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PLACES TO GROW - SIMCOE AREA: A STRATEGIC VISION FOR GROWTH - ENVIRONMENTAL BILL OF RIGHTS REGISTRY POSTING 010-6860 REGIONAL COMMENTS

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated July 29, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services with the following additional Recommendation No. 10:

- 10. The Commissioner of Planning and Development Services respond further to the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure regarding the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry Posting 010-6860 to specifically address the Ontario Municipal Board resolution regarding Official Plan Amendment No. 15 in the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, and report back to Committee.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse staff comments made in response to the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry posting 010-6860 on Places to Grow – Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth, June 2009.
2. The Province implement the *Growth Plan* equitably and ensure that all upper- and lower-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are subject to the same policies and regulations as contained in the *Growth Plan* and the *Places to Grow Act*.
3. The Province assess the impact on the GTA regions including York Region, resulting from the two strategic employment area provincial designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil. Council requests that the Province undertake this assessment and circulate to York Region and the other GTA regions prior to the approval and finalization of the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.
4. The Province commit to the following transportation capacity improvements to accommodate the forecasted growth in the Simcoe area and address issues of increasing traffic congestion:
 - a. Highway 404, 427 and Bradford Bypass expansions
 - b. Twelve new or modified interchanges and widenings for 400 series highways
 - c. HOV lanes on 400 series highways
 - d. Cross-boundary and boundary road improvements

- Further, the Provincial commitment to build these infrastructure projects be included with a schedule reflecting early construction in the area transportation study proposed in the Simcoe Growth Vision as well as the proposed Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.
5. The Minister of the Environment clarifies how the principles in the Simcoe Growth Vision will address the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and specifically how servicing this growth will impact the carrying capacity of Lake Simcoe for approved and planned growth in the Lake Simcoe Watershed in York Region.
 6. The Province require that the construction and/or operation of all existing water and proposed wastewater treatment facilities in the Lake Simcoe Watershed be held to the same high standard of environmental responsibility and performance as those in York Region..
 7. The Regional Clerk forward this report and *Attachment 1* to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for further consideration in resolving the Provincial appeal to *ROPA 52 – Highway 400 Employment Lands* in the City of Vaughan.
 8. Regional staff continue to monitor and comment on the Places to Grow – Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth initiative, including progress on the proposed Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.
 9. The Regional Clerk circulate this report and *Attachment 1* to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, the Minister of the Environment, York Region Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), the Clerks of Simcoe County, the City of Barrie and the City of Orillia and the local municipalities in York Region.

2. PURPOSE

This report advises Council of staff comments made in response to the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry posting 010-6860 on *Places to Grow – Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth*, June 2009, prior to the EBR deadline of September 2, 2009. These comments are appended to this staff report as *Attachment 1*.

3. BACKGROUND

The Province initiates a Strategic Growth Vision for the Simcoe area under the *Growth Plan*

In June 2009, the Province released a growth strategy for the Simcoe area entitled, “*Places to Grow – Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth*” (“Simcoe Growth

Vision”). The Simcoe area includes the County of Simcoe, the City of Barrie and the City of Orillia. The key components of the Simcoe Growth Vision are as follows:

- Pursuant to the process set out in the *Places to Grow Act, 2005*, the Province will prepare and propose a Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.
- A total of 667,000 residents and 254,000 jobs are forecasted for the Simcoe area in the *Growth Plan*. These figures represent growth of approximately 229,900 residents and 73,300 jobs.
- Growth will be reallocated to five urban nodes in Alliston, Barrie, Bradford, Collingwood and Orillia.
- An adjustment to the Barrie-Innisfil municipal boundary proposes approximately 2,293 hectares be added to the City of Barrie.
- Two strategic employment areas are proposed along Highway 400 in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil, and have subsequently been endorsed.
- Emphasis on identifying and supporting strategic employment areas for future high quality manufacturing and industrial jobs so that residents can live and work in the Simcoe area, without having to commute long distances.

In comments submitted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry on September 2, 2009, staff highlighted key issues in the Simcoe Growth Vision that could impact York Region. These issues are highlighted in the following section and discussed in detail in *Attachment 1*.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Regional staff comments on the Simcoe Growth Vision are divided into three theme areas:

- Transportation and Traffic Planning
- Levelling the Planning Context
- Impacts on the Lake Simcoe Watershed

TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC PLANNING

Investment in transportation infrastructure is urgently required particularly the 400-series highway network

There are only three transportation connections between the Simcoe area and York Region: Yonge Street, Highway 400 and Highway 27. The lack of additional capacity improvements has resulted in traffic congestion and traffic operational problems on Regional and local municipal roads in the Towns of Newmarket and East Gwillimbury and the Township of King. The additional traffic infiltration will also result in an increased demand for emergency services, police and fire should a higher rate of vehicular incidents occur on York Region roads.

