

# **Niagara's Transportation Strategy**

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# Niagara's Transportation Strategy

## 1. Introduction:

Transportation is of pivotal importance in the development of Niagara. This, Niagara's first comprehensive transportation strategy, provides an integrated framework to guide the development and expansion of transportation systems in Niagara Region. The strategy identifies strategic directions, key transportation initiatives and specific objectives to guide the implementation of important transportation improvements in Niagara.

The Strategy focuses on the needs of Niagara and was developed in consultation with the citizens, businesses and stakeholders in Niagara. The Transportation Strategy identifies the direction and the outcomes that Niagara wants to achieve. The Strategy outlined in this document provides: a common context for decisions on project and service improvements, methods for implementing improvements, and a process for determining the relative priorities of improvements to be implemented by the many agencies involved in transportation.

Although the Transportation Strategy was developed from a Niagara perspective, it recognizes that many of the transportation systems that pass through Niagara serve important functions beyond Niagara's borders and support broader Provincial and Federal objectives. This Transportation Strategy will assist in developing solutions that serve both Niagara's and the larger transportation markets while ensuring that the transportation solutions fit with Niagara's social, economic, environmental and development objectives. The strategy is aligned with the broader Federal and Provincial transportation policy objectives.

The strategy provides a framework for developing transportation systems, however, it does not provide all the specific details of the transportation solutions. More detailed technical studies will determine the most effective methods to implement the objectives for each of the transportation initiatives. The majority of these implementation studies are underway. The Province is in the process of preparing an Environmental Assessment for the Mid-Peninsula Corridor and will be implementing plans for improvements of the QEW through St. Catharines, Niagara on the Lake and Niagara Falls. The Region of Niagara has initiated studies on arterial roads, inter-municipal transit and bikeways. Studies on inter-regional passenger services and freight rail services have just been initiated. A study on potential roles and markets for airports in Niagara is being done in partnership with the Niagara District Airport. An implementation plan for the Port of Niagara will be developed in partnership with the marine industry and the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority. These studies will identify specific action plans for achieving the strategic objectives and provide information to coordinate various initiatives and set priorities for specific actions.

This transportation strategy outlines key strategic directions for transportation, identifies the initiatives that support those directions, sets out the objectives that each initiative should achieve and lays out the process for implementation of the strategy.

## 2. Strategic Directions

Transportation systems in Niagara should support the following strategic directions:

- Improve travel and commuting within Niagara;
- Support planned economic growth and land use development in Niagara;
- Enhance community lifestyles (quality of life) in Niagara;
- Provide environmental stewardship;
- Improve travel and commuting between Niagara and the surrounding areas;
- Support international trade;
- Enhance accessibility to tourist and recreational destinations in Niagara; and
- Provide citizens in Niagara with a choice of ways to affordably access places of employment, education social, recreational and essential services.

## 3. Strategic initiatives

The following initiatives are pivotal in supporting Niagara's strategic directions.

- Construction of a **Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor** which off loads international and truck traffic from the QEW, provides an alternative route through the Region for international trade and supports economic and urban development in the southern tier of the region.
- Planned **expansion of the QEW** (to 6 lanes) to improve access and transportation capacity to major economic and tourist destinations in Niagara.
- Expansion of **Highway 406** to provide improved highway access from the QEW in the north to Port Colborne in the south.

- An improved **arterial road system** that provides safe, efficient vehicular access between diverse communities in the Region and across major physical barriers such as the escarpment, the Welland canal and controlled-access highways (i.e. the QEW and Hwy 406) that will accommodate the needs of motorists, truckers, transit operations and cyclists.
- Expanded **transit services** between the municipalities in Niagara that provides an alternative to the automobile as well as services that provide the physically and mobility-challenged in Niagara with a viable alternative method to access places of employment, medical and other services and activities.
- **Improved passenger services between Niagara and the GTA** by rail, bus and/or ferry service to serve the needs of commuters from Niagara and persons travelling to tourist and recreational attractions in Niagara.
- **Integration of transit and other passenger services** across Niagara and between Niagara and surrounding areas through coordination of schedules and the use of common terminals and transfer points.
- **Improved railway facilities** across the Niagara Peninsula that meet the needs of passengers to and from Niagara, industries and businesses in Niagara, as well as international trade and passenger travel through Niagara.
- Establishment of a **Port Authority in Niagara** to coordinate the use of existing port facilities and promote the use of those port facilities by industries and tourist operators in Niagara and the surrounding area.
- **Development and promotion of Niagara's airports** and complementary abutting land uses in a manner that serves the unique requirements of the residents and the tourist, manufacturing and service industries in Niagara.
- An **integrated system of bikeways** across Niagara providing opportunities for residents of Niagara to use bicycles to travel to work, business, educational and recreation destinations as well as providing recreational bicycling opportunities for residents and tourists visiting Niagara.
- Improvements to the capacities of the **International Bridges** that provide critical links between Ontario and the United States of America as well as between Niagara and our immediate neighbors in New York State.

