

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, September 22, 2020

WARD(S): 1

**TITLE: GTA WEST TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR ROUTE PLANNING
AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT STUDY – UPDATE AND
ANNOUNCEMENT OF PREFERRED ROUTE**

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update on the Ministry of Transportation Ontario's (MTO) GTA West Transportation Corridor Route Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study, including the recent announcement of the Preferred Route.

Report Highlights

- In November 2019, Vaughan's position was to proceed with alignment 8-1 as opposed to 8-3, as identified by MTO as part of the Technically Preferred Route.
- The GTA West Project Team had a number of meetings with City staff to discuss the section 8 alignment alternatives and interchange locations.
- On August 7, 2020, the GTA West Project Team announced the Preferred Route and associated Focused Analysis Area for the GTA West EA corridor.
- Alternative S8-5 was selected to be part of the Preferred Route.
- The next steps for the GTA West Project Team include field investigations and the completion of the Preliminary Design for the Preferred Route.
- The City supports the progress of the GTA West EA Study and looks forward to continuing to engage with the GTA West Project Team.

Recommendations

1. That the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) be requested to continue to work with the City of Vaughan, as the Preliminary Design for the Preferred Route of the GTA West Transportation Corridor progresses, and the ultimate alignment and interchange locations are confirmed; and,
2. That a copy of this report be forwarded to the Province, the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO), the City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, Township of King, Region of Peel and Region of York.

Background

The GTA West EA Study Resumed in June 2019 from Suspension in 2015

The Ministry of Transportation Ontario's (MTO's) GTA West Transportation Corridor Route Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study, which spans from Highway 400 in the east to the Highway 401/407 ETR interchange in the west, resumed in June 2019 from its suspension in 2015. The new corridor would include a 400-series 4-to-6-lane highway with freeway-to-freeway connections at Highway 401/407 ETR, Highway 410, Highway 427, and Highway 400. The right-of-way would range between 110m (highway) without the transitway and 170m including a separate adjacent transitway.

The GTA West Study is being undertaken as an Individual EA in accordance with the Ontario EA Act and the GTA West Corridor EA Terms of Reference. The study is designed to explore all modes of transportation options for facilitating more efficient movement of people and goods and protecting the required land. It is identified in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) area as part of the required transportation improvements to support the planning vision for managing growth and development.

The GTA West Transportation Corridor will help address current transportation issues and will help support the City's projected growth. Without the Corridor, Region of York and the City's transportation infrastructure will experience further reduction in level of service. The absence of the Corridor will also impact the Province's mandated ongoing employment and population growth planning to 2041.

The GTA West Project Team held the second round of Public Information Centers in September 2019, presenting the draft Technically Preferred Route

Starting on September 19, 2019, the GTA West Project Team held the second round of Public Information Centers where they presented the draft Technically Preferred Route

Alternative and the refined Focused Analysis Area, showing lands to be made available for development, subject to confirmation of the Preferred Route.

The draft Technically Preferred Route Alternative through Vaughan (Attachment 1) includes a freeway-to-freeway interchange at Highway 427, an interchange at Highway 27, a partial interchange at Weston Road, and a freeway-to-freeway interchange at Highway 400. Additional information can be found on the GTA West EA website at: <https://www.gta-west.com/>.

The GTA West Project Team Presented at Committee of the Whole on November 12, 2019 where Council provided a position on the GTA West Transportation Corridor

A [report](#) was prepared by City staff to supplement the presentation which provided background information on the study, an update on the study resumption, and highlights of the draft Technically Preferred Route Alternative.

The report's recommendations included that the Ministry of Transportation be requested to work with the City of Vaughan in the confirmation of the preferred route alternative, interchanges and ultimate alignment, and to address the issues identified in the report. And that the Ministry of Transportation be requested to provide a written response to the City of Vaughan's comments prior to confirming the Preferred Route Alternative.

Council provided its [position](#) regarding the draft Technically Preferred Route Alternative, in particular, the alignment identified within Section 8. Vaughan's position was a preference for alignment S8-1 as opposed to S8-3, as identified by MTO as the draft Technically preferred Route. Alignment S8-1 veers north, which avoids impacting the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area.

The GTA West Project Team completed a number of council presentations (including York Regional Council on November 14, 2019) and held meetings with stakeholders, including the Advisory Groups. The Preferred Route Alternative would eventually be confirmed following feedback reviewed by the GTA West Project Team.

The Northwest GTA Transmission Corridor Identification Study was initiated in June 2019, a new study separate from the GTA West Study

In February 2018, MTO and the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO), with support from the Ministry of Energy, initiated The Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study to identify and protect lands for a multipurpose linear infrastructure corridor.