The Township of King, whose municipality Highway 400 traverses, has noted that *"continued pressure on a slow growth municipality with a part time Fire Department may necessitate a significant increase in service with associated costs with no corresponding increase in assessment which traditionally pays for such service. General estimates to move to just one full time shift per week, as a result of increased need to respond, would result in a 10 fold increase in costs for this municipality."*

Additional east-west access is also needed to other parts of the Greater Toronto Area to provide further distribution of truck traffic on the provincial expressway network. Otherwise, there will be an increased negative impact on York Region roads resulting from the east-west traffic trying to get to Highway 404.

York Region has already taken significant steps to improve the transportation system in this area at an estimated cost of \$42 million. These improvements include:

- Construction of a 4-lane high capacity arterial connection between Highways 400 and 404 using Highway 9, Bathurst Street and Green Lane to serve as an interim east-west facility prior to the construction of the Bradford By-Pass.
- Established conditions for the construction of a high capacity arterial connection through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Transportation for the extension of Highway 404 to Green Lane in exchange for the transfer of Highway 9 east of Highway 400 to York Region.
- Major improvements to several arterial to arterial road intersections.

Staff reiterate York Region Council's adopted recommendations 2.3 and 2.4 in Clause 6 of Report No. 1 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee *"Places to Grow – Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe November 2005"*, January 2006 which included the following:

"As part of the Provincial commitment to infrastructure, the Province immediately commit to funding arrangements for the following critical road and transit infrastructure projects in York Region. These infrastructure projects included:

- Highway 404, 427 and Bradford Bypass expansions
- Twelve new or modified interchanges and widenings for 400 series highways
- HOV lanes on 400 series highways
- Cross-boundary and boundary road improvements."

Regional staff stress the urgency to move forward with the early construction of these infrastructure improvements simultaneously given the Regional and Simcoe area growth projections and the recently endorsed provincial employment area designations. Regional staff support the Province in including these infrastructure commitments in the area transportation study proposed in the Simcoe Growth Vision and the proposed Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan* with a schedule of early construction.

Leapfrogging of development north of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt Plan will result in increased traffic infiltration into York Region from the Simcoe area

Regional Council, in adopting Recommendation 7 of Clause 6 of Report No. 1 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee “*Places to Grow – Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe November 2005*”, January 2006, has been clear and consistent that the *Growth Plan* should prevent “leap-frogging” of development north of the Greenbelt into Simcoe County.

With the increased forecasted population and employment growth in the Simcoe area, there will be increased travel from the Simcoe area to and through York Region. Increased traffic infiltration into York Region will exacerbate existing issues of congestion, the cost of maintaining York Region roads for increased inter-regional traffic and the provision of emergency services. While the recent restoration of GO Rail services to Barrie will provide some relief, clearly, additional traffic capacity between the Simcoe area and York Region needs to be provided before 2031.

In comments on the *Greenbelt* and *Growth Plan*, York Region Council requested that the Province undertake a formal comprehensive review to address the issue of leapfrog development. At this time, Regional staff have not received an update on the status of this comprehensive review. As well, the impacts on York Region resulting from the Simcoe Growth Vision initiative are not known.

LEVELLING THE PLANNING CONTEXT

The *Growth Plan* Policies and Growth Allocations should apply to the Simcoe area

The 2031 growth allocations for the *Growth Plan* for the Simcoe area did not include the two proposed provincial strategic employment area designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil. As a result of these additional designations, Regional staff believe that there may be an over-supply of employment lands in the Simcoe area. The Province has repeatedly emphasized that GTA regions are not permitted to revise their respective 2031 growth allocations contained in the *Growth Plan*. However, if the Province is ensuring that these strategically located employment lands remain available for employment uses beyond 2031, then the Region trusts that the same ability to designate lands for employment purposes beyond the *Growth Plan* horizon will be afforded York Region in its Draft Official Plan currently under review.

Staff also emphasize that employment area designations should be contiguous with the urban boundary and integrated into the overall community fabric. This approach is in keeping not only with Regional policy, but also with the *Growth Plan*’s vision of complete communities, transit and stronger live-work relationships.

New Provincial employment area designations may compete with employment from York Region

The possible over-supply of employment lands in the Simcoe area resulting from the new employment area designations may impact York Region's ability to meet its own 2031 employment forecast. The Neptis Foundation's report, "*Simcoe County: The New Growth Frontier*", May 2004 stated that the "low cost of acquiring or optioning rural land in Simcoe relative to elsewhere is attractive to developers". Regional staff agree that the Simcoe area may have the competitive advantage over York Region in so far as land costs are concerned. York Region's supply adjacent to the 400 series highways is constrained by both the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*.