These strategic initiatives are the heart of the transportation strategy. Transportation policies, action plans and priorities are being developed to guide the implementation of these strategic directions.

The development of new transportation facilities and services will be aligned with these key initiatives and be implemented in a manner that is compatible with and improves the natural and social environments in the Region. Decisions on alternative methods of undertaking these initiatives will give preference to those transportation facilities and services that reduce dependency on private autos, demands for fuel and the creation of pollution.

#### **4. Specific objectives for each initiative**

The initiatives identified above will be implemented in a manner that will achieve the following objectives.

##### **The Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor**

###### **Objectives:**

- An alternative route for international trade passing through Niagara
- Divert truck traffic away from the QEW and arterial roads
- Divert development pressures away from the tender fruit areas north of the escarpment
- Increase accessibility to support development in the south of Niagara
- Connection to international bridge in the southern portion of the Niagara Frontier border

##### **The QEW Corridor**

###### **Objectives:**

- Limit future widening of the QEW to areas already planned for improvements and improvements to Garden City Skyway
- Design and operational plans for the QEW that are compatible with its function as a major entrance to Niagara's tourist area
- Encourage trucks onto the Mid-Peninsula Transportation Corridor once it is complete

##### **Highway 406**

###### **Objectives:**

- Direct highway access from Port Colborne to the Provincial highway network and the proposed Mid-Peninsula Transportation corridor.
- A high speed highway connection from Port Colborne to other urbanized areas of Niagara.

## **The Arterial Road System**

### **Objectives:**

- Direct connections between diverse communities in Niagara, to major highways and across major physical barriers such as the Welland Canal, the escarpment and controlled-access highways
- Road right-of-way and design that will safely accommodate traffic growth associated with development and changing travel patterns as well as truck, transit and bicycle traffic
- A system of truck routes to accommodate commercial traffic while minimizing impacts on communities, tender fruit-lands and environmentally sensitive areas
- Road improvements designed to fit with community objectives and standards
- Completion of Greater Niagara Circle Route parkway.

## **Niagara Transit Systems**

### **Objectives:**

- Provide alternative means of transportation (to the automobile ) for travel between the diverse communities in Niagara
- Develop a coordinated system of accessible transit to meet the needs of the “transportation disadvantaged” to travel between communities
- Create a system of terminals that will integrate municipal transit and inter-regional transit and passenger services.

## **Inter-Regional Rail, Transit and Ferry Passenger Systems**

### **Objectives:**

- A set of passenger connections between Niagara, the GTA and adjoining jurisdictions that serve the distinct markets of commuting, tourism, business and recreational travel
- Develop business plans with potential partnerships to promote the implementation of feasible, inter-regional passenger services including: GO, VIA, inter-city bus and ferry services
- Coordination of inter-regional passenger services, services in surrounding jurisdictions and municipal and inter-municipal transit services in Niagara.

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## **Railway Networks in Niagara**

### **Objectives:**

- Improve direct rail freight services to the industries and businesses of Niagara.
- Maintenance of all rail rights-of-way designated for abandonment, for freight services to Niagara industry and business where feasible or alternative transportation purposes (i.e. trails) where it is no longer feasible to maintain a rail function.
- Improved operation of rail lines and facilities through Niagara that provide complementary and alternative methods to carry both freight and passengers.

## **Niagara Port Authority**

### **Objectives:**

- Expanded use of Niagara port facilities through coordinated marketing to business, industry and tourist operations in Niagara and the surrounding areas
- Improvement of marine and related facilities to meet the needs of and help expand and attract new markets.
- Improved coordination of the operation and marketing of marine facilities in Niagara.