With the resumption of the GTA West EA Study, The Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study did not proceed; however, in June 2019, the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines (ENDM) and the IESO initiated The Northwest GTA 'Transmission' Corridor Identification Study, which is a new study separate from the GTA West EA Study. The Northwest GTA Transmission Corridor Identification Study was initiated to identify a transmission corridor (almost adjacent to the GTA West EA corridor, Attachment 4) to be protected for future transmission infrastructure to support growing demand for electricity in western GTA. Additional information can be found on the Study website at: <http://ieso.ca/Get-Involved/Regional-Planning/GTA-and-Central-Ontario/GTA-West>.

Previous Reports/Authority

Council position within the [Mayor's Members Resolution](#), June 29, 2020

GTA West Transportation Corridor Route Planning and Environmental Assessment Study Resumption Council [Report](#), November 12, 2019

Analysis and Options

In addition to the November 12, 2019 Council Report, City staff provided technical comments on the draft Technically Preferred Route to the GTA West Project on November 29, 2020.

On April 7, 2020, the GTA West Project Team sent a written response (via email) to the City's comments. Key items to highlight in their response include:

1. The extension of Highway 427 north of the GTA West Transportation Corridor is not part of the scope of the GTA West EA Study. The extension is also not part of any other active MTO Study; however, it will not be precluded by the GTA West multimodal transportation corridor and may be considered in future studies.
2. The GTA West Project Team is not moving forward with an interchange at Pine Valley Drive at this time due to close proximity to the planned Weston Road partial interchange. This decision does not preclude municipalities from exploring the option of a second interchange at Pine Valley Drive outside the scope of this study.
3. Regarding interchanges on Highway 400 at Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road, it was noted that these additional connections to Highway 400 were not required for the GTA West multimodal transportation corridor. As such, reviewing the feasibility of these connections would be outside the scope of this study.
4. Highway 50 is too close to the proposed Highway 427 freeway-to-freeway interchange, and the inadequate spacing results in geometric constraints and

operational concerns. Therefore, an interchange at Highway 50 is not being carried forward for further consideration as part of this study.

The GTA West Project team reviewed Interchange Locations within Vaughan with City and Regional Staff

The GTA West project team requested meetings with City and Regional staff on May 27 and June 10, 2020 to discuss the possibility of a full movement interchange at Pine Valley Drive, versus a partial interchange at Weston Road (part of the draft Technically Preferred Alternative, Attachment 1). The interchange is partial due to its proximity to Highway 400, not having enough room for a full movement interchange.

Discussions between City and Regional staff have highlighted that while a full movements interchange has its benefits, Pine Valley Drive is discontinuous to the north and south. A partial interchange at Weston Road, although having greater environmental impacts and close proximity to the proposed freeway-to-freeway interchange, may offer better connectivity to the Highway 400 North Employment areas, especially that interchanges at Highway 400 and Kirby Road or King-Vaughan Road are uncertain at this time.

Although MTO has the desire to implement only one of the two interchanges at this time, having both could be feasible and could be protected for future implementation. The municipalities would likely need to fund the cost of any future interchange implementation.

Another item for consideration is the feasibility of an interchange at Highway 400 and Kirby Road or King-Vaughan Road, relating to Council's 2011 adoption. The GTA West project team advised that while outside the scope for the GTA West EA Study, King-Vaughan Road (partial interchange) appears to be more feasible than Kirby Road based on geometry and proximity to the proposed freeway-to-freeway interchange, and could be implemented in the future.

Discussions are ongoing and additional information will be needed for the City and Region to make an informed decision on the preferred interchange locations. The City and the Region have discussed the potential of undertaking a joint study to determine the need and phasing of these two interchanges.

It was noted that in the draft Technically Preferred Alternative (Attachment 1), part of the footprint for the proposed interchange at Highway 27 falls outside the Focus Analysis Area (FAA) for the study. The GTA West project team advised during the June 10, 2020

meeting with City and Regional staff that the interchange design will be reviewed, the FAA adjusted accordingly, and property owners notified, if required.

Concerns regarding the Section 8 alignment alternatives were identified in November 2019

The GTA West Project Team worked with Advisory Groups, municipal staff, regulatory agencies and other stakeholders and continued to review feedback received from PIC 2, to confirm the Preferred Route and associated Focused Analysis Area for the GTA West multimodal transportation corridor. In doing so, the Project Team attempted to balance the benefits and impacts for local communities and users of the transportation system. As the GTA West Project Team was made aware of various concerns from stakeholders regarding the draft Technically Preferred Route Alternative (especially through Section 8), the project team developed new alternatives in Section 8 that attempted to address the issues identified by stakeholders (Attachment 2).