A review of land sales from 2004 to 2008 indicates that industrial land values have increased by 70% from approximately \$182,000 per hectare to \$310,000 per hectare. According to Colliers International, Spring 2008, land values in the GTA North are higher than the total GTA. The GTA North comprises of the municipalities of Aurora, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

As a result, developers and employers seeking lower land prices are likely to gravitate to the new provincial employment area designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil. This trend may compete with employment growth from York Region where significant investments in infrastructure have already been made.

Regional staff request that the impact on the GTA regions including York Region resulting from the new Provincial employment area designations be assessed.

In addition, it is inconsistent that the Province would approve two employment areas in the Simcoe area while appealing *York Region Regional Official Plan Amendment 52 – Highway 400 Employment Lands* in the City of Vaughan. The Province appealed ROPA 52 on the basis that a municipal comprehensive review was not conducted in regards to the proposed ROPA 52 lands and that the GTA West Corridor alignment was not identified. Since the Province's appeal, the Region has completed the municipal comprehensive review and the draft ROP identifies the GTA West Corridor. Also, the Region supports having detailed policies in the Secondary Plan (Vaughan OPA 637) that protect lands for the proposed GTA West Corridor.

Ensure that *the Growth Plan* is implemented equitably across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and extend the *Greenbelt Plan* planning controls and policies to the Simcoe area

The Region trusts that the Province is taking a leadership role in the Greater Golden Horseshoe by ensuring that all upper- and lower-tier municipalities are subject to the same policies and regulations contained in *the Growth Plan* and *the Places to Grow Act*.

The Simcoe area contains significant areas of Provincial and Regional Areas of Scientific Interest (ANSIs), Provincially and locally significant wetlands, woodlands, Class 1, 2 and 3 and organic soils, linkages, agricultural lands and aggregate resources. In comments on the *Greenbelt Plan* and the draft Simcoe County Official Plan, York Region Council stressed that Simcoe County should be subject to the same environmental planning policies set out in the *Greenbelt Plan*. Regional staff recommends that this be reflected in the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan* by the extension of the Greenbelt Legislation and Plan to include the Simcoe area.

IMPACTS ON THE LAKE SIMCOE WATERSHED

The sustainability of Lake Simcoe could be adversely affected by increased growth in the Simcoe area

Regional staff commends the Province in undertaking a Simcoe area infrastructure plan, including a strategy for water and wastewater that includes mechanisms for coordinating service delivery and incorporating green solutions.

There is however a concern that the sustainability of Lake Simcoe could be adversely affected by increased growth in the Simcoe area through increased nutrient and phosphorous loading and the inability of Lake Simcoe to assimilate waste. As a result, oxygen levels in Lake Simcoe could be reduced thereby interfering with the reproductive cycle of the various species of coldwater fish native to Lake Simcoe.

The *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* (LSPP) indicates that the major contributors of phosphorus within the Lake Simcoe Watershed are atmospheric deposition (33%) and urban and rural inflow drainage (37%). The LSPP calls for a number of water quality initiatives including a phosphorous reduction strategy that contains loading targets and sewage treatment plant caps. Regional staff believes that future development and infrastructure investment in the Simcoe area, particularly the two new employment areas in Bradford and Innisfil, may undermine the intent behind maximum phosphorous assignments for watershed municipalities and impact the long-term ecological health of Lake Simcoe.

York Region has a long and consistent history of protection and study of Lake Simcoe through the funding of the Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and funding and participation on the Lake Simcoe Environmental Management Strategy (LSEMS). In addition, the Region is consistently held to high standards in planning and servicing that includes:

- A commitment to utilizing “drinking water quality” equivalent membrane treatment technology at the Region’s Keswick Water Pollution Control Plant in addition to other environmental enhancements already implemented such as accreditation to the ISO 14001 environmental management system standard.

- Continuously operating our Water Pollution Control Plants at/or beyond compliance to ensure enhanced protection of Lake Simcoe.

It is probable that the Bradford and Innisfil employment areas may partially lie within the Lake Simcoe Basin. As well, staff conversations with the LRSCA indicate that the Bradford employment area will be serviced by the Bradford Sewage Treatment Plant which discharges into Lake Simcoe.

York Region is currently undertaking an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the expansion of the Sutton WPCP and Regional staff has been negotiating new phosphorus limits with MOE staff. These negotiations have already delayed the current EA process and plant expansion. In order to achieve the new phosphorus limits required by MOE through the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and Ontario Regulation 60/08, significant capital investment will be required. Furthermore, the new phosphorus limits proposed by MOE will reduce the approved service population for the Sutton WPCP expansion.

Sewage treatment plant inputs of phosphorus to Lake Simcoe represent only a small percentage of total phosphorus inputs. York Region is incurring significant extra costs due to approval delays and the high standard of sewage treatment in these facilities. Regional staff trusts that the Province will ensure that water and wastewater treatment facilities in the balance of the Lake Simcoe Watershed will be held to the same high standards in environmental responsibility and performance as York Region is.