## **Niagara's Airports**

### **Objectives:**

- Improved airport services that meet the needs of the citizens and businesses of Niagara
- Develop a marketing strategy to attract airport related businesses that are compatible with the needs of Niagara and assist in building Niagara's economic base
- Create business plans and partnerships to move the operations of Niagara's airports towards self-sufficiency.

## **Bicycle and Pedestrian Systems**

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**Objectives:**

- Develop a comprehensive plan for both on-road and off-road bicycle paths and trails to meet the needs of residents of Niagara and tourists visiting Niagara
- Integration of bikeways and trails provided by the Region, the area municipalities and parks authorities to provide a seamless biking and hiking experience in Niagara
- Promotion to increase the use of bicycling and walking as viable alternatives to the automobile for shorter distances and certain types of trips
- Establish a priority and staging plan to expand the existing system in a logical, and effective manner.

**International Bridges****Objectives:**

- To increase capacity of those bridges connected directly to controlled access highways in order to facilitate the easy flow of traffic associated with trade and tourism between Canada and the United States.
- To ensure that plans for bridge improvements are consistent with planned improvements to highway capacity, especially the proposed Mid Peninsula Transportation Corridor.
- To include in the design of bridges, improvements that will facilitate the connection of pedestrian and bikeway trails on both sides of the border and the easy flow of people between the communities on both sides of the border.

**5. Implementing the Transportation Strategy**

The Strategy is being implemented in the following steps.

**a) A Policy Framework to guide implementation of the Strategy**

The transportation strategy is an important element in the policy and development plans for Niagara. It is an important component of the Region's Smart Growth Strategy and the basis for revisions to the transportation policy framework for the Region's Policy Plan. New transportation policies will be based on the strategic directions, key initiatives and objectives outlined in this transportation strategy. The policies will be adopted by formal amendment to the Region's Policy Plan.

**b) Development of Action Plans**

Detailed questions must still be addressed to assist in the implementation of the strategy. A number of technical sub-studies are assessing the feasibility of achieving the strategic objectives and identify specific action plans to implement those initiatives. Technical advisory committees and focus group sessions will provide input from stakeholders and the local municipalities on each of the sub-studies. Each of the sub-studies will identify:

- The alternative that best achieves the identified objectives;
- The costs associated with that alternative;
- The action plan to achieve the alternative;
- Agencies responsible for carrying out the actions; and
- Organizational and budget implications associated with the action plan.

These sub-studies will provide the level of detail required for making decisions on the relative priorities of the many projects competing for limited financial resources. They will also provide information on the role of the different agencies in completing the action plans and methods for coordinating the organization and funding of the projects.

The majority of the sub-studies have already been initiated. The results of the key studies will be available before the end of 2002. Final output from the studies on the airports and marine will not be available until 2003.

### **c) Establish Priorities for Transportation Projects**

The action plans established in step b) above will identify specific projects and related expenditures required for implementing the key initiatives of the transportation strategy and the desirable timing of those projects and expenditures. Once all the specifics have been identified, the Region will compile a list of expenditure requirements by jurisdiction and timeframe. This will be key input into the coordination of actions by the different jurisdictions and the Region's Capital budget process. All transportation initiatives under the jurisdictional responsibility of the Region will be compiled into a list of long-term expenditure requirements. A comprehensive financial plan will evaluate the ability of the Region's tax base to carry expenditures associated with the various strategy initiatives and examine all alternative methods of obtaining funding for those expenditures.

### **d) Mechanisms to co-ordinate actions with other jurisdictions**

The Region cannot implement this transportation strategy on its own. Implementation of the strategy requires a cooperative effort by the Region, the local municipalities, the Province, the Federal Governments and the many different transportation agencies that operate within and through Niagara. The strategy was developed in a consultative process and included input from many of the transportation agencies and jurisdictions. The sub-studies are being developed with input from the transportation agencies through technical committees and stakeholders and the public through focus groups. Some of the sub-studies will be done in partnership with the appropriate transportation

agencies. The output from the sub-studies will identify the agencies that should be the lead in implementing actions and the potential for partnerships in carrying out the action plans. A number of mechanisms will be established during the course of the sub-studies to ensure coordination and cooperation between the relevant agencies and jurisdictions.