
For Information

DATE: April 10, 2018

REPORT TITLE: **GTA WEST CORRIDOR/NORTHWEST GREATER TORONTO AREA CORRIDOR IDENTIFICATION STUDY UPDATE**

FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Public Works

OBJECTIVE

To update Regional Council on the status of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study and provide information on the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- On February 9, 2018, the Minister of Transportation announced the cancellation of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study.
- A new study known as the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study (Study) was initiated in December 2017. Its purpose is to “identify a narrow corridor of lands in the northwest GTA to protect for future linear infrastructure.”
- The Study is anticipated to be completed in nine to 12 months with a study area approximately one third the size of the GTA West Focused Analysis Area.
- Staff are in the process of obtaining further information on the Study to resolve localized impacts of the cancellation of the GTA West Environmental Assessment Study wherever possible and develop Terms of Reference for future studies.

DISCUSSION
1. Background

In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (the Ministry) initiated an Environmental Assessment study to examine long term transportation problems and opportunities and to consider alternative solutions to provide better linkages between Urban Growth Centres in the Greater Toronto Area as identified in the *Places to Grow Plan*. This study came to be known as the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study.

Stage 1 of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study concluded in 2012 with the release of the Transportation Development Strategy (the Strategy). The Strategy confirmed that in addition to new and expanded non-road transportation infrastructure and widening or improvements to existing roadways, a new freeway from Highway 400 in Vaughan, with connections to Highways 427 and 410, and north-south along the Halton-Peel boundary, with a connection to Highway 401 and potentially Highway 407 in Halton Region, would be necessary to serve growth to 2031.

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Stage 2 of the Environmental Assessment was initiated in early 2014. A range of alternatives and a Focused Analysis Area was released for public consultation in late 2014. The GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Project Team was working towards identifying a single preferred alternative and alignment for the corridor by 2018. On December 4, 2015, the Ministry issued a study update advising that planned Public Information Centres would not go ahead as more time was needed. Following this, on December 16, 2015, the Minister of Transportation announced that work on the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study was suspended pending a review to be concluded by Spring, 2016. The need to examine the project in light of climate change commitments and emerging technologies were some of the reasons cited for the suspension.

An Advisory Panel was subsequently appointed to conduct a strategic assessment of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study. The Panel reviewed trends, emerging technologies and provincial policy, and also conducted scoped consultation with affected municipalities, including the Region of Peel.

2. Cancellation of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study and Initiation of Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study

The Minister of Transportation released a statement on February 9, 2018 advising that the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study had been cancelled. The Advisory Panel report was also released to the public.

The Advisory Panel recommended that:

- The GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study be stopped and that the Ministry of Transportation lead the development of a single transportation plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
- That the Ministry make the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study data available and easily accessible online, including relevant information about the data sources, collection methods and timing, to ensure that users can tap into the full potential of the data; and,
- The Ministry not continue to protect the corridor that was identified as preferred in the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study.

The Minister of Transportation further announced that a new study, known as the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study, had been initiated jointly by the Ministry and Independent Electrical Safety Operator. The new study area would be focused within a narrow portion of the original GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study area. The new study area is approximately 600 metres (1967 feet) wide and releases much of the land previously “frozen” by the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study.

The new study aims to, “identify a narrow corridor of land in the Northwest GTA to protect for future linear infrastructure,” and is anticipated to take nine to 12 months to complete. This study is not conducted as an environmental assessment, and any infrastructure development in the area would require the completion of an applicable environmental assessment. Ministry staff have confirmed that they will release protection of the larger GTA West Corridor lands, and pursue protection of the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification

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Study lands. Staff have requested terms of reference of the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study and have expressed interest in being actively engaged.

Specific mapping details of the Northwest GTA Corridor have not been provided, with Ministry staff noting that they will not be releasing this information to municipalities. Instead, a pdf format “map book” is available. Consultations will still be required with the Ministry to confirm if specific properties are in or out of the study area.

Provincial staff held an information session for municipal staff, during which they advised that the Northwest GTA Corridor will function similarly to the Parkway Belt West Corridor shown in Appendix I, which was identified by the province as a multi-purpose corridor and was preserved for decades while uses were identified and studied. The 407 Transitway is currently being implemented in portions of that protected corridor.

Peel has long commented to Provincial staff that the typical 20-year horizon for planning necessary transportation infrastructure is wholly inadequate due to development pressures on scarce land, and the length of time required to complete studies for these projects.

In 2016, the Ministry commenced the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan which is expected to be completed in 2019. The study aims to develop a multi-modal transportation system to the year 2051 and a long term vision to 2071. Peel staff have actively participated in the study and are pleased that the Province has understood this concern and are taking steps to mitigate challenges for the future. The Ministry’s information sessions have noted that the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan is intended to consider inputs from the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study in recommending a way to move forward for planning for transportation and other infrastructure needs in this area. Staff are engaged in the development of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan. However, this initiative does not resolve the concerns that the Region currently faces with respect to managing growth in Peel, and planning around the uncertain use of the Northwest GTA Corridor.