The Region further supports the Province in ensuring upfront servicing prior to development approvals that are in conformity with *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan*. However, Regional staff also request clarification on how the principles in the Simcoe Growth Vision will address the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and *Lake Simcoe Protection Act*. Specifically, it is important to understand how implementation of this Vision will impact the carrying capacity of Lake Simcoe for approved and planned growth in the Lake Simcoe Watershed in York Region. It is unclear how additional servicing with discharge to Lake Simcoe can be accommodated given the need to reduce existing annual phosphorus loading to that required by the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan*.

SUMMARY OF YORK REGION RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, York Region staff recommended the following actions in making the EBR submission:

1. The Province implement the *Growth Plan* equitably and ensure that all upper- and lower-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are subject to the same policies and regulations as contained in the *Growth Plan* and the *Places to Grow Act*.
2. The Province assess the impact on the GTA regions including York Region, resulting from the two strategic employment area provincial designations in Bradford West

Gwillimbury and Innisfil. Regional staff request that this assessment be undertaken and circulated to York Region and the other GTA regions prior to the approval and finalization of the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.

3. The Province commit to the following transportation capacity improvements to accommodate the forecasted growth in the Simcoe area and address issues of increasing traffic congestion:
 - a. Highway 404, 427 and Bradford Bypass expansions
 - b. Twelve new or modified interchanges and widenings for 400 series highways
 - c. HOV lanes on 400 series highways
 - d. Cross-boundary and boundary road improvements.

Regional staff request the Provincial commitment to build these infrastructure projects be included with a schedule reflecting early construction in the area transportation study proposed in the Simcoe Growth Vision, as well as, the proposed the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.

4. The Minister of the Environment clarifies how the principles in the Simcoe Growth Vision will address the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and specifically how servicing this growth will impact the carrying capacity of Lake Simcoe for approved and planned growth in the Lake Simcoe Watershed in York Region.
5. The Province require that the construction and/or operation of all existing water and proposed wastewater treatment facilities in the Lake Simcoe Watershed be held to the same high standard of environmental responsibility and performance as those in York Region..
6. The Regional Clerk forward the Region's EBR submission to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for further consideration in resolving the Provincial appeal of *ROPA 52 – Highway 400 Employment Lands* in the City of Vaughan. It should be recognized that the Region has completed its municipal comprehensive review, identified the GTA West Corridor in its draft ROP, and supports detailed policies in the Secondary Plan (Vaughan OPA 637) that protect lands for the proposed GTA West Corridor.

Relationship to Vision 2026

This staff report supports a number of Vision 2026 goal areas, including Managed and Balanced Growth, Infrastructure for a Growing Region, A Vibrant Economy, Enhanced Environment, and Responding to the Needs of our Residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), “The Big Move” and the MoveOntario 2020 plan consist of a number of infrastructure commitments to support Provincial priorities and growth and development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. These infrastructure strategies need to be in place immediately in order to support the kind of growth the Province is requiring in the *Growth Plan*.

As previously mentioned, the Region has already invested an estimated \$42 million to improve the transportation system in the northern part of the Region. In addition, the 10-year capital plan identifies a number of capacity improvements in the area between Newmarket and Keswick. The plan is premised on the assumption of Provincial commitment to improve and extend the 400-series network.

Staff has estimated that, in the absence of the Bradford Bypass as a 4-lane expressway, the equivalent capacity of 10 new arterial roads would be required to accommodate increased travel through and destined for the Region. This translates into approximately 8,000 more vehicles infiltrating regional and local roads during a typical morning peak period which would further escalate the costs and issues associated with congestion, operations and the provision of emergency services.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Regional staff has circulated the EBR posting submission to the local municipalities for comment. The Township of King has included comments as part of the Region’s submission. Town of Georgina, the Town of East Gwillimbury and Township of King staff have expressed support for Regional comments on the Simcoe Growth Vision EBR submission.

7. CONCLUSION

In June 2009, the Province released a growth strategy for the Simcoe area entitled, “*Places to Grow – Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth*” (“Simcoe Growth Vision”). The Province intends to prepare and propose a Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*. Regional staff comments to the Province submitted on the Environmental Bill Registry Posting 010-6860 include:

- An immediate need for the Bradford By-pass, Highway 404 and 427 extensions and capacity improvements to the existing 400 series highways to address the future increase of traffic infiltration from the Simcoe area onto the York Region road network.