These two new alternatives were evaluated following the same process that was used for the short-listed route alternatives) and were compared to the draft Technically Preferred Route. These new alternatives also had implications on the draft Technically Preferred Route in Section 7 (Brampton/Caledon/western Vaughan) and the Project Team took these implications into consideration.

Shortly after responding to the City's Technical Comments in April 2020, the GTA West Project Team requested a meeting with City and Regional staff to discuss the evaluation of the new Section 8 alignment alternatives, with a focus on reducing potential impacts to the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area. The meeting took place on May 8, 2020. The new alignment alternatives can be described as follows:

- S8-3 – part of the draft Technically Preferred Route (PIC 2), shortest alignment of the three, cuts through North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area, opposed by City Council/ developers/ property owners
- S8-4 – avoids the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area completely, takes up considerably more Greenbelt and agricultural lands and requires a much larger crossing of the Humber River
- S8-5 – clips the northern part of the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area, takes up more Greenbelt and agricultural lands and requires a large crossing of the Humber River

After evaluating the three alignment alternatives, the draft Technically Preferred Route S8-3, was said to provide for the shortest crossing of the Humber River and had the least impacts to Greenbelt and agricultural lands.

The GTA West project team also expressed that S8-1 (Council supported alternative) and other previous alignment alternatives located further north, would have significant environmental impacts and direct impacts on Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) lands, so were therefore; not desirable to pursue. It was discussed that new Section 8 alignment alternatives, S8-4 and S8-5 could be compromise alignments and require additional analysis.

The intent of the May 8, 2020 meeting was to provide an introduction on what would be presented to the broader group of stakeholders that provided significant comments on Section 8. This larger stakeholder meeting was scheduled for May 21, 2020; however, in a May 14 email from the GTA West project team, it was stated that new information had come to light which prompted the project team to undertake supplementary analysis. This analysis had given rise to additional questions and the GTA West project team needed more time to explore the draft alternatives and arrange focused opportunities to provide input on them before confirming the Preferred Route in Section 8. As such, the May 21, 2020 stakeholder meeting was cancelled.

In a June 4, 2020 email from the GTA West project team to City and Regional staff, feedback was requested on the three Section 8 alternatives as follows:

- Preferred alternative selection
- Strengths and/or weaknesses associated with each route alternative.
- How we might mitigate or address some of the weaknesses associated with each alternative
- Additional valuable input to be shared with the Project Team

Additional information on the alternatives was provided by the GTA West Project Team such as plan drawings, profile views, shape files and assessment tables. Feedback was requested by July 3, 2020.

City and Regional staff provided feedback on the three Section 8 alignment alternatives (S8-3, S8-4 and S8-5) as requested by the GTA West Project Team. The City's feedback was provided based on criteria key to staff, to assist the GTA West Project Team in further evaluating the Section 8 alternatives, as follows:

- City of Vaughan Land Use Policies
- Existing Residential Areas and the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan Development Areas
- Environment, and
- Connectivity

In addition to the staff technical comments, Council provided a position through the endorsed recommendations (within the [Mayor's members resolution](#)), at its meeting of June 29, 2020. The resolution was also forwarded to the GTA West project team.

On August 7, 2020, the GTA West Project Team announced the Preferred Route and the associated Focused Analysis Area for the GTA West Transportation Corridor

Following the review of stakeholder comments, the GTA West Project Team announced the Preferred Route and change to the associated Focused Analysis Area on August 7, 2020. The announcement was issued in a bulletin sent via email (Attachment 3). Additional information can be found on the GTA West website at <https://www.gta-west.com/>.

Of the three Section 8 alignment alternatives as previously described (Attachment 2), alternative S8-5 was selected to be part of the Preferred Route

Although S8-5 potentially impacts a northern piece of the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area, it is an improvement from S8-3 (part of the draft Technically Preferred Route) in terms of impacts to the existing residential communities and the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area. With further refinement of the design, the footprint of the highway will likely be reduced, and the impact of S8-5 on the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area potentially minimized. The Preferred Route in the GTA West Project Team's recent announcement is showing a 250m wide right-of-way with the intention of reducing to 170m wide as the highway design is refined.

It also appears that S8-5 ranked higher for the GTA West Project Team compared to S8-4 (which veered further north to avoid impacting the developable lands), as it offered a shorter crossing of the Humber River and potentially less environmental impacts. Although S8-3 has the shortest crossing of the Humber River that could result in reduced construction and maintenance costs, and possibly less environmental impacts, it presented the most significant impacts to the existing residential communities and on the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area.

