



**Stop the Escarpment Highway Coalition
and
Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment**

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NGTA Study Team
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**Re: Niagara to GTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study
Transportation Development Strategy – September 2013**

We wish to reflect on the long road that Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE) and the Stop Escarpment Highway Coalition (SEHC) embarked upon when we citizens decided that a highway cutting the Niagara Escarpment was not a good idea. Over a decade ago we started submitting arguments – many relating to the value of the environment and many related to the logic and economics of the stove-piped process. We educated ourselves on what was happening in our environment and we are fortunate enough to have considerable in-house expertise to understand and comment on the ramifications of a highway. We warned of rising fuel prices and the cost of losing services provided by the natural eco system. We commented on the economics and external factors randomly forming the push for new highways. We warned about the need to protect Foodland from highways and subsequent sprawl. Sadly, the global situation today is worse than we foresaw. It is within the context of this crisis that we submit these comments.

Some of our comments are intended for the Niagara to GTA (NGTA) study team.
Some of our comments are directed to our government leaders.

In April 2013, Transportation Minister, Glenn Murray, described highway development as “last century kind of infrastructure” that is inefficient and unaffordable. We agree and also agree that good transportation and infrastructure planning is paramount for Ontario’s economy on the world stage. We anticipate that these overriding statements will mold future planning.

COPE and the SEHC spent much time objecting to elements of the study as well as submitting other ideas for inclusion. Given the restraints of the NGTA Terms of Reference, we appreciate the professionalism demonstrated by the study team, led by John Slobodzian, over the years.

Having reviewed the Ministry of Transportation's (MTO) results and recommendations of the NGTA Corridor Planning and Environmental Assessment Study, COPE and the SEHC submit the following comments.

Study Recommendations for the three "streams":

- ❑ We accept the majority of recommendations contained in the final Transportation Development Strategy for the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area Corridor Planning and Environment Assessment Study – September 2013.
- ❑ We do not agree with the expansion of Highway 6 between Hamilton Airport and Highway 403. The city owned airport has been managed by a private company since 1996. In a recent change, the private operator stopped releasing their annual consolidated financial statements to the public nor are they available to Hamilton city councilors. In June 2013 it was reported that Hamilton Airport cargo dropped to a level only 8.5% higher than that recorded in 2001. Five years ago, it was predicted that passenger traffic at the airport for 2012 would be 877,000 passengers. The actual number was 351,491 – 60% short of projection. Overstatement of operational capacity has been a continual issue with the Hamilton Airport. Access to the airport from 403 is not congested in any way. Given the above circumstances, paying for the widening of airport access at taxpayer expense is not warranted; especially when the funds are needed for transit.

Comments on recommended future study

- ❑ We remain firmly opposed to any new transportation corridor crossing the Niagara Escarpment, the Green Belt and the West study area which is home to the communities of Flamborough and Burlington.
- ❑ We expect that a new highway will not be built that cuts across the Niagara Escarpment, rural Flamborough or Halton Region's Natural Heritage System.
- ❑ We support a longer planning horizon beyond 2041 along with expansion of the area, options and opportunities considered. However, the assumption that continued reliance on oil is not acceptable. For this study we want new highway corridors excluded from the possible options.

