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GTA WEST TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Jim Wang, Project Coordinator, Ministry of Transportation and Neil Ahmed, Project Manager, McCormick Rankin Corporation, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report dated April 19, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of the Environment be requested to expedite the GTA West Corridor and other environmental assessments that are needed to meet the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
2. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal be advised of recommendation No.1.
3. The Ministries of Transportation and Public Infrastructure Renewal be requested to work with York Region and other affected municipalities to investigate other processes and mechanisms that will allow the Province to plan and protect the GTA West Corridor within a two-year period.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Regional Council on the initiation of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) environmental assessment study of the GTA West Transportation Corridor. A presentation by the Ministry will be made at the May 2, 2007 Planning and Economic Development Committee meeting.

3. BACKGROUND

Schedule 6 of the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) (*Council Attachment 1*) as part of the Places to Grow Act provides the strategic highway network for future goods movement investment decisions in the GGH. In addition to showing future extensions of Highways 404 and 427, the Growth Plan also identifies a conceptual new transportation corridor extending from Guelph east into the City of

Vaughan. This new corridor is shown as being south of the Oak Ridges Moraine within York Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The following sub-sections describe the status of the Provincial project and its impacts on other initiatives in York Region.

4.1 Status of the GTA West Corridor EA

The Province initiated this EA late in 2006 when it awarded a contract to McCormick Rankin to conduct the EA study. The EA study will follow the individual environmental assessment process for Provincial projects. As such, the Terms of Reference for the actual environmental assessment work must be developed and approved by the Ministry of the Environment.

A draft set of Terms of Reference for the study has been completed and circulated to affected stakeholders for comments. Staff from the Planning and Transportation and Works departments will be reviewing and commenting on it.

As part of the release of the draft set of Terms of Reference for the GTA West Corridor EA, MTO has conducted a series of public information centres with one meeting in Woodbridge in the City of Vaughan on April 18, 2007.

4.2 Other Provincial Highway Projects in York Region

There are a number of Provincial highway environmental assessment, design and construction projects that are on-going in York Region. They are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Provincial Highway Projects in York Region

Highway	Project Description
GTA West Corridor	Environmental assessment study of new corridor from Vaughan to Guelph.
Highway 404 extension	Detailed design and construction of the segment from Green Lane to Ravenshoe Road with target completion of 2012.
Highway 427 extension	Environmental assessment study for the segment from Highway 7 north to a point south of the Oak Ridges Moraine.
Highway 400	Preliminary design for a widening from Teston Road to King Road potentially for HOV lanes.

Highway 404	Construction of a northbound HOV lane from Highway 401 to the Beaver Creek, just north of Highway 7 to be opened in 2007.
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Of these projects, only the Highway 427 project will have a direct impact on the GTA West Corridor EA. The future Highway 427 extension could potentially be the eastern terminus of the GTA West Corridor. Correspondingly, the GTA West Corridor could potentially be the northern terminus of the Highway 427 extension. In either case, if both the GTA West Corridor and Highway 427 extension are approved, there will be an interchange between these two proposed highways.

4.3 Effect on Highway 400 North Employment Lands

The City of Vaughan has been taking steps to define land use designations for the land area between Weston Road and Jane Street from Teston Road to the northern boundary of the city. This area is called the Highway 400 North Employment Lands.

In the Growth Plan for the GGH, the east terminus of the conceptual GTA West Corridor is not clearly defined and appears to end at the vicinity of the CP Rail Intermodal Yard in Vaughan. However, with the support of York Region and due to the uncertain nature of the Highway 427 extension project, MTO has agreed to set the primary study area for the GTA West Corridor as extending from Highway 400 westward. That is, the future GTA West Corridor could potentially have an east terminus interchange with Highway 400.

As there are no opportunities south of Teston Road and to stay generally south of the Oak Ridges Moraine, potential locations for a new Highway 400 interchange can only be found in the area currently under study in the Highway 400 North Employment Lands. Therefore, staff are working with the City of Vaughan to protect a corridor for the GTA West Corridor and property for a new interchange with Highway 400 in the North Employment Lands.

4.4 Affected York Region Transportation Initiatives

York Region is conducting a Request for Proposal process to initiate the Western Vaughan individual environmental assessment study. This large IEA will cover an area between Highway 400 and Highway 50 from Highway 407 to Teston Road. It will examine north-south and east-west transportation needs given the elimination of the Pine Valley Drive extension through the Boyd Conservation Area.

In cooperation with the Region of Peel and the City of Brampton, a process is underway to better define the east-west arterial connections to the future Highway 427 extension. These arterial connections will be needed to support employment and residential lands proposed in Brampton and in Vaughan on both sides of the boundary. Loosely called the

Highway 427/50 Area Network study, this effort is being coordinated with MTO's Highway 427 extension EA study.

Staff will work with MTO to ensure that the GTA West Corridor EA take into account these municipal studies with the objective of creating a comprehensive, effective and efficient transportation network in the western part of Vaughan.

4.5 Timelines

A typical Provincial highway EA will take approximately 8 years to complete. Given the growth environment in York Region and the Greater Toronto Area and the growth demands in York Region projected by the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, it would be difficult for York Region and the City of Vaughan to fend off pressures to develop the remaining lands in the northern parts of Vaughan over the next 8 years. The situation is similar in the Region of Peel.

What it means is that potentially more viable alignment alternatives may be eliminated for the GTA West Corridor simply because the current process being used is too long. A more reasonable timeframe is two years.

Therefore, in order to protect a reasonable swath of land for the GTA West Corridor in a more timely manner, changing the study design of the EA study or making use of other processes and mechanisms must be investigated.

A case in point is the Parkway Belt West, which houses Highway 407, a corridor for a future transitway and space for hydro and other utility corridors. By the time Highway 407 was built in 1996, development had reached points much further north. If the Province had followed an EA process to protect land for these facilities, it is very likely that the Parkway Belt would not be at the current location and be of the current width.

Changing the study design, for instance, to bring forward the environmental constraints mapping component would be a big step towards identifying land within the primary study area that can be released for development. Further, this work could be prioritised such that the areas experiencing the highest development pressures like the City of Vaughan are analysed first.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report does not have any direct financial impacts.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The identification and protection for this highway corridor will provide the framework on which development plans in the vicinity of this corridor in the City of Vaughan and King Township can be based.

Staff from the City of Vaughan and King Township are also involved in this study and have participated in project meetings.

7. CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Transportation has initiated an environmental assessment study to identify and protect for a transportation corridor, the GTA West Corridor, from Guelph east to the City of Vaughan. The eastern terminus of this new highway corridor is expected to be Highway 400. A draft set of Terms of Reference for the EA has been prepared and is under review. Staff is working with the Ministry to help expedite the project through coordination with York Region and City of Vaughan initiatives such as the Highway 400 North Employment Lands studies, the Western Vaughan transportation improvements IEA and the Highway 427/50 Area Network study. An earlier completion of the GTA West Corridor EA will facilitate an earlier definition of land use designations in the northern part of Vaughan.

Staff is recommending that MTO make changes to the study design or investigate alternative processes or mechanisms to allow the identification of land parcels within the primary study area not needed for the GTA West Corridor and, therefore, land parcels that can be released for development.

For more information on this report, please contact Loy Cheah, Manager, Transportation Planning at 905-830-4444 ext. 5024 or loy.cheah@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)