a municipal/regional "tool box" of these financial as well as planning tools to encourage strategic investment across the GTA.

BUILDING NODES IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA: REPORT TO SMART GROWTH CENTRAL ONTARIO GRIDLOCK SUB-PANEL

In January of 2003, the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (GTA Caucus), prepared this report to the Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel to summarize accomplishments since the GTA Vision 2021 and reinforce that the Provincially endorsed Vision's nodal concept of development remains the best model to address the growth pressures facing the GTA.

In addition, the original system of 29 nodes envisioned in the 1992 Vision report were refined, through a consultative process, to a system of 17 regional-level nodes.

The conclusion of these combined efforts of the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario - Greater Toronto Area Caucus is that the nodal concept of development as endorsed by the Provincial Government in 1992 remains the model that offers the best opportunity to address the growth pressures facing this area.

Markham Highway 7 Corridor - Concept





five UNDERSTANDING CENTRES AND CORRIDORS

A number of initiatives have taken place recently that refine and move forward on the directions set out in the GTA Vision, and identify areas that require more effort, including a number of long-term commitments by the provincial and federal governments.

The RPCO-GTA Caucus has produced the following reports and symposia that have informed the process.

REFOCUSING ON GROWTH MANAGEMENT IN THE GTA AND BEYOND

In April of 2002, a co-operative workplan was developed by the GTA municipalities to implement GTA Vision 2021. It identifies what is needed to implement the Vision, and recommends refocusing efforts on a number of specific areas that continue to be growth management challenges including:

- Intensification
- Affordable housing
- Transit
- Green space protection
- New financial tools and,
- The need for increased and proactive involvement of the provincial and federal governments.

DELIVERING THE GTA VISION: CENTRES, CORRIDORS AND TRANSIT

In June of 2002, over 120 elected officials, municipal staff and experts from across the GTA met to discuss the challenges of building an urban structure of Centres and Corridors supported by a seamless, integrated transit network.

Co-hosted by the GTA municipalities and the Cities of Toronto and Hamilton, the symposium's purpose was to develop action items to implement the Centres and Corridors component of the GTA Vision.

Fourteen (14) key actions were identified as part of an overall action plan. These key actions focus on Policy Initiatives, e.g. a provincial policy statement supporting Centres and Corridors; Financial Policy Initiatives including sustained funding for public transit; Transportation, Transit and Design Initiatives including enhanced pedestrian environments and mobility in centres, and; Co-operative Initiatives, i.e. focussing on the development of centres with the greatest potential.



City of Toronto "The Avenues" - The Queensway Concept

two THE GTA VISION REMAINS SOUND

In 1992, a report entitled "**GTA 2021: The Challenge of our Future, a Working Document**" was prepared by the former Office for the Greater Toronto Area (OGTA) and endorsed by the Provincial Cabinet. The report adopted the concentrated nodal form of development as the "Vision for the GTA". The report had a number of purposes:

- To raise public awareness of issues facing the GTA
- To present a *vision* of what the GTA should look like in 2021; and
- To provide a broad outline of the process needed to achieve the vision.

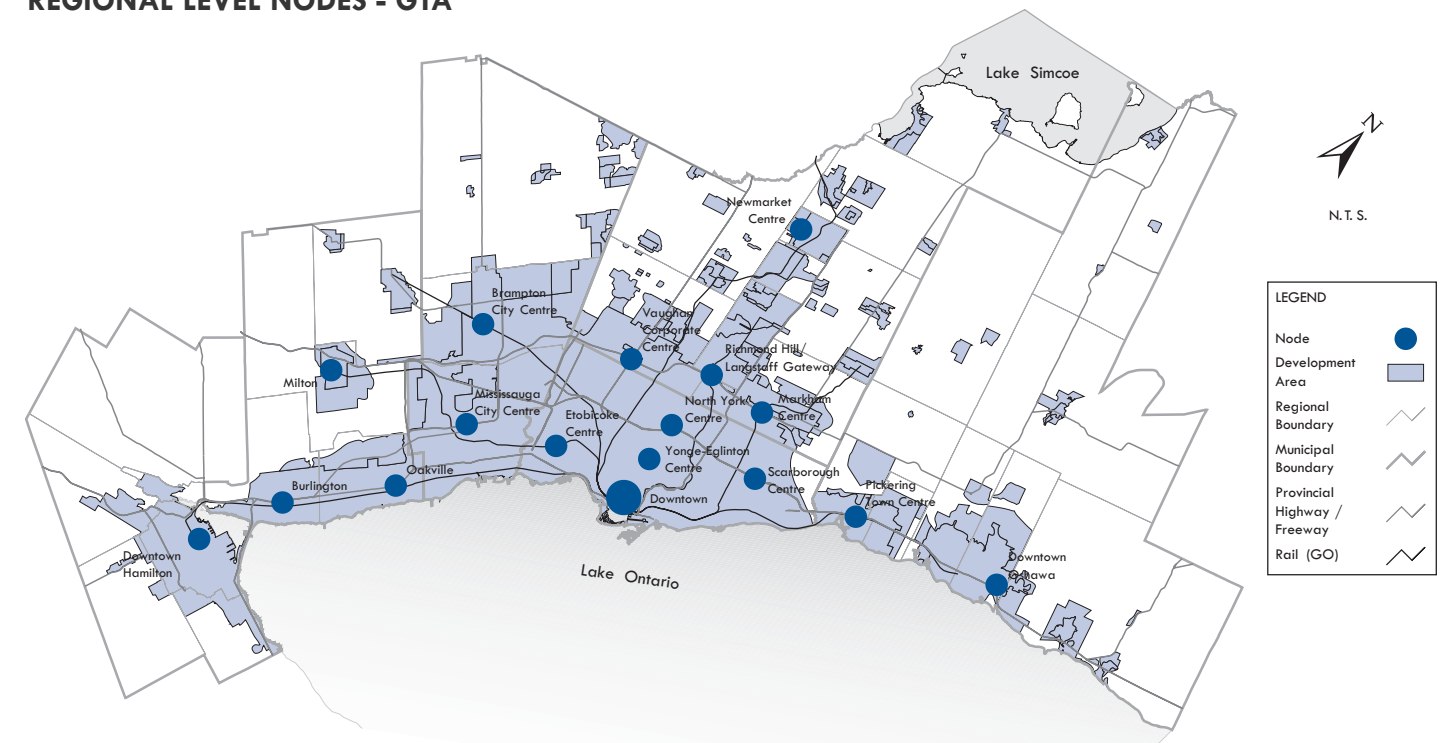
The GTA Vision emphasizes quality of life through the development of sustainable, healthy communities supported by concentrated centres and corridor growth