- Possible over-supply of employment lands beyond the 2031 horizon of the *Growth Plan* with the strategic employment area designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil. The Province has stated that revisions to the 2031 growth allocation are not permitted for Greater Toronto Area regions. This possible over-supply may compete with the Region's employment growth and impact the ability for the Region to meet its own 2031 forecast.
- A request that the Region's EBR submission be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for further consideration in resolving their appeal of *ROPA 52 – Highway 400 Employment Lands* in the City of Vaughan. It should be recognized that since the Provincial appeal to ROPA 52, the Region has completed its municipal comprehensive review, identified the GTA West Corridor in its draft ROP and support policies in the Secondary Plan (Vaughan OPA 637) that protect lands for the proposed GTA West Corridor.
- The Minister of the Environment clarify how the principles in the Simcoe Growth Vision will address the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan*.

Staff will continue to monitor and comment on the progress of the Growth Plan Simcoe area-specific amendment and update Council on a regular basis.

For more information on this report, please contact Barbara Jeffrey, Manager of Land-Use Policy and Environment, at 905-830-4444 x1526 or John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning, at Ext. 1525.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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



Planning and Development Services Department

September 2, 2009

Ms. Tija Dirks
Director
Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure
Ontario Growth Secretariat
Growth Policy, Planning and Analysis
Planning and Analysis
777 Bay Street, 4th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Dear Ms. Dirks:

Re: York Region Comments on *Places to Grow Simcoe area: A Strategic Vision for Growth* – EBR Posting 010-6860

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Places to Grow document, *Simcoe area: A Strategic Vision for Growth* ("Simcoe Growth Vision") that was released in June 2009. The following letter expresses the key issues regarding the Simcoe Growth Vision as they relate to York Region. York Region comments can be divided into three main theme areas:

- Transportation and Traffic Planning;
- Levelling the Planning Context in South Central Ontario; and,
- Impacts on the Lake Simcoe Watershed.

Detailed comments pertaining to each of these main theme areas are provided below.

Transportation and Traffic Planning

1. Investment in transportation infrastructure is required particularly the 400-series highway.

In comments on the *Growth Plan*, York Region Council had repeatedly expressed the opinion that investment in transportation infrastructure was required to accommodate the Provincial 2031 growth allocations. Critical road investments needed include extending Highways 404 and 427, constructing the Bradford By-pass and capacity improvements to the existing 400-series highways. York Region Council has taken the position that the Bradford By-pass extension is an immediate need.

There are only three transportation connections between the Simcoe area and York Region: Yonge Street, Highway 400 and Highway 27. In addition, the existing discontinuities in the road network in this area, as represented by the abrupt ending of Highway 404 at Green Lane and the lack of a highway connection between Highway 400 and 404, creates inefficient travel patterns and results in unnecessary and incompatible travel on Regional and local municipal roads. This is manifested in traffic congestion and traffic operational problems on Regional and local municipal roads north of the Towns of Newmarket and East Gwillimbury and the Township of King. The additional traffic infiltration will also result in an increased demand for emergency services, police and fire should a higher rate of vehicular incidents occur on York Region roads.

The Township of King, whose municipality Highway 400 traverses, has noted that "*continued pressure on a slow growth municipality with a part time Fire Department may necessitate a significant increase in service with associated costs with no corresponding increase in assessment which traditionally pays for such service. General estimates to move to just one full time shift per week, as a result of increased need to respond, would result in a 10 fold increase in costs for this municipality.*"

Additional east-west access is also needed to other parts of the Greater Toronto Area to provide further distribution of truck traffic on the provincial expressway network. Otherwise, there will be an increased negative impact on York Region roads resulting from the east-west traffic trying to get to Highway 404.

York Region has already taken significant steps to improve the transportation system in this area. They include:

- Construction of a 4-lane high capacity arterial connection between Highways 400 and 404 using Highway 9, Bathurst Street and Green Lane to serve as an interim east-west facility prior to the construction of the Bradford By-Pass;
- Established conditions for the construction of this high capacity arterial connection through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Transportation for the extension of Highway 404 to Green Lane in exchange for the transfer of Highway 9 east of Highway 400 to York Region; and,
- Major improvements to several arterial to arterial road intersections.

The cost to York Region from these initiatives was estimated at \$42 million.

In addition, York Region has programmed a number of road improvements to be carried out over the next 10 years to provide additional capacity to improve the transportation network in the area between Newmarket and Keswick. The projects in the 10-year road capital plan include:

- Bathurst Street from Green Lane to Yonge Street;
- Second Concession from Green Lane to Doane Road;
- Queesville Sideroad from Woodbine Avenue to Bathurst Street;
- Doane Road from Woodbine Avenue to Old Yonge Street, including an interchange with the extension of Highway 404; and,
- Highway 9 – Bathurst Street intersection.

