

1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has completed a Class Environmental Assessment (EA) study to determine a long-term strategy to address the structural and traffic safety needs of the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) crossing of the Welland Canal. This includes the generation and evaluation of alternatives for the QEW Garden City Skyway.

The study has followed the approved environmental planning process for Group 'B' projects under the Ministry of Transportation's *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities* (2000). The MTO Class EA is an approved process under the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act for the planning and design of provincial highway projects.

1.2 Study Area

The study area extends along the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) from Niagara Street, in the City of St. Catharines, to Glendale Avenue, in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, within Niagara Region. The existing QEW Garden City Skyway is a 48-span, high-level bridge that is 2.2 km long, 28 m wide and carries the QEW over the Welland Canal, connecting the City of St. Catharines and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. At the crossing of the Welland Canal, the bridge is approximately 40 m high. The bridge was built in 1963, and has since undergone various repairs. The project study area is depicted in **Exhibit 1-1**.

1.3 Background and Study Purpose

The Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) is Ontario's oldest freeway, dating back to the 1930s. The QEW is a critical element in the provincial highway network and is one of Ontario's most important transportation facilities in terms of trade, commuter, and tourist traffic. The QEW links the Canada-United States border crossings at Niagara Falls and Fort Erie with Ontario's Golden Horseshoe and beyond.

The purpose of this Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) study is to address the long-term structural, traffic safety and operational needs of the QEW crossing of the Welland Canal.

1.4 Related / Adjacent Studies and Projects

The following are notable studies in the vicinity of the study area.

Niagara to GTA Planning and Environmental Assessment Study

MTO is examining long-term transportation problems and opportunities to consider alternative solutions that provide better linkages to urban growth centres within the Niagara to GTA Corridor Preliminary Study Area (e.g., Niagara, Hamilton, and Halton). Phase 1 of the Planning and Environmental Assessment study was completed in September 2013, and made several recommendations. These include widening of key highway facilities in Hamilton and Halton, widening the QEW to eight (8) lanes, including HOV lanes, from Hamilton to St. Catharines, and the construction of a new highway corridor connecting Highway 406 south of Welland to the QEW near Fort Erie.

The Niagara to GTA (NGTA) study considered widening the QEW to eight or ten lanes through St. Catharines, but recommended that capacity expansion through St. Catharines (and, hence, the QEW Garden City Skyway) is less preferable than providing additional capacity via the improvements to Highway 406 and the construction of the new highway corridor. As a result of these outcomes, the current Preliminary Design study

for the QEW Garden City Skyway has not considered capacity improvements to the QEW within the study area.

Phase 2 of the NGTA study will determine the preferred route for the new highway that connects Highway 406 south of Welland to the QEW near Fort Erie. Phase 2 is not yet scheduled. The start date for Phase 2 will be based on provincial infrastructure priorities and the availability of funding.

Additional information regarding the Niagara to GTA study is available online at: www.ontario.ca/page/niagara-greater-toronto-area-corridor.

QEW / Glendale Avenue / Highway 405 Class EA Study

In 2010, Niagara Region initiated a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) to investigate opportunities for improvements to the transportation network in the Glendale/QEW/Highway 405 area. The study area is bounded approximately by the Welland Canal, Queenston Road, Four Mile Creek Road, and Mountain Road, and includes interchanges between Glendale Avenue, the Queen Elizabeth Way, and Highway 405.

The Region issued a Notice of Study Closure in February 2013 as updated future land use information indicated that development patterns in the study area will differ significantly from those used in study. At the time the study was closed the evaluation of alternatives had been completed and work was about to begin on the design concept for the preferred alternative. Due to the uncertainty surrounding certain factors that would influence the recommended configuration of key transportation improvements, the Class EA study was closed with the possibility of resuming the study at a later date.

In 2015, Cole Engineering Group Ltd., on behalf of Ivanhoe Cambridge, initiated a Class Environmental Assessment study to review various improvement options at the QEW/Glendale Avenue interchange, to address capacity constraints and accommodate anticipated growth in traffic demand from Northbound Glendale Avenue to the Toronto-bound QEW. However, the study was never completed.

The Ministry of Transportation is considering initiating a Class Environmental Assessment and Preliminary Design study to look at various alternatives for replacement of the Glendale Avenue structure over the QEW. In addition, this study will investigate options for operational enhancements at the QEW/Glendale Avenue interchange.

EXHIBIT 1-1: STUDY AREA