- ❑ We recommend expanding the mandate of Metrolinx to include regional transit planning around the entire West end of Lake Ontario including St. Catharines.
- ❑ We encourage visionary leadership of future transportation planning processes where the project team is asked to consider “What would it take to have 20%, 30% or 40% of passenger traffic as transit trips in this region?” This approach will enable truly creative solutions and planning, as opposed to straight-line projections of the status quo.
- ❑ The terms of reference for this future study must strictly respect the devastating impact of climate change as well as the value of natural eco-systems. Any decisions must be made in the context of further impact to the environment with preservation of natural features and agricultural land as overriding priorities in determining any outcome. Asking simple questions: Does this action further exacerbate climate change? Are there no other measures that would solve the need? Do we have the right to jeopardize our grandchildren’s future for this? What is the actual cost of the action being contemplated?
- ❑ With billion dollar storms becoming the norm, one element of the ***Province’s Action Plan***, which provides the framework for infrastructure planning, is painfully absent. Alongside the ***Growth Plan***, the ***Greenbelt Plan*** and the ***Niagara Escarpment Plan*** is needed a ***Climate Change Plan*** firmly ensconced in legislation. For over a decade COPE and SEHC have maintained that the priority for investment should be transit and rail and priority for protection should be life-sustaining assets including air, water and Foodland. With the increasingly devastating impacts of climate change and the subsequent cost to mend lives and infrastructure, we now know that we are in unknown territory in regards to weather. As per the National Research Council report commissioned by the C.I.A. (November 2012), climate change is accelerating with the expectations of more crises around water supplies, food markets, energy supplies and public health systems. One-hundred year storms are now an annual event. What we spend billions of dollars building, Mother Nature can wipe out with one tornado. To purposely build highways and knowingly add more climate-altering gases into the atmosphere would be negligent at the least. However painful, it is time for government to address the root cause of these changes in transportation planning.
- ❑ We encourage the Provincial government to initiate with the Federal government the development of a National Transportation strategy. We expect this document to enable both regional transit planning and to define a clearer role for rail to move freight as opposed to the current truck based system.

- The future study be conducted in concert with efforts of other Provincial Ministries to address transportation issues in a manner that does not further contribute to CO2 emissions and climate change and safe-guard our eco-systems and Foodland. Such efforts would include:
 - Tax incentives for businesses that allow employees to work at home or in a satellite office closer to home. To reduce commuter traffic from 5 days a week to 3 or 2 days a week would alleviate considerable strain on the system.
 - Tax incentives for businesses to situate job opportunities/employment lands along transit routes.
 - Taking control of urban planning. Developers are deciding where to build with little or no co-ordination or consideration of the impacts to the transportation infrastructure. The result has been gridlock and sprawl because development has run amuck.
 - Banning development of rural/agricultural lands that abut or are close to future corridors.
 - Government protection against foreign ownership of agricultural/rural lands in the province and along possible transportation corridors. This has been done in other provinces in recognition of the prospecting that has been taking place. As climate change effects worsen, ownership of farmland will become increasingly important.
 - Completing a province-wide Natural Capital Study for use in cost/benefit analysis undertaken on infrastructure projects. Any future study must use a true cost benefit analysis considering all the factors.

The COPE/SEHC expects to be included as a primary stakeholder in the development of the strategy and scope of any future study to address the transportation needs of the West and Central Areas as identified in the study's Highway Expansion recommendations.

We look forward to continued collaboration in creating a modern, sustainable transportation system in Ontario that is based on a solid understanding of need and incorporates true infrastructure costs in decision-making — a system that also factors high-level, long-term planning and protection of eco-systems and Foodland into the equation.

Sincerely,

Susan McMaster
Co-Chair
Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment

Geoff Brock
Spokesperson
Stop Escarpment Highway Coalition

Appendix A: Member Groups of the Stop Escarpment Highway Coalition



The Stop Escarpment Highway Coalition (SEHC) is committed to ensuring there is no new highway cut through the Niagara Escarpment, a national treasure and UNESCO biosphere reserve.

Coalition Group Members working in Concert with Halton Regional and the City of Burlington

Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE)	www.stophighway.com
Oakvillegreen Conservation Association	www.oakvillegreen.org
Lowville Area Residents Association (LARA)	www.welcometolowville.com
BurlingtonGreen	www.burlingtongreen.org
Coalition of the Niagara Escarpment (CONE)	www.niagaraescarpment.org
Protecting Escarpment Rural Land (PERL)	www.perlofburlington.org
Milton Green Citizens Group	www.Miltongreen.info
Environment Hamilton	www.environmenthamilton.org
Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society	www.pals@becon.org
Cedar Springs Community	cedarspringscommunityclub.ca
Sidrabene Latvian Camp	www.sidrabene.org
CRASHH (Halton Hills)	www.crashh.org
Sustainable Vaughan	sustainablevaughan.com
Sustainable Brant	www.sustainablebrant.blogspot.ca