York Region Council's adopted recommendation 2.3 and 2.4 in Clause 6 of Report No. 1 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee "*Places to Grow – Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe November 2005*", January 2006 states that:

As part of the Provincial commitment to infrastructure, the Province immediately commit to funding arrangements for the following critical road and transit infrastructure projects in York Region:

1. *A rapid transit system in all four York Region Corridors*
2. *Full funding of GO Transit Expansion Plan*
3. *Highway 404, 427 and Bradford Bypass expansions*
4. *Twelve new or modified interchanges and widenings for 400 series highways*
5. *HOV lanes on 400 series highways*
6. *Support and funding for Travel Demand Management and commuter parking lots*
7. *Cross-boundary and boundary road improvements*

Regional staff would like to reiterate this Council resolution with particular attention to items 3, 4, 5 and 7. Regional staff stress the urgency to move forward with the early construction of these infrastructure improvements simultaneously given the York Region and Simcoe area growth projections and the recently endorsed provincial employment area designations. Regional staff also support the Province in including these infrastructure commitments with a schedule reflecting early construction in the area transportation study proposed in the Simcoe Growth Vision and the proposed Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.

2. Leapfrogging of development north of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt Plan area will result in increased traffic infiltration into York Region from the Simcoe area.

Regional Council, in adopting Recommendation 7 of Clause 6 of Report No. 1 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee "*Places to Grow – Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe November 2005*", January 2006, has been clear and consistent that the *Growth Plan* should prevent "leap-frogging" of development north of the Greenbelt into Simcoe County.

With the increased forecasted population and employment growth in the Simcoe area, future conditions dictate that there will be increased travel from the Simcoe area to and through York Region for work, recreational and institutional needs. Currently, there are only three transportation connections between the Simcoe area and York Region: Yonge Street, Highway 400 and Highway 27. All three routes are congested during peak times today. In 2006, approximately 22,500 person trips entered York Region during a typical morning peak period from the Simcoe area.

Increased traffic infiltration into York Region will exacerbate existing issues of congestion, the cost of maintaining York Region roads from increased inter-regional traffic and the costs of providing emergency services. While the recent restoration of GO Rail services to Barrie will provide some relief, clearly, additional traffic capacity between the Simcoe area and York Region needs to be provided before 2031.

In comments on the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Growth Plan*, York Region Council had requested that the Province undertake a formal comprehensive review, similar to the process found the Greater Toronto Area, to address the issue of development “leap-frogging” north to Simcoe County. As well, this review was to include all elements of the *Greenbelt Plan* and should specifically address the impact on York Region. At this time, Regional staff have not received an update on the status of this comprehensive review. As well, the impacts on York Region resulting from the Simcoe Growth Vision initiative are not known.

Levelling the Planning Context

3. The *Growth Plan* Policies and Growth Allocations should apply to the Simcoe area.

According to the 2031 growth allocations contained in the *Growth Plan*, the Simcoe area is anticipated to receive 667,000 residents and 254,000 jobs. In addition, the Province has designated two new strategic employment areas in Bradford-West Gwillimbury and Innisfil as part of the Simcoe Growth Vision. It is York Region’s understanding that the 2031 *Growth Plan* employment forecasts for the Simcoe area did not include employment uses in these two new provincial employment area designations. As a result, Regional staff believes that there may be an over-supply of employment lands in the Simcoe area.

In discussions with York Region on the updated *York Region Official Plan*, the Province repeatedly emphasized that Greater Toronto Area regions are not permitted to revise their respective 2031 growth allocations contained in the *Growth Plan*. In fact, as a result of this Provincial position, the Region’s Draft Official Plan employment forecast was decreased from our preferred forecast level of 798,800 to 780,300 to conform with the approved *Growth Plan* employment forecast. If this *Growth Plan* forecast is to be considered fixed, then it must be applied equitably throughout the Growth Plan area, including the Simcoe area. Regional staff takes issue with the Province appearing to circumvent its own legislation and potentially permitting an over-designation of employment lands in the Simcoe area.

If, by its decisions on the Simcoe area employment lands, the Province is ensuring that these strategically located lands remain available for employment uses beyond 2031, then the Region trusts that the same ability to designate lands for employment purposes beyond the *Growth Plan* horizon will be afforded York Region in its Draft Official Plan currently under review.

Regional staff support employment area designations that are contiguous with the urban boundary and integrated into the overall community fabric. This approach is in keeping with not only Regional policy but also the *Growth Plan*’s vision of complete communities, transit and stronger live-work relationships.

4. New Provincial employment area designations may compete with employment from York Region.

As mentioned previously, the Growth Plan population and employment 2031 growth allocations were predicated without the inclusion of the two new provincial employment area designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil proposed in the Simcoe Growth Vision. This possible over-supply of employment lands in the Simcoe area may impact York Region's ability to meet its own 2031 employment forecast.

