

SUBJECT: Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan – Discussion Paper

PREPARED BY: Loy Cheah, Senior Manager, Transportation
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RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) That the staff report entitled “Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan – Discussion Paper” dated September 27, 2021 be received; and
- 2) That Council support the visions and short-term actions proposed in the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) discussion paper entitled “Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan” and the following directions that are part of the proposed 2051 Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan (“GGHTP”) within the discussion paper:
 - Elevating the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre node to a higher level at par with the Union Station and Pearson Airport nodes as GGH-level Conceptual Transit Hubs;
 - Exploring a new east-west, cross regional connection (the “Cross Rail” line) between Burlington and Oshawa (including Markham) that connects existing GO Lines;
 - Exploring a new transit loop (the “Orbital Line”) that extends and connects the Ontario Line to new major transit hubs where regional services connect, including at Markham-Richmond Hill Centre and Pearson Airport; and
- 3) That, as part of the “*Getting people moving on a Connected Transit System*” pillar of the proposed 2051 GGHTP:
 - a. the Province and Metrolinx give priority to formalizing the proposed status of the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre node and implementing plans and policies for the transit infrastructure and services connecting to the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre node, through updates of the Provincial Growth Plan and Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan;
 - b. the Province enhance the GO rail network in York Region to support two-way urban rapid transit service and evaluate the opportunity to provide quicker service times than 15 minutes, and invest in new station locations on the Stouffville line at Denison Street and Major Mackenzie/Markham Road to support creation of complete communities;
 - c. MTO identify in the proposed GGHTP preferred transit network, a Leslie Street Bus Rapid Transit line (from Steeles Avenue to Major Mackenzie Drive), with an extension along Woodbine Avenue via Major Mackenzie Drive, to service the significant employment development planned within the Markham Innovation Exchange district; and

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- 4) That, as part of the “*Enhancing Capacity and Performance on Congested Roads*” pillar of the proposed 2051 GGHTP,
 - a. the Province include short term goals and actions to maximize capacity of the existing road and highway infrastructure through innovative techniques and latest traffic control technologies to utilize off-peak lanes for peak period travel, prior to investing in new Provincial roads and highways;
 - b. the Province expand highways at strategic locations such as widening Highway 7 from Donald Cousens Parkway to York Durham Line and Highway 48 from Major Mackenzie Drive to Bloomington Road; and
 - 5) That the comments in this staff report be forwarded to MTO as the City’s formal comments on the “Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan” Discussion Paper; and
 - 6) That a copy of this report be forwarded to the Region of York; and further
 - 7) That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In June 2021, MTO released the “*Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan*” discussion paper to receive public and stakeholder feedback. Comments from the public and stakeholder was requested by August 28, 2021 and staff have provided preliminary comments by the above deadline. This Council report represents the formal comprehensive City of Markham comments to MTO.

The MTO discussion paper proposes a mix of transportation solutions consisting of new transit and highway infrastructure, better transit and shared services, and new policies to improve the overall transportation experience in the Greater Golden Horseshoe region. In addition to completing the Yonge North Subway Extension, key recommendations of the discussion paper and proposed GGHTP includes:

- Identifying the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre as one of three major transit hubs, with Union Station and Pearson Airport being the other two, that will anchor the future rapid transit network for the Greater Golden Horseshoe region;
- Exploring a new east-west, cross regional connection (the “Cross Rail” line) between Burlington and Oshawa (including Markham) that connects existing GO Lines;
- Exploring a new transit loop (the “Orbital Line”) that extends and connects the Ontario Line to new major transit hubs where regional services connect, including at Markham-Richmond Hill Centre and Pearson Airport;

With these major proposals, staff recommend that the Province formalize the proposed status of the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre node and implementing plans and policies for the transit infrastructure and services connecting to the Markham-Richmond Hill

Centre node, through updates of the Provincial Growth Plan and Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan.

Other key Markham Council transportation planning policies and positions are also recommended to be added to the proposed GGHTP including a potential rapid transit connection to the Markham Innovation Exchange district and new GO rail stations on the Stouffville line at Major Mackenzie Drive and Denison Street.

PURPOSE:

This report presents:

- A summary of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) Discussion Paper titled “*Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan*” released on June 29, 2021;
- The key recommendations that would impact the City of Markham;
- Additional recommendations and directions for the Province to consider; and
- An overview of the preliminary staff comments issued to MTO.

BACKGROUND:

MTO is developing a transportation plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) to support growth to 2051. The transportation plan will set out a 30-year vision for mobility in the GGH region, and guide and align strategic Provincial and municipal decisions and investments. The plan focuses on the GGH transportation system and provide solutions that will have GGH-wide impacts. It will inform how public agencies make decisions about policy and infrastructure investments and provide direction to municipalities, transportation agencies and service providers as they plan for growth.

