

## Bridge across lake floated at planning meeting

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There's no shortage of ideas to relieve traffic congestion between Niagara and Toronto.

The group studying alternatives to a mid-peninsula highway between Fort Erie and Burlington has compiled 150 ideas from the public and municipalities, ranging from optimizing existing transportation links to new road infrastructures.

Now they need to narrow it down and make recommendations to the province by the end of 2010.

The ideas were on display last night at the last of three public information centres staged as part of the lengthy Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study.

Dozens of people wandered through the centre at the Burlington Holiday Inn. The other information nights were held in Welland and Ancaster, which were on the route of a highway that was proposed by the former Conservative government, and shelved by the Liberals for this study.

Some new ideas:

- \* Upgrade Centennial Parkway to a freeway link.
- \* Build a 400 series highway between Niagara and Milton.
- \* Extend the Red Hill Valley Parkway to Fort Erie.
- \* Twin the Burlington Skyway Bridge.
- \* Build a Hamilton Bay tunnel.
- \* Build a bridge across Lake Ontario for cars and transit.

Transportation Ministry spokesperson Will MacKenzie said the group has received a "lot of good ideas," but noted that was the purpose of the process.

"We need to have the public involved to have the process work," he said. "If we say 'Do this, do that' and then people disagree then we have a big brouhaha."

The mid-peninsula highway was derailed partly because of Burlington's opposition to it impacting the Niagara Escarpment to link up with the Freeman interchange (QEW/403/407).

MacKenzie admitted a new highway has not been ruled out, but the province is looking at coping with growth in 2031.

"Even if it were recommended to be a highway, that doesn't mean a shovel will be in the ground two years from now," he said.

Royce Curry, a former member of the Halton Transport Development Committee, suggested a lake bridge between Oakville and St. Catharines. He believed it would end congestion where the QEW meets the 403.

He acknowledged it would take courage and admitted, "How many people do we have to do that?"