3. Preliminary Identification of Implications for Peel RegionImpacts to the Region of Peel Integrated Growth Management Strategy

The cancellation of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study and initiation of the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study has implications for the integrated Growth Management Strategy that the Region is leading. The proposed GTA West Highway was a fundamental input to the transportation assumptions to support growth to 2041. The now uncertain use of the corridor will require staff to revisit the transportation assumptions and inputs that formed the transportation component of the integrated Growth Management Strategy and work plan. Further information about broader implications of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study cancellation can be found in the companion report listed on the April 12, 2018 Regional Council agenda, titled “Implications of the GTA West Cancellation and Current Planning Requirements on Growth Management Work Plan”.

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Impacts to the Halton-Peel Boundary Area Transportation Study

In 2007, the City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, Town of Halton Hills, Halton Region, and the Region of Peel initiated an Environmental Assessment study known as the Halton-Peel Boundary Area Transportation (HPBAT) Study. The purpose of the study was to identify transportation network requirements to facilitate growth in the area. The information and recommendations of the study were ultimately deferred to the Province when the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study area overlapped with the HPBAT study area shown in Appendix I.

As a result of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study cancellation and initiation of the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study, discussions are currently underway with the HPBAT Study partners to address long term transportation and planning issues in the area. The commitments made through the HPBAT Study Memorandum of Understanding will also be considered.

Impacts to Specific Land Use and Transportation Planning Matters

In 2012, Regional Council endorsed three “priority areas” for the GTA West Study, where significant planning challenges exist. These areas were: Mayfield West (Caledon), Heritage Heights (Brampton), and Secondary Plan Area 47 (SP 47, Brampton), and are identified in Appendix I.

In Mayfield West and SP 47, Brampton some developments that were impacted by the GTA West Corridor study area continue to be impacted by the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study Area, while other lands will be released once the matters have been formally resolved at the Ontario Municipal Board. In addition, other developments physically located outside of the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study Area in Mayfield West are dependent on servicing that is required to cross the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study Area. Peel and Caledon staff are engaged in discussions with Provincial staff on resolving this matter.

The Regional Policy framework requires the alignment, jurisdiction and financing of a viable north-south corridor to be completed to the Region’s satisfaction prior to development in Northwest Brampton (Heritage Heights). To this end, extensive local and Regional planning efforts have been undertaken in the area, as part of the Halton-Peel Boundary Area Transportation Study (HPBATS). That study confirmed the need for a north-south transportation corridor with connections to Highways 401 and 407 in Halton Region. The study also recommended a number of other improvements in the Halton-Peel boundary area. The Ministry of Transportation’s Transportation Development Strategy resulted in the locally identified north-south corridor largely coinciding with the GTA West Corridor.

A subsequent analysis led by the original HPBATS Study partners (Halton Region, Peel Region, the City of Brampton, and Towns of Caledon and Halton Hills) and involving an examination of best practices and precedents, discussions with key staff from the Ministries of Transportation and the Environment, independent legal and Environmental Assessment advice, and staff and consultant input, concluded that it was not feasible to continue local planning efforts to implement the Halton-Peel Freeway, given the concurrent GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment.

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A lack of clarity regarding the location of the GTA West Corridor had prevented secondary planning in Heritage Heights from advancing, which will ultimately impact the Region of Peel's ability to accommodate population and employment as allocated in the Province's *Places to Grow* Plan. In light of the decision to cancel the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study and commence the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study, staff will need to obtain further information and consult with various agencies in determining the path forward.

On March 13, 2018, the City of Brampton passed a resolution to commence a transportation study, in consultation with the Region of Peel, to confirm the long term transportation infrastructure needs for Northwest Brampton in parallel to the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study.

In addition to the three priority areas endorsed by Regional Council, staff has noted that in the Ninth Line Lands area, the Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study Area is slightly larger than the previous GTA West Focused Analysis Area (Appendix I). However, the larger lands were protected under the Parkway Belt West Corridor protection policies.

Staff are working with legal counsel to address the outstanding appeals related to the GTA West Corridor and to ensure protection for the Northwest GTA Corridor Protection Area, and will report back to Council on specific appeals and status at a future date.

Impacts to Goods Movement Planning in Peel Region

The Region of Peel has long supported the GTA West Corridor, both as a means to provide transportation capacity to support future population growth as outlined in the Province's own *Places to Grow* Plan, as well as acting as a catalyst for economic development, specifically for the already strong goods movement industry in Peel. Goods movement related industries account for 43 percent of the jobs in the Region of Peel, and goods movement industries contributed \$49 billion of Gross Domestic Product to Peel's economy in 2014. The implications of the GTA West cancellation will need to be revisited in the Region's ongoing development of the Goods Movement Long Term Plan.

4. Risks to the Region of Peel

In addition to the implications mentioned above, the primary risk to the Region of Peel pertains to the challenges in accommodating for population and employment growth due to the uncertain use and location of the corridor. By 2041, the Region of Peel is expected to grow by 600,000 additional residents and 300,000 additional jobs. This growth translates to an increase in the number inter- and intra-regional trips also resulting in significant capacity implications. The uncertain use of the corridor makes transportation planning and planning for the anticipated growth particularly challenging for the Region of Peel and local municipalities.