The Neptis Foundation's report, "Simcoe County: The new Growth Frontier", May 2004 concluded that the "low cost of acquiring or optioning rural land in Simcoe relative to elsewhere is attractive to developers". Regional staff agree that the Simcoe area may have the competitive advantage over York Region in so far as land costs are concerned. York Region's supply adjacent to the 400 series highways is constrained by both the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*.

A review of land sales from 2004 to 2008 indicates that industrial land values have increased by 70% from approximately \$182,000 per hectare to \$310,000 per hectare. According to Colliers International, Spring 2008, land values in the GTA North are higher than the total GTA. The GTA North comprises of the municipalities of Aurora, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

As a result, developers and employers seeking lower land prices are likely to gravitate to the new provincial employment area designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil. This trend may compete with employment growth from York Region where significant investments in infrastructure has already been made.

Regional staff request that the impact on GTA regions including York Region resulting from the new Provincial employment area designations in the Simcoe area be assessed.

In addition, it is inconsistent that the Province would approve two employment areas in the Simcoe area while, at the same time, appeal *York Region Regional Official Plan Amendment 52 – Highway 400 Employment Lands* in the City of Vaughan. The Province appealed ROPA 52 on the basis that a municipal comprehensive review was not conducted in regards to the proposed ROPA 52 lands and that the GTA West Corridor alignment was not identified. Since the Province's appeal, the Region has completed the municipal comprehensive review and the draft ROP identifies the GTA West Corridor. Also, the Region supports having detailed policies in the Secondary Plan (Vaughan OPA 637) that protect lands for the proposed GTA West Corridor.

Regional staff request that this EBR submission be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for further consideration in resolving the appeal to ROPA 52.

5. Ensure that *the Growth Plan* is implemented equitably across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and extend the *Greenbelt Plan* planning controls and policies to the Simcoe area.

The Region trusts that the Province is taking a leadership role in levelling the planning context in the Greater Golden Horseshoe by ensuring that all upper- and lower-tier municipalities are subject to the same policies and regulations contained in *the Growth Plan* and *the Places to Grow Act*.

The Simcoe Growth Vision states "*that key natural heritage features and hydrologic features outside the Greenbelt Plan area, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan area, Niagara Escarpment Plan area, and the Lake Simcoe watershed will be protected by official plan provisions that conform with the Growth Plan and are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement.*"

The Simcoe area contains significant areas of Provincial and Regional Areas of Scientific Interest (ANSIs), Provincially and locally significant wetlands, woodlands, Class 1,2 and 3 and organic soils, linkages, agricultural lands and aggregate resources. In comments on the *Greenbelt Plan* and the draft Simcoe County Official Plan, York Region Council has previously taken the position that that Simcoe County should be subject to the same environmental planning policies set out in the Greenbelt Plan. Regional staff recommends that this be reflected in the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*, by the extension of the Greenbelt Legislation and Plan to include the Simcoe area.

Impacts on the Lake Simcoe Watershed

6. The sustainability of Lake Simcoe could be adversely affected by increased growth in the Simcoe area.

Regional staff commends the Province in undertaking a Simcoe area infrastructure plan, including a strategy for water and wastewater that includes mechanisms for coordinating service delivery and incorporating green solutions.

There is a concern that the ecological health of Lake Simcoe could be adversely affected by increased growth in the Simcoe area through increased nutrient and phosphorous loading and the inability of Lake Simcoe to assimilate waste. As a result, oxygen levels in Lake Simcoe could be reduced thereby interfering with the reproductive cycle of the various species of coldwater fish native to Lake Simcoe.

The *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (LSPP)* indicates that the major contributors of phosphorus within the Lake Simcoe Watershed are atmospheric deposition (33%) and urban and rural inflow drainage (37%). The LSPP calls for a number of water quality initiatives including a phosphorous reduction strategy that contains loading targets and sewage treatment plant caps. Regional staff believes that future development and infrastructure investment in the Simcoe area, particularly the two new employment areas in Bradford and Innisfil, may undermine the intent of

maximum phosphorous assignments for watershed municipalities and seriously impact the long-term ecological health of Lake Simcoe.

York Region has a long and consistent history of protection and study of Lake Simcoe through the funding of the Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and participation and funding on the Lake Simcoe Environmental Management Strategy (LSEMS). In addition, the Region is consistently held to high standards in planning and servicing that includes:

- A commitment to utilizing “drinking water quality” equivalent membrane treatment technology at the Region’s Keswick Water Pollution Control Plant in addition to other environmental enhancements already implemented such as accreditation to the ISO 14001 environmental management system standard; and,
- Continuously operating our Water Pollution Control Plants at/or beyond compliance to ensure enhanced protection of Lake Simcoe.