The Preferred Route within Vaughan includes a partial interchange at Weston Road, an interchange at Highway 27 and freeway-to-freeway interchanges at Highways 427 and 400. It does not include interchanges at Highway 50 and Pine Valley Drive, essentially the same interchange locations from the draft Technically Preferred Route as shown at PIC 2 last year

In previous discussions with the GTA West Project Team, a partial interchange at Weston Road, although having greater environmental impacts compared to Pine Valley Drive, and being quite close to the proposed freeway-to-freeway interchange, offers better connectivity to the Highway 400 North Employments areas, especially if interchanges at Highway 400 and Kirby Road or King-Vaughan Road are uncertain at this time. Weston Road is also continuous north and south.

As previously noted, although MTO only plans to implement one of the two interchanges in that area, having both could be feasible and the City and the Region could protect for an additional full-moves interchange in the future while possibly addressing the discontinuities along Pine Valley Drive. Discussions are ongoing on this subject.

The GTA West Project Team also provided in their recent bulletin (Attachment 3) adjustments to the FAA (2014, 2019 and 2020) made to reflect changes from the draft Technically Preferred Route to the Preferred Route.

Comments on the Northwest GTA Transmission Corridor (Attachment 4) were requested by June 8, 2020

The Environmental Registry of Ontario [019-1503](#) provides details on the Province's proposal. Staff's comments reflected the recommendations as previously made for the GTA West corridor to ensure the hydro transmission alignment also reduces impacts to existing and approved community areas. Comments were coordinated by the Policy Planning and Environmental Sustainability department.

Financial Impact

There are no immediate financial impacts associated with this report. However, there may be future costs considerations for potential impacts to developable lands, potential additional interchange and addressing the discontinuities along Pine Valley Drive.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Staff from the Region of York are actively participating in the GTA West Corridor EA and have been attending the Municipal Advisory Group (MAG) meetings.

Following the second round of PICs in September 2019, the GTA West Project team made presentations to a number of organizations including Regional Council on November 14, 2019.

York Region staff submitted a [report](#) to York Region Committee of the Whole on May 14, 2020. The purpose of this report was to have Council reiterate its position that the

Ministry of Transportation develop, as part of the EA, a highway alignment that reduces impacts to existing and approved community areas in the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area. Additionally, that Council request, as part of the EA, the Ministry of Transportation not preclude a future interchange at Pine Valley Drive and continue to explore an additional interchange north of the Teston Road interchange at Highway 400, to accommodate development of lands within Regional Official Plan Amendment 2, which are key planned future City of Vaughan communities.

The Region also provided feedback on the three Section 8 alignment alternatives on July 3, 2020, as requested by the GTA West Project Team. York Region staff continue to be involved in discussions with City staff and the GTA West Project Team regarding the Preferred Route and interchange locations within Vaughan.

York Region staff are preparing to take a memo to Regional Council in September 2020 to provide an update on the recent provincial announcement of the Preferred Route for the GTA West transportation corridor.

Conclusion

The City supports the progress of the GTA West EA Study and looks forward to continuing to engage with the GTA West Project Team as work on the recently announced Preferred Route and associated Focused Analysis Area moves forward.

MTO met with City staff on August 24, 2020 and they advised that the GTA West Project Team will not be providing presentations to municipal councils and other organizations at this time due to scope of work and time constraints for the EA study; however, they plan to do so at future key milestones as the study progresses.

The study's next steps are outlined below:

- 2020-2021 - The GTA West Project Team will be undertaking fieldwork on properties potentially impacted by the Preferred Route to document existing environmental and engineering conditions
- Fall/Winter 2021- 3rd PIC to present the preliminary design for the Preferred Route, property impacts, and mitigation measures for review and comment
- 2022 - The study's planned completion and Environmental Study Report

Staff have been working with MTO to provide insight of the City's position on the GTA West Corridor, to inform the study and aid in identifying the best corridor alignment alternatives throughout Vaughan. The final decision rests with the GTA West Project Team based on the established study criteria and process. Staff will continue to work the GTA West Project Team as the project proceeds to Preliminary and Detailed design

and will continue to participate as a member of the Municipal Advisory Group throughout the project. Staff will provide updates to Council at key milestones in the process.

With regards to the Northwest GTA Transmission Corridor Identification Study, City staff will also continue to review and provide comments on the study. Updates will be provided to Council at future Committee Meetings.

For more information, please contact Vince Musacchio, Director, Infrastructure Planning and Corporate Asset Management, at extension 8311.

Attachments

1. Draft Technically Preferred Route with Short-list of Route Alternatives (sections within the City of Vaughan), October 2019
2. Section 7-8 Route Alternatives & North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan Area, GTA West Project Team, June 2020
3. Preferred Route and Refined FAA Bulletin, GTA West Project Team, August 2020
4. Proposed Northwest GTA Transmission Narrowed Area of Interest Compared to MTO's 2019 FAA, Ministry of Energy Northern Development and Mines (ENDM) and the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO), September 2019

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