Making the Connection

Highway 400 – 404 Connecting Link

400-404 Connecting Link
What is the Highway 400 – 404 Connecting Link?

The Highway 400 – 404 Connecting Link is a proposed 16.2 kilometre, four-lane controlled access highway that will provide an east-west connection between Highway 400 in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Highway 404 in East Gwillimbury. The Highway 400-404 Connecting Link has been in discussion before, appearing in the 2002 Simcoe Area Transportation Network Needs Assessment, York Region’s official plans, Simcoe County official plan and the MTO Simcoe Area Multi-Modal Transportation Strategy.

A provincial environmental assessment was approved by Cabinet in 2002.

The Highway 400—404 Connecting Link is intended to alleviate congestion on east-west facilities across the Holland Marsh and to provide an alternative path from eastern Toronto and the eastern GTA to Barrie and the rest of the Simcoe Area. The Connecting Link would provide a key link between the Simcoe Area and York Region and would aid in economic development of these two important regions in the Growth Plan.
Why is the 400 – 404 Connecting Link needed?

The Highway 400—404 Connecting Link would yield economic benefits by reducing congestion and providing a significantly improved connection between York Region and Simcoe Area. The road also has benefits of increasing overall network resiliency by providing a connection between Highway 400 and Highway 404 that could more easily divert traffic between these roads when incidents occur. It would serve all the travel markets, including commuters, transit, tourists and freight.

The Highway 400 – 404 Connecting Link is needed to help:

- Attract new economic development opportunities
- Grow and retain existing business investments
- Improve goods movement
- Increase travel options for residents and divert inter-regional travel around core urban/settlement areas thereby creating less congestion, carbon dioxide emissions, traffic accidents, property damage and health costs
- Provide possible opportunity for high occupancy vehicle (HOV) and dedicated transit lanes

Based on current forecasts the Connecting Link will be heavily used in 2041 with 3,700 vehicles travelling in the peak direction during the a.m. peak hour - clearly demonstrating its need well before that date. The Connecting Link is projected to have a relatively balanced bi-directional demand in the a.m. peak period. Although currently planned as a four-lane highway, the traffic projections indicate a six-lane highway may be required by the 2041 time frame.
The Provincial Growth Plan forecasts population and employment growth for York Region from 1.1 million people in 2014 to 1.79 million in 2041 and for Simcoe County to grow from 461,000 in 2011 to 796,000 in 2041. Employment will also grow in York Region from 565,000 in 2014 to 900,000 jobs in 2041 and in Simcoe County from 195,000 in 2011 to 304,000 in 2041.
By 2041, the combined population of York Region and Simcoe County will be approximately 2.6 million people (equal to the current population of the City of Toronto)

Traffic and congestion are main concerns for residents and businesses. Addressing these concerns is a top priority to ensure our communities continue to be places where people and businesses want to locate.

We need to ensure the proper infrastructure is in place for our growing populations, and to improve connectivity and provide travel options for commuters. Without these improvements, York and Simcoe roads will continue to be overly congested.

Both York Region and Simcoe County provide major transportation facilities which accommodate auto, transit, bicycle and pedestrian travel. These corridors provide travel across cities and towns and connect with regional transportation systems. While we are committed to building complete communities where residents live, work and meet their basic needs, we also must ensure visitors and workers have multiple options of travel to key destinations. Examples of these include:

- All modes of transportation (transit, carpooling, walking and cycling) are considered when designing new roads
- All new road projects and major repair projects include updating intersections to meet or exceed AODA standards
- Designing and implementing complete streets
- Dedicated bike lanes and innovative bike boxes to allow cyclists increased safety
- Simcoe County Trails Strategy – creating a world-class network of multi-purpose trails that connects communities while providing links to natural, cultural and tourism assets
- Lake to Lake cycling route and walking trail – an on-road and off-road trail from Lake Simcoe at the northern edge of York Region through the City of Toronto to Lake Ontario in the south
Ensuring Ongoing Economic Viability in Simcoe County and York Region

The connecting link is key to supporting growing economic development, specifically in the Towns of Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil.

Unlocking employment lands located in northern York Region and southern Simcoe County is critical to reducing travel demand, increasing live/work ratios and increasing growing economic sectors that drive the Canadian economy. Many companies are attracted to lands close to highways which allow the convenient movement of goods and easy access for employees to get to work.