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CONCLUSION

Regional staff are currently in the process of gathering information from the Ministry of Transportation as their Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study progresses. This information will enable staff to develop a comprehensive work plan on how to proceed with addressing the Region's anticipated growth and transportation demands. In the interim, Regional staff are conducting preliminary analyses to understand the impact of the cancellation of the GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study and infrastructure required in the lieu of a provincial corridor.



Janette Smith, Commissioner of Public Works

Approved for Submission:



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

APPENDICES

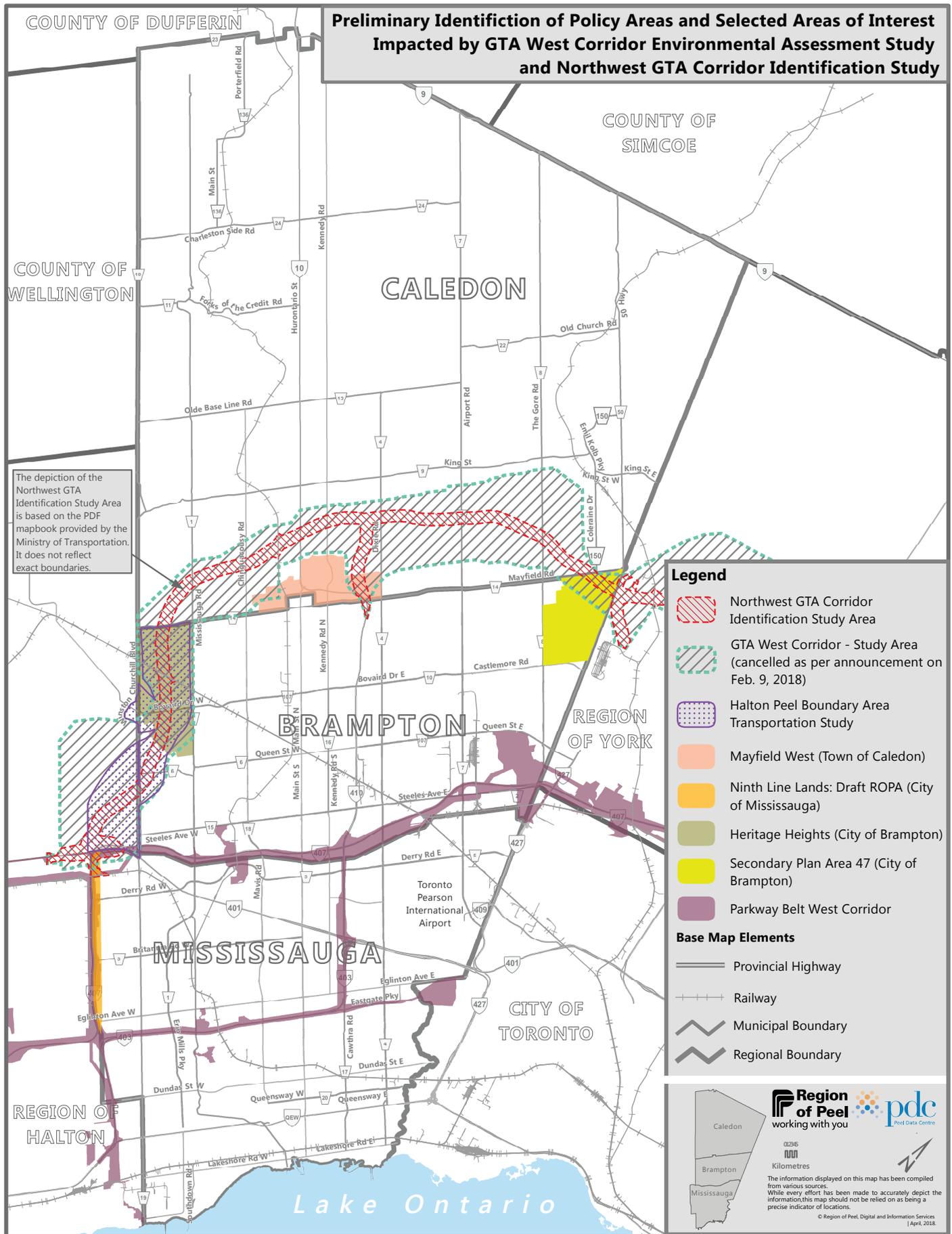
Appendix I – Preliminary Identification of Policy Areas and Selected Areas of interest Impacted by GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study and Northwest GTA Identification Study

For further information regarding this report, please contact Sabbir Saiyed, Manager, Transportation System Planning, extension 4352, Sabbir.Saiyed@peelregion.ca.

Authored By: Tina Detaramani, Principal Planner, Transportation System Planning; and Richa Dave, Planner, Transportation System Planning

Reviewed in workflow by:

Financial Support Unit



The depiction of the Northwest GTA Identification Study Area is based on the PDF mapbook provided by the Ministry of Transportation. It does not reflect exact boundaries.