Overview of Discussion Paper

On June 29, 2021, a Discussion Paper “*Towards a Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan*” was released for public and stakeholder feedback. The Discussion Paper outlined MTO’s:

- 2051 Vision for mobility in the Greater Golden Horseshoe; and
- Near-term actions consisting of work currently underway or planned and considered foundational to its long-term vision.

The underlying transportation challenges being addressed in this Discussion Paper include the following:

- The GGH population is forecasted to grow from 10 million people in 2019, to 14.9 million people by 2051. This rapid growth, alongside technological and socio-economic changes, will create an increasingly complex and congested transportation network over the coming decades.
- Roads alone cannot keep up with growth. From 2001 to 2016, travel demand on provincial highways in the GGH grew three times faster than the rate of new road construction.

- While the highly urban core of the City of Toronto relies on transit and active transportation to move masses of people, the rapidly growing suburban municipalities surrounding Toronto require more transportation options and better connections not just to Union Station but across the 905 region.

The MTO Discussion Paper is proposing a mix of solutions consisting of new transit and highway infrastructure, better transit and shared services, and new policies to improve the overall transportation experience.

Nine objectives were developed to guide the GGH transportation plan development and evaluation of projects:

1. Improving Our Ports and Cross-Border Movement
2. Improving Access to Jobs and Services
3. Integrating New Technologies
4. Getting Goods to Market
5. Supporting a More Sustainable and Resilient Region
6. Growing More Active and Sustainable Modes
7. Making it Easier to Travel by Transit
8. Reducing Congestion and Increasing Choice
9. Providing More Options for Small Communities

The proposed GGH Transportation Plan sets out a 30-year vision for mobility

The 2051 vision includes a number of different directions on infrastructures, services, and policies centering around three main themes, termed in the Discussion Paper as the three pillars of the proposed GGHTP:

1. Getting People Moving on a Connected Transit System
2. Enhancing Capacity and Performance on Congested Roads
3. Efficiently Moving Goods Across the Region

The first pillar, “*Getting people moving on a Connected Transit System*”, envisions a transformation of the existing transit system, from a radial commuter network (with connections centered on Union Station that extend outward) to an expansive grid (that provides multitude of direct connections) without needing to go through the Toronto core (see also Attachment 1). Key elements of the first pillar consists of the following:

- Delivering **major transit investments** currently at various stages of planning, design, and construction, including the Yonge North Subway Extension;
- Exploring a **new east-west, cross regional connection** (conceptually shown to follow the Highway 407 right-of-way) between Burlington and Oshawa (including through Markham) that connects existing GO Lines;
- Exploring a **new transit loop** that connects the Ontario Line with new major transit hubs where regional services connect including at Markham-Richmond Hill Centre;

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- Increasing the **frequency of local transit service to every 10 minutes** across all urban areas;
 - **Fully integrating transit fares and services** to provide seamless connections;
 - **24-hour public transportation access** to better serve the region's largest employment nodes;
 - Planning transportation services to support equity of **access and mobility**;
 - **Promoting walking and cycling** as a first choice for short trips.

The second pillar, “*Enhancing Capacity and Performance on Congested Roads*”, envisions a combination of new road infrastructure and ways to manage and maximize the utilization and efficiency of the road network (See Attachment 2): Key elements of the second pillar consists of the following

- **Delivering major highway projects** including the GTA West Corridor;
- **Expanding highways** at strategic locations (e.g. widening Highway 7 from Donald Cousens Parkway to York Durham Line and Highway 48 from Major Mackenzie Drive to Bloomington Road);
- **Establishing a network of connected managed lanes** to maximize capacity and prioritize uses on the highway network such as transit and goods movement;
- **Managing passenger travel demand and congestion** through various travel demand management strategies;
- **Supporting innovation and leveraging new technologies** such as automated, connected and electric vehicles;
- Planning, designing and managing the road network and rights-of-way to support **safety and mobility for all users**, regardless of age, ability or mode of travel.

The third pillar, “*Efficiently Moving Goods Across Region*”, envisions an integrated, multimodal Strategic Goods Movement Network (see Attachment 3). Key elements include the following:

- Planning for and managing the movement of freight on key routes, corridors and rail, air and marine facilities;
- Connected corridors with real time traffic management and new technologies such as cooperative truck-platooning;
- Network performance monitoring to identify future needs and improvements across transport modes to better serve goods movement.

Short-term Goals and Actions Affecting City of Markham

Through the Discussion Paper, MTO also identified “interconnected near-term goals” and associated actions where progress “is already being made” toward the proposed GGHTP. These near-term actions are considered foundational pieces towards its vision.