Since completion of Simcoe County’s Transportation Master Plan (TMP) in 2008, the County and its local municipalities continue to experience growth in employment and tourism, as well as seasonal and year-round residents. The amount of commercial vehicles travelling in the area continues to grow. In Simcoe County the largest forecasted commercial vehicle growth is expected in the minerals, manufacturing, food and automotive commodity sectors. This correlates with the existence of manufacturing plants and quarries in the County, including the Honda plant in Alliston.
We are committed to continued creation of communities where people want to work and live, reducing the amount of commuting and traffic on our roads and improving overall quality of life. Increasing the attractiveness of planned and potential future employment areas is key to success in this regard, as we have a vibrant and qualified labour force living in these areas, currently commuting to other areas. As a result, York Region residents have some of the longest commute times in the GTHA and the third longest commute distances. Fifty per cent of residents living in York Region commute to other regions for work. By providing attractive spaces for economic development and convenient transportation opportunities, travel time is reduced because the people live close to their work.

In Simcoe County, an important indicator of long-term growth opportunities is the relationship between the number of jobs and the number of resident workers. Data from 2006 indicates the number of resident workers in the Simcoe Area, 142,540, far exceeded the number of available jobs, 83,525. This implies a significant number of Simcoe County residents commute outside of the Simcoe Area for employment.

The Partnership Advantage

With strong Provincial leadership there have been a number of successful projects that are improving travel in the area. The recent completion of Highway 404 extension from Green Lane to Ravenshoe Road (which now carries up to 50,000 vehicles daily), plans for Regional Express Rail and the Highway 427 extension are a few examples.

The advantage of our partnership is also evident in recent successful and ongoing projects like bus rapid transit and the Toronto-York Spadina Subway extension.

“That (Growing the economy and helping create jobs) critical priority is supported by strategic investments in the talent and skills of our people, from childhood to retirement. It is supported through the building of modern infrastructure, transit and a seamless transportation network.”

Throne Speech, 2015
Moving goods and people efficiently is a priority for all levels of government and we are pleased to continue working together to find new and unique ways to plan for transportation to address current congestion, new trends and technologies and future growth.

We commend you with your recent announcement on investments your government is making in expanding the electric vehicle charging stations. We look forward to seeing the results of the High Occupancy Toll lanes and how they change behaviour and mitigate congestion. Through the initiatives noted throughout this document, York Region and Simcoe County are also taking steps to change behaviours and enhance our current road network. One of the areas of improvement York Region is working towards is refining our grid and reducing the number of non-permeable barriers in our roadways to minimize the stress on the main corridors. To achieve this objective, we are increasing the number of roads that go east-west such as mid-block overpass crossings of Highway 404 and 400.

Growth is happening and will continue, but without additional support to our road network to maximize what we are already doing, congestion will continue to adversely affect the way goods and people move. The Highway 400 - 404 Connecting Link is vital to improving connections, especially east-west travel, resulting in improved transport time connecting suppliers and manufacturers between York and Simcoe, as well as reducing traffic on already congested arterial roadways.

Ease of implementing the Connecting Link is considered high because it is already an EA-approved new corridor, and the corridor has a protected right-of-way. Both York Region and Simcoe County support the new highway.

Since transportation in Ontario is the single-largest carbon dioxide emitting sector in our economy, this connection will help the Province work towards reducing emissions.

We all have a commitment to our residents to continue to offer communities with a high-quality of life. In order to do this, it is imperative we provide opportunities for people to live and work in the same community and minimize congestion.

Please include the 400 – 404 Connecting Link in the Growth Plan and Metrolinx’ Big Move updates.
# Project Background

The need for the connecting link has long been identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>A study identified need for a Provincial Highway Facility.</td>
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<td>1984 &amp; 1989</td>
<td>Two additional studies were done by the MTO. The study in 1989 identified the long-term need for a Provincial highway north of Bradford, linking Highway 400 to the Highway 404 extension.</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>The Province pursued an Environmental Assessment.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Received Environmental Assessment approval and the connecting link was included in York Region's Transportation Master Plan.</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>The Province designated the approved alignments for the link as &quot;Controlled Access Highway&quot; corridor under the Highway Traffic Act, protecting the route from development until the highway is constructed.</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>The connecting link was included in Simcoe County's Transportation Master Plan.</td>
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<td>2006 &amp; 2012</td>
<td>The Province did not include the highway in its five-year construction plan and it is not included in its Growth Plan (2031).</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>York-Simcoe Boundary Area Transportation Study was undertaken and identified the need for the Highway 400-404 link to relieve east-west travel congestion.</td>
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<td>2012 &amp; 2013</td>
<td>Simcoe Area Multi-Modal Transportation Study was undertaken for MTO.</td>
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<td>March 2014</td>
<td>The MTO completed a &quot;needs assessment&quot; for the Simcoe Area Multi-Modal Transportation Strategy. This study determined that the link is required in addition to other transit and capacity improvements in order to provide an acceptable level of services for provincial highways in the Simcoe area. These results are consistent with studies undertaken by the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Simcoe County and York Region.</td>
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MTO continues to protect for the future highway through the development approval process.