and a transportation system that balances transit and automobile use.

To a large degree, the GTA Vision has been integrated into the Official Plans of the four regions, the City of Toronto, area municipalities as well as the City of Hamilton. Results in achieving the type of urban structure outlined in the GTA Vision, however, have been mixed. In particular, efforts to create Centres and Corridors linked by transit have not been as successful as hoped.

The consensus continues to be that the GTA Vision model, with a reduction of the number of centres to 17, is still the best plan to address the growth pressures facing the area. A number of key steps have been taken to build and move forward on this model.

REGIONAL LEVEL NODES - GTA





North York City Centre

three GROWTH MANAGEMENT PROGRESS

There have been a number of important successes in growth management across the GTA, including the establishment of firm urban boundaries, an innovative and comprehensive community building system, and long-range infrastructure strategies and systems that protect greenlands, agricultural and rural areas.

Existing successful Centres and Corridors have achieved this through strong advanced planning and policy making, committed public investment in infrastructure and civic facilities, strong political support, followed by significant private sector involvement and investment.

Well-established examples include the Mississauga City Centre and the North York Centre with additional planned areas including the City of Toronto's "The Avenues" and the Markham Centre.

Other municipalities in the GTA are successfully following suit with investment and planning of centres including Oakville's Uptown Core, the City of Hamilton's Downtown revitalization, and the City of Pickering's downtown core development.

However, further efforts are needed in continuing to create a GTA urban structure of regional Centres and Corridors linked by an integrated transit system.

Efforts are also needed to enhance growth management tools like financial drivers such as tax structures, development charges, property taxes and subsidies. New development needs to be transit supportive. Both the Federal and Provincial governments need to be involved in a more proactive manner in helping to steer "growth management" initiatives, in particular, investment in housing and transit.

four WHAT ARE CENTRES AND CORRIDORS ?

Regional Centres (also referred to as nodes) are considered by definition to be high-density, mixed use (i.e. retail, office, entertainment, civic and residential) areas which are very well connected to the larger urban area surrounding it by a variety of transportation modes, specifically rapid transit. Centres provide liveable, walkable areas for pedestrians and have high quality urban design attributes. Centres are linked by corridors that support efficient high order transit.

In the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO- GTA Caucus) January 2003 report to the Smart Growth Panel, criteria were provided for the identification of Mixed Use Nodes (or Centres) in the GTA. The criteria are based on the direction that there should be a hierarchy of centres, including Regional Centres and local community centres.

Given the varying stages of centre development in the GTA, it may be premature to ascribe size criteria for both regional and local centres. Some of the 17 Regional Centres are well developed like North York Centre, while others are just beginning to emerge.

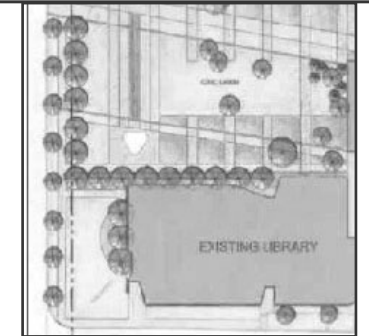
In "Urban Form: Bringing the Vision into Focus" that followed up on the GTA 2021 Vision, major corridors are defined as: "those for which some form of higher capacity transit system might be foreseen by 2031. At a minimum, this means a bus line within its own right of way and includes different forms of fixed rail transit...or subways. In more mature areas, major corridors already possess "main street" characteristics.

However, in the developing areas of the GTA, major corridors will most likely start out as major transit routes serving as links between different nodes."¹

¹Report of the Provincial-Municipal Urban Form Working Group. Urban Form: Bringing the Vision into Focus.



Uptown Oakville Core - Concept



Downtown Ajax Civic Square Concept



CRITERIA FOR CENTRES INCLUDE:

1. Centres must contain a mix of uses, such as residential, employment, institutions, commercial, office, cultural, recreational.
2. Centres must have high residential and employment densities.
3. Centres must be accessible by both inter-regional and local transit service.
4. Centres must be accessible by good roads and highways, and bicycle lanes.
5. Centres must be pedestrian-oriented and accommodate barrier free accessibility.
6. Centres are linked by mixed-use corridors.
8. Centres must have 24 hours activity.
9. Centres must exhibit architectural excellence.