

MTO updates EA for GTA West corridor

By Mark Pavilons

The Ministry of Transportation is proposing a regulation to update the existing environmental assessment process for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Transportation Corridor. The regulation would create a new streamlined process for assessing potential environmental impacts of the project, as well as consulting on it. And the public has a chance to submit its comments and concerns. As part of the government's Made-in-Ontario Plan commitment to modernize the 50-year old environmental assessment program, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is proposing a regulation to update the existing environmental assessment process for corridor. The proposed regulation would create a new streamlined process for assessing potential environmental impacts of the project, as well as consulting on it. The new process would eliminate duplication while maintaining environmental protection. For example, it would include a requirement to complete field investigations and collect technical information for documentation in the Environmental Conditions report, an Environmental Impact Assessment report, and an Early Works report. Stage 1 of the GTA West environmental assessment study (Systems Planning) recommended a Transportation Development Strategy (TDS), which was completed in November 2012. This strategy identified the need for more road capacity beyond optimizing the existing transportation network, widening existing highways, and the transit expansion projects identified by Metrolinx. Stage 2 of the environmental assessment study (Route Planning and Preliminary Design) is currently under way. Building on the recommendations from Stage 1, the GTA West environmental assessment study will identify the route, determine interchange locations, and complete the preliminary design for a new transportation corridor within the Route Planning Study Area. The new multimodal transportation corridor will include: a 400-series highway.

Transitway and potential goods movement priority features extending from Highway 400 (between Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road) in the east to the Highway 401/407 ETR interchange area in the west. Shortened timelines would speed up completion of the preliminary design phase of the project, providing earlier confirmation of the transportation corridor to local communities, municipalities, and Indigenous communities. More broadly, this could allow construction to start earlier, which would ease congestion in the study area more quickly from its intersection with Highway 400 west to its intersection with Highway 401/407 ETR. Modifying the existing environmental assessment process for the GTA West Transportation Corridor project would lead to more efficient design and construction phases and provide flexibility for the delivery model selected in the future. Under the proposed regulation, the MTO would still be required to complete preliminary/detail design and consultation as a requirement of conditions outlined in the regulation. This streamlined process would require the MTO to prepare an Environmental Conditions report. This report would be documentation of all work completed from the start of the project up until the completion of the preliminary design phase. The report would help expedite timelines and provide certainty in the process, which in turn would support selection of the future delivery model. The realigned GTA West Corridor proposal is welcomed by King councillors. Councillors lauded the new route alignment, which protects lands for a further multimodal transportation corridor. The new route swings further north into Caledon before dipping south through Vaughan, connecting with Highway 427 near Nashville Road. It then continues east south of the King-Vaughan Road, connecting to Highway 400 north of Kirby Road. Certain parts of the GTA West Transportation Corridor project are expected to be ready for construction earlier than other parts of the highway. This streamlined environmental assessment process would shorten the project schedule by completing the preliminary design study in 2022 instead of 2023 or beyond. It would also remove duplication between Environmental Assessment Act requirements and other specific legislation, as well as the MTO standards and practices, while maintaining environmental considerations. The proposed regulation would save time by allowing the ministry to apply for, and obtain permits and approvals required for construction. These approvals would be subject to consultation or other requirements associated with those processes, and to meeting the requirements set out in the regulation. Visit <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882> to submit comments.