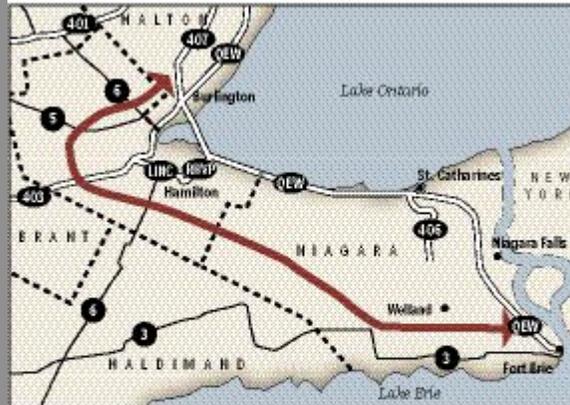


Niagara highway route quashed

Mid-peninsula highway



SOURCE: Niagara Peninsula transportation needs assessment technical summary
The \$1.5-billion mid-peninsula highway proposed in 2001 would have connected the QEW at Fort Erie with Highway 407 in Burlington. The red line shows the general route proposed.

Province focusing on light rail, public transit

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Nearly a decade after announcing plans for a \$1.5 billion mid-peninsula highway between Halton and Niagara, the Ministry of Transportation says the road won't be necessary to accommodate traffic needs.

Southern Ontario is expecting a population boom of 4.5 million people over the next two decades, but Will Mackenzie, a spokesperson for MTO, said the super-highway will not be required after all.

"We felt that even after 2031, there would be no immediate need for the section between Ancaster and Welland," said Mackenzie.

Instead, the province plans to focus on other transit initiatives such as Metrolinx, a provincial agency which placed a \$770 million order for 182 light rail vehicles earlier this month.

The original expressway plan called for one super-highway looping from Burlington around Ancaster and south Hamilton Mountain, eventually winding up in Fort Erie/Niagara.

Rather than building one large expressway between Halton and Niagara, several smaller projects involving the QEW and 403 have been proposed by a Niagara-GTA study team. Mackenzie said that "there were a number of (other) issues" involved in the cancellation of the mid-peninsula highway earlier this week.

He cited the 2003 Richmond Landfill decision in Napanee as one of the most pressing issues facing the highway's completion.

The Richmond case involved a proposed landfill expansion, where divisional courts sided with the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) regarding what are known as terms of reference.

The courts ruled that environmental assessments in Ontario have to include needs and alternatives on any given project.

In the case of the super-highway, it was determined there was not enough need.

"That decision became case law ... that's why the mid-peninsula project was one of many pulled off the table," Mackenzie said.

The provincial Liberals launched an environmental assessment into the super-highway in 2005, and the issues of need and environmental impact on the surrounding lands have been major points of contention ever since.

In a letter sent to a Niagara-GTA study team on January 8, Citizens Against Paving the Escarpment (COPE) co-chairs Susan McMaster and Dave Bailey said they were "opposed to any scenario that includes building a new highway corridor or inflicts a new cut on the Niagara Escarpment."

The group could not be reached for comment on the latest mid-pen highway decision.

In terms of commerce, John Koroscil, chair of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and president and CEO of the Hamilton International Airport, said that the mid-pen decision is a "lost opportunity" on the Mountain.

"Look at the QEW between Hamilton and Toronto, and the development that's taken place there. That's a good example of the kind of opportunity that exists for Hamilton, and now you're taking that away."

However, Koroscil said that the decision "would not affect the airport employment growth district, because Highway 6 goes right through the middle of it."

With the mid-peninsula highway now off the table, new options include a corridor between the QEW in Fort Erie/Niagara and Highway 406 in Welland; a widening of the QEW between Highway 406 in St. Catharines and the Freeman Interchange in Burlington (QEW-403-407).

Also on the table are operational improvements on Highway 403 between the Ancaster-Brant County border and the Freeman Interchange in the short term; and a new corridor study to connect the 403 at Ancaster/Brant with Highway 407 near Burlington/Milton.

The MTO's Mackenzie said the new transit developments are still several years away from being realized.

"The plan that we've come out with is predicated on all the other stuff being done first.

"All of the Metrolinx plans, the GO Transit expansion and the road improvements that are planned by the municipalities and the province all need to be in place before any of the additional new stuff can be done."

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