Below are the short-term goals and actions that directly impact Markham:

a. Transit connectivity

- i. Build **new transit routes and stations** in highly urban areas – new transit routes like the Ontario Line and Yonge North Subway extension;
- ii. **Two-way, all-day service every 15 minutes over core segments of the GO Transit rail network**, including the Stouffville Line;
- iii. Implementing high quality transit hubs;
- iv. Starting to **plan for a future Phase 2 of Ontario's GTA transit plan**, including exploring the Ontario Line loop concept.

b. Access to transit by active transportation

- i. **Making it easier to walk or cycle** to or from transit stations by working with municipalities to prioritize and coordinate improvements to active transportation facilities, such as bike lanes, that connect to transit stations and stops.
- ii. Developing a **best practice guideline** document to support updates to the **e-bikes framework** – 3 distinct classes (bicycle style, moped style, and motorcycle style) to help municipalities choose which classes of vehicles to safely integrate on their transportation infrastructure

The following links are provided for reference:

- MTO project website: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/greater-golden-horseshoe-ggh-transportation-plan#section-1>
- Full Discussion Paper: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/towards-greater-golden-horseshoe-transportation-plan-discussion-paper>

Next Steps

The proposed visions and short-term actions by MTO are draft for public and stakeholder review and comment and will be finalized by MTO as part of the final GGHTP, anticipated for Fall 2021.

The recommendations of the final plan will affect the 2018 Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and will, therefore, require the Metrolinx RTP to be updated at a later date. It will also affect York Region's Transportation Master Plan (TMP), which is currently being updated as part of the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review and Official Plan Update process.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

This MTO study was initiated in late 2015 and Markham staff have been involved through the study Municipal Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC). Prior to the release of the Discussion Paper, feedback from Markham staff have focused on ensuring correct data assumptions are used in the study, representing existing and future conditions as contained in City's approved/published plans.

Preliminary Staff Comments issued to MTO

With comments on the Discussion Paper due by August 28, 2021 to MTO, staff have provided preliminary comments (see Attachment 4), which are aligned with the City's strategic objectives for Building Markham's Future Together (BMFT) 2020 – 2023 Strategic Plan.

As part of the “Accelerate delivery of an enhanced comprehensive transportation network in partnership with other levels of government / private sector” strategic objective in the BMFT, staff have underlined the importance of:

- Elevating the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre node to a higher level at par with the Union Station and Pearson Airport nodes as GGH-level Conceptual Transit Hubs;
- Exploring a new east-west, cross regional connection (the “Cross Rail” line) between Burlington and Oshawa (including Markham) that connects existing GO Lines;
- Exploring a new transit loop (the “Orbital Line”) that extends and connects the Ontario Line to new major transit hubs where regional services connect, including at Markham-Richmond Hill Centre and Pearson Airport; and
- Maximize capacity of the existing road and highway infrastructure through innovative techniques and technologies, including utilizing the latest traffic control technologies to optimize off-peak lanes and signalization for peak period travel, prior to investing in new Provincial roads and highways.

With the Markham-Richmond Hill Centre node becoming one of three anchor nodes in the proposed GGH transit network, staff suggested that this major transit hub and the implementation steps for the connecting transit infrastructure and services be formalized through updates of the Provincial Growth Plan and Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan.

Staff have also identified projects, which were not identified in the proposed GGHTP preferred transit network but are of importance to Markham in the near and long-term future and that align with the strategic actions within the BMFT, including:

1. The Province enhance the GO rail network in York Region to support two-way urban rapid transit service and evaluate the opportunity to provide quicker service times than 15 minutes, and invest in new station locations on the Stouffville line at Denison Street and Major Mackenzie/Markham Road to support creation of complete communities; and

2. The potential need for higher order transit to service the significant employment development planned within the Markham Innovation Exchange area via Leslie Street, Major Mackenzie Drive and Woodbine Avenue.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The proposed Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan is compatible and aligns with the City of Markham's Official Plan policies and the Building Markham's Future Together 2020 – 2023 Strategic Plan as it relates to the Safe, Sustainable & Complete Community goal. A previously stated, a key objective of the BMFT Strategic Plan is to accelerate the delivery of an enhanced comprehensive transportation network in partnership with other levels of government and the private sector including for more higher order transit, transit-oriented developments and optimizing the road system.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Planning and Urban Design was consulted and has reviewed the contents of this report.

RECOMMENDED BY:

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Director of Engineering

Arvin Prasad, MPA, RPP, MCIP
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 – Proposed 2051 GGHTP Transit Network
- Attachment 2 – Proposed 2051 GGHTP Roads Network
- Attachment 3 – Proposed 2051 GGHTP Goods Movement Network
- Attachment 4 – Preliminary Staff Comments