

From: Liz Benneian, President, Oakvillegreen Conservation Association;  
Jim Steeves, Chairman, Milongreen; Kurt Koster, president, BurlingtonGreen  
Environmental Association

To: Premier Dalton McGuinty, Minister James Bradley, Minister John Gerretsen,  
Minister Gerry Phillips, Minister Sandra Pupatello, Minister Monique Smith

Re: The Niagara to GTA Corridor and Environmental Assessment Study

Dear Premier McGuinty and Honourable Ministers:

Oakvillegreen Conservation Association, BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association and Milongreen appreciate the efforts made by the McGuinty government on several fronts including better land use planning, moving toward Zero Waste, protecting greenspace and agricultural land, decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels and providing municipalities with more resources. We also appreciate the initiatives this government has undertaken to increase public transportation options and efficiencies, from funding for GO train improvements to the Presto project. We believe that these initiatives will help the Province meet its goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pollution while creating a better quality of life for Ontario's citizens, however, as is so often the case, at the same time the Province is taking two steps forward it is taking one step back as planning for a new mid-peninsula highway in Niagara drives inextricably ahead.

We know this project is not yet in its final phase and we know there are more consultations and public meetings to be held but we also know that we can't afford to wait for everything to be finalized to make our concerns known because by then it is too late.

As we have made clear in previous correspondence, we object to the creation of new highways in general and we most specifically object to creating a new highway through the Niagara Region. To create a new highway in this area you will need to lay waste to valuable agricultural land, significant habitat and important areas of the Greenbelt. It will also inevitably mean increasing vehicular traffic, increasing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing pollution throughout an airshed that is already significantly compromised.

Building new highways has never and will never solve the problem of congestion because as long as new highways are built, more people will make the choice to use them. Therefore you will always have an increase in road traffic where what the government should be aiming for — if we intend to get serious about reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, reducing the amount of pollutants we generate and creating a more sustainable, resilient society — is a reduction in road usage, especially by private, single-passenger vehicles.

#### The Real Questions

The argument is made in this study that we cannot impede the efficient transportation of goods, or cause long commute times or discourage tourists with

congestion. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “are we willing to imperil the lives of millions of people around the world for our convenience?” The question we need to ask ourselves is, “are we willing to sacrifice our young people to asthma and our elderly to cardiovascular and lung diseases so we can drive to places more efficiently?” The question we need to ask ourselves is, “are we willing to truly commit to creating a more sustainable society, protect our vital agricultural land, be environmentally responsible, leave a livable world for our children or are we going to continue to pay lip service to those goals?”

We would like the government to concentrate on asking the right questions that will lead to effective solutions that will include putting a transportation system in place that is sustainable over the long-term and improves our environment.

### Carrots and Sticks

The goal of this government should be to decrease road usage. The means to this end is providing both carrots and sticks.

The sticks are allowing congestion to increase by not building new highways to prod people into choosing alternative transportation strategies and to make life decisions more consistent with sustainable communities and to stop subsidizing personal automobile use by providing an ever-expanding highway system. Additional sticks could include road tolls, emission taxes etc.

The carrot is to provide increased public transportation options, promoting work from home, videoconferencing and other technology options, ridesharing, jitney systems etc.

People will make different choices as congestion increases and fuel costs rise. Many already have. For example, over the years people in our groups have changed jobs to reduce commute times/take advantage of public transit; worked from home; teleconferenced and done volunteer and paid work mostly electronically; bought fuel-efficient hybrid cars; taken university courses by teleconference etc.

### Putting Taxpayer Money In The Wrong Place

Building new roads subsidizes the automobile and trucking industry on the backs of taxpayers and at the expense of public transit and low-income groups.

If Ontario is truly committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting natural and agricultural lands then we must stop subsidizing what we don't want.

On the MTO website it says: “In 2008, the Ontario government invested more than \$2 billion to repair and expand highways, roads and bridges across the province, with \$927 million designated for Southern Ontario highway construction. The Ontario government is investing an additional \$284 million over five-years for bridge repair and replacement in Southern Ontario —with \$19 million invested 2008.”

That's a big subsidy to a transportation system that is not viable over the long term.

Highways are expensive to build and even more expensive to maintain, especially as the price of asphalt will rise significantly as the price of oil increases. It would be fiscally prudent to maintain current highways and put a moratorium on

further highway expansion.

We applaud the government for its commitment to spend more than \$9 billion on public transit in the GTA on public transit initiatives. We also applaud the government for giving cities 2 cents a litre from gas tax revenues for public transit from the province.

We would like to see subsidies to public transit projects increase, the Province take a stronger role in advocating to the Federal government for public transit funding and the Province place a moratorium on new highway construction.

### What's The Cost?

We are unable to find an estimate of the cost of the mid-peninsula highway – no doubt because the study has not been completed and the final decision not yet made. Which makes sense but poses a significant dilemma for interested citizens and, I assume, politicians as well. How can we compare a new highway's costs with alternatives if we don't know what the project may cost?

In any case, building 95 km of highway with 4 to 6 lanes and 5 to 8 interchanges is going to be expensive. A study done by MTO 14 years ago, the Transfocus 2021 report, suggested meeting the same transportation needs through expanded rail and bus service would cost about a third of what a highway would cost.

We would like to see an estimated cost of the mid-peninsula highway.

### The Faulty Three-legged Stool

The Niagara to GTA Corridor and Environmental Assessment Study is underpinned by the faulty Three-Legged Stool. The study notes, "The criteria for the "assessment of alternatives to the undertaking" are transportation, economy and environment.

Whenever this criterion is used, the environment is outweighed by the other two factors. The criteria model must be changed, as everything is dependent on the environment. You cannot have a healthy social system without a healthy environment and healthy people. You cannot have a transportation system that is built on a fundamentally unsustainable model. You cannot have a healthy economy without a sustainable use of the earth's resources as we are rapidly discovering.

The new criteria model should be the environment as the big circle with transportation, the economy and other factors as subsets within the circle.

We have to start making the difficult choice of not doing things solely because they will negatively impact our environment. Otherwise we will keep diminishing it overtime with tragic consequences for the world's citizens.

"Mitigation", as mentioned in the study, is not an answer. Making things less bad doesn't make them better or even as good.

We would like to see the Provincial government adopt a new criteria model for evaluating government projects that acknowledges that everything is a subset of the environment.

### Mid-Peninsula Highway Is Unacceptable

In talking to staff at the Public Information Session in Burlington in December

2009, it seemed clear the MTO is moving toward Option Four which includes recommending to build a mid-peninsula highway.

This is simply unacceptable to us, as we know it is to many other citizens groups.

If this recommendation moves ahead it must go through a formal review and approval by the Ministry of the Environment. We hope the Ministry will reject any proposal that calls for the building of a new highway in Niagara.

We must expect a Transportation Ministry will tend to view transportation planning through a traditional transportation lens, projecting ever-increasing air travel, single occupant car use, an expanding trucking industry, continued business models like just-in-time-delivery and goods coming in from global markets but the trends point in a different direction.

People increasingly prefer locally made goods, they are more conscious of environmental impacts and more eager to avoid detrimental ones. They are flying less and air shipments are down. They will choose public transportation if it is affordable and convenient. These trends will only increase as the price of fuel increases.

Now is the time to think out of the box, to put the environment first, to stop subsidizing what we don't want and put taxpayers dollars to work on creating a sustainable future.

We ask you to say no to the development of a mid-peninsula highway through the heart of Niagara.

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