It is probable that the Bradford and Innisfil employment areas may partially lie within the Lake Simcoe Basin. As well, staff conversations with the LRSCA indicate that the Bradford employment area will be serviced by the Bradford Sewage Treatment Plant which discharges into Lake Simcoe. Should, at minimum, one of these two instances be the case, Regional staff trusts that the Province will ensure that water and wastewater treatment facilities in the Lake Simcoe Watershed will be held to the same high standard in environmental responsibility and performance that is in conformity with the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and required of all watershed municipalities.

York Region is currently undertaking an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the expansion of the Sutton WPCP and Regional staff has been negotiating new phosphorus limits with MOE staff. These negotiations have already delayed the current EA process and plant expansion. In order to achieve the new phosphorus limits required by MOE through the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and Ontario Regulation 60/08, significant capital investment will be required. Furthermore, the new phosphorus limits proposed by MOE will reduce the approved service population for the Sutton WPCP expansion.

Sewage treatment plant inputs of phosphorus to Lake Simcoe represent only a small percentage of total phosphorus inputs. York Region is incurring significant extra costs due to approval delays and the high standard of sewage treatment in these facilities. Regional staff trusts that the Province will ensure that water and wastewater treatment facilities in the balance of the Lake Simcoe Watershed will be held to the same high standards in environmental responsibility and performance as York Region is.

The Region further supports the Province in ensuring upfront servicing prior to development approvals that are in conformity with *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan*. However, Regional staff also request clarification on how the principles in the Simcoe Growth Vision will address the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and *Lake Simcoe Protection Act*. Specifically, it is important to understand how implementation of this Vision will impact the carrying capacity of Lake Simcoe for approved and planned growth in the Lake Simcoe Watershed in York Region. It is unclear

how additional servicing with discharge to Lake Simcoe can be accommodated given the need to reduce existing annual phosphorus loading to that required by the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan*.

Summary of York Region Recommendations

In summary, York Region staff recommend the following action:

1. The Province implement the *Growth Plan* equitably and ensure that all upper- and lower-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are subject to the same policies and regulations as contained in the *Growth Plan* and the *Places to Grow Act*.
2. The Province assess the impact on the GTA regions including York Region resulting from the two strategic employment area provincial designations in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil. Regional staff request that this assessment be undertaken and circulated to York Region and the other GTA regions prior to the approval and finalization of the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*.
3. The Province commit to the following transportation capacity improvements to accommodate the forecasted growth in the Simcoe area and address issues of increasing traffic congestion:
 - a. Highway 404, 427 and Bradford Bypass expansions
 - b. Twelve new or modified interchanges and widenings for 400 series highways
 - c. HOV lanes on 400 series highways
 - d. Cross-boundary and boundary road improvements.

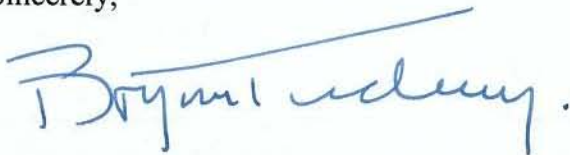
Further, Regional staff request that the Provincial commitment to build these infrastructure projects be included with a schedule reflecting early construction in the area transportation study proposed in the Simcoe Growth Vision as well as the proposed the Simcoe area-specific amendment to the *Growth Plan*

4. The Minister of the Environment clarify how the principles in the Simcoe Growth Vision will address the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* and specifically how servicing this growth will impact the carrying capacity of Lake Simcoe for approved and planned growth in the Lake Simcoe Watershed in York Region.
5. The Province require that the construction and/or operation of all existing water and proposed wastewater treatment facilities in the Lake Simcoe Watershed be held to the same high standard of environmental responsibility and performance as those in York Region..
6. This letter will be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for further consideration in resolving the Provincial appeal of *ROPA 52 – Highway 400 Employment Lands* in the City of Vaughan. It should be recognized that the Region has completed its municipal comprehensive review, identified the GTA West Corridor in its draft ROP, and supports detailed policies in the Secondary Plan (Vaughan OPA 637) that protect lands for the proposed GTA West Corridor.

Regional staff look forward to receiving the clarification requested in these comments, to the Province undertaking the studies and assessments that York Region feels are necessary before these decisions are finalized, and to working with the Province to implement the vision of the *Growth Plan*. As such, we would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the comments contained in this letter. Regional staff will bring forward the comments contained in this letter to Council at its September 2009 meeting.

Should you have any questions or comments, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at 905-830-4444 extension 1525 or john.waller@york.ca

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bryan W. Tuckey".

Bryan W. Tuckey M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Commissioner of Planning and Development Services

BT/ds

Copy to: Simcoe County Clerk
Barrie City Clerk
Orillia City Clerk
The Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable George Smitherman, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure
The Honourable John Gerretsen, Minister of the Environment
York Region Local Municipalities
York Region Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs)