

March 4, 2020

The Honourable Caroline Mulroney
Minister of Transportation
777 Bay Street, 5th floor
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Mulroney,

RE: Southwestern Ontario Regional Transportation Plan

I am pleased to provide comments from the City of Guelph (the City) on the Province's Regional Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario (SWO RTP).

Guelph falls within the GTA West region of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's (MTO's) regional planning structure, and is an active participant on the MTO Technical Advisory Committee that is also initiating a regional transportation plan. The City takes an active interest in MTO plans and initiatives in adjacent communities and regions as they influence or intersect with more local objectives.

The City's comments on the SWO RTP focus on a few key themes:

- Continued prioritization of Highways 6 and 7 improvements
- Support for rail transportation improvements (passenger and freight) to alleviate congestion on the 400-series highways
- Encouraging non-auto travel to, from and within our communities
- Continued open and transparent engagement with municipalities and partners on planning, technology and pilot project opportunities.

Prioritization of Highways 6 and 7 improvements

The SWO RTP notes MTO's continued commitment to the construction of the Highway 6 South Morriston Bypass, upgrades to the south end of Highway 6 in Guelph, and construction of the new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. These improvements will be necessary to support the projected population and employment growth-related traffic to 2031 in Guelph. Guelph is encouraged to see this ongoing commitment of MTO to the projects. The City looks forward to more details on the timing and phasing of these projects, particularly as they impact long-range transportation and development planning in the community.

I am pleased that the City has had further discussions with Ministry staff about a potential interchange at Highway 6 (the Hanlon Expressway) and the new Highway 7. The City raised our concerns about the current signalized intersection design when Guelph's Mayor met with your Director of Policy, Kailey Vokes and MTO staff in January. We appreciate the Ministry's follow-up on this matter.

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We also look forward to more information about when the Ministry will continue to change signalized intersections to interchanges along Highway 6 (the Hanlon Expressway) through Guelph. In recent meetings with MTO staff on the design work for the approved Hanlon EA (Speed River to Maltby Road), we were unable to get confirmation of a proposed schedule for construction.

Support rail transportation improvements (passenger and freight)

Guelph commends the Province's progress on two-way all day GO service between Union Station and Kitchener. Extending improved passenger rail service west of Kitchener further supports non-auto intercommunity travel and relieves congestion on the 401 corridor. Parking for GO-train users from the downtown Guelph Central Station is limited, and the City is willing to work with Metrolinx to explore alternatives to increasing the supply of parking to attract ridership.

The SWO RTP notes that MTO will continue to negotiate with freight and rail partners to make improvements. As the Province enters into these negotiations, Guelph encourages a balanced approach to recognize the important contribution that rail freight has on mitigating highway congestion caused by goods movement. It is important to balance the needs of the rail freight partners to accommodate growth in the industry, with the needs of increased frequency and speed of passenger rail.

Encouraging non-auto travel within and between communities

Goal 1 of the RTP speaks to the review of the intercommunity bus sector. The City has provided comments on this review in the past, and considers this a province-wide issue. Guelph continues to encourage the Province to find ways to open up the market to more service providers, new service delivery models, and allow for routes to be opened up to future service. As noted above, this also supports the City's efforts to reduce car dependency for inter-community trips.

The SWO RTP proposes updating the "long combination vehicle program conditions to reduce congestion due to truck traffic, cut red tape and increase efficiencies for businesses." It is unclear whether this is a specific action item for the Southwestern Ontario region or for all of Ontario. The City concurs that there are potential benefits to this program as noted in the SWO RTP. There are also some concerns of road design, land acquisition, and road user compatibility if this pilot is formally adopted and/or applied to roads affecting Guelph. The introduction of these vehicles may oblige the City to redesign roadways to accommodate these vehicles at the expense of other more vulnerable road users, such as cyclists, pedestrians, and people taking public transit. The City is interested in working with the MTO to better understand the potential for long combination vehicles, the associated plan/program, and the impacts to Guelph.

Continued open and transparent engagement

Goal 4 references a number of initiatives related to testing emerging technologies or

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exploring opportunities for various pilot projects. The SWO RTP is unclear whether these are province-wide initiatives, or specific to the region. Guelph would be interested to actively participate in these initiatives if there are opportunities to get involved. Specifically, integrated fare payment, refining the definition and operating parameters for kick style e-scooters (and e-bicycles) and traffic data integration.

Goal 4 also includes an action to support transit-oriented development. The City is interested to know more about this action: is it specifically geared to Southwestern Ontario, or is it a province-wide goal? How does the MTO envision it will “facilitate transit-oriented development at transit stations”? It is unclear what the action is and who is intended to implement it. If the Province is contemplating changes to the way development is undertaken around or near transit stations, the City looks forward to further consultations and discussion on how this will be achieved.

Goal 5 makes reference to preparing for connected, autonomous vehicles, but lacks specific details as to how that will occur. An important element to research and studies will be understanding the impacts on congestion and the regulatory tools to mitigate this.

In conclusion, the SWO RTP demonstrates the MTO’s financial commitment to highway, rail and transit improvements. The City is encouraged to see this commitment in our own community as well, and hope this will continue to figure prominently in the GTA West RTP, notably for the Hanlon Expressway improvements, Highway 7 construction, and investments in two-way all day GO service.

The City also looks forward to the release of the Regional Transportation Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SWO RTP.

Sincerely,



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