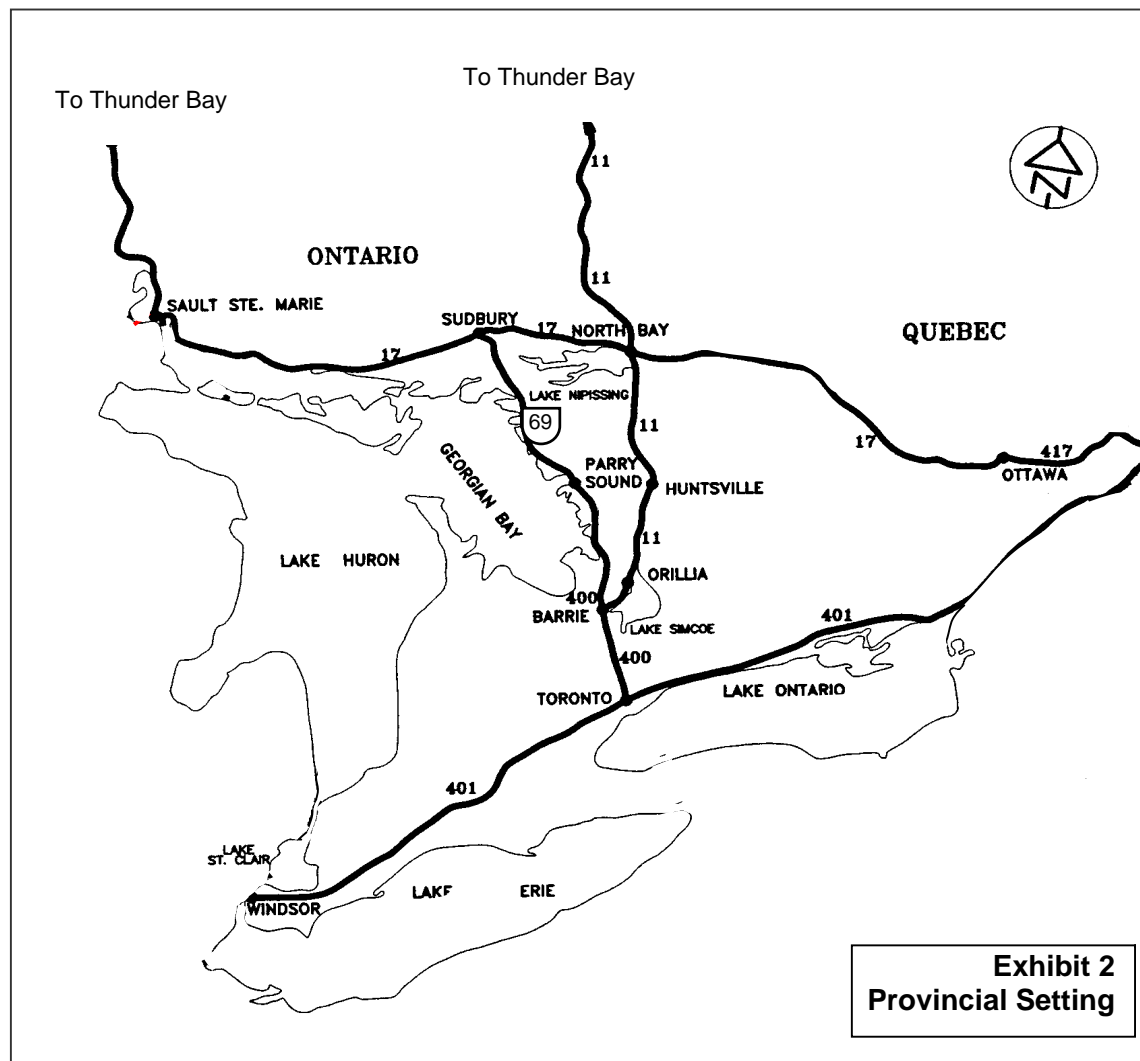


# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF UNDERTAKING

Highway 69 is an important link in the Provincial highway network because it is one of only two corridors connecting southern Ontario to northern Ontario. Highway 69 is the Georgian Bay Route of the Trans-Canada Highway and serves as a major travel corridor for both recreational and transport traffic between the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Sudbury. The other main corridor is Highway 11 that connects the GTA to North Bay, on an inland route, through Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville. The strategic importance of Highway 69 is significant to the provincial and national highway network as shown on Exhibit 2.

EXHIBIT 2: PROVINCIAL SETTING



Traffic volumes on Highway 69 have grown significantly since the 1960's. Also, the recreational uses within the study area result in summer weekend traffic "peaks", where the traffic level of service is reduced because of the higher volumes of traffic. Of interest and overall guidance to this Route Planning Study, have been the *Northern Ontario Transportation Perspective Study Draft Final Technical Report November 2001* and the *Strategic Transportation Directions January 2002 Draft*. These two broad based examinations of highway infrastructure, network connectivity and provincial growth provide the overall guidance for consideration of a four-lane Highway 69.

In addition to these studies, a *Study Design Report* was prepared at the beginning of the Route Planning Study (1994). This *Study Design Report* (Appendix A) was updated in 2003.

## 1.2 PURPOSE OF UNDERTAKING

The Ministry of Transportation has a mandate to provide transportation services for the people of Ontario. The mandate is to:

- Be a leader in providing a cost-effective transportation system that supports the Province's economic, social and environmental objectives
- Provide the focal point for the identification of transportation needs for the people of Ontario
- Address transportation needs through the effective use of road, rail, transit, air and marine transportation systems and services

### 1.2.1 Problems and Opportunities

The problem statement outlines the reasons for initiating a study. This study was initiated for three reasons. The first recognizes that traffic is growing in the Highway 69 corridor and capacity improvements are needed. Secondly, the higher traffic volumes contribute to increased delay in travel and result in a reduction of traffic safety. Finally, the accessibility for travel between northern Ontario (i.e. Sudbury) and southern Ontario (i.e. Toronto) must be addressed. Each problem presents an opportunity for MTO to take appropriate action to fulfill its mandate (as described above). The three problems and the opportunities they present are discussed below.

#### 1.2.1.1 Travel Capacity

The first problem is the travel capacity in the Highway 69 Sudbury-Toronto corridor. The study presents an opportunity to review alternative means of improving travel capacity in the Highway 69 corridor.

Travel volumes in the corridor are growing, resulting in a reduced level of service. Planning is needed to meet the growth in travel, particularly truck travel, and to outline a strategy to ensure that the movement of people and goods in the corridor and beyond to western Canada is effective.

## INTRODUCTION

Determination of the ultimate corridor requirements in advance of the specific need has the following advantages:

- It ensures that the mobility of people and goods is protected
- Allows for a safe, rational and efficient improvement to the existing transportation system
- Permits effective planning to minimize environmental impacts
- Results in a cost-effective solution by anticipating the future transportation demand

### 1.2.1.2 Traffic Operations

The second problem is the level of traffic operation and safety in the corridor. There is an opportunity to review alternative means of improving traffic operations in the Highway 69 study area.

Increasing truck and automobile volumes on the existing two-lane highway contribute to a reduction in safety. The operation of high volumes of traffic on the two-lane highway, particularly at night and in the winter, also reduces the level of safety. The heavy truck volumes, at-grade intersections and the lack of passing opportunities result in a reduction of the level of service and increases the potential for collisions. Improvements to the transportation system will ensure that the movement of people and goods in the corridor meets public expectations. The upgrading of the highway alignment addresses the safety concerns, improves the efficiency of the transportation link and contributes to economic and social growth in the region.

### 1.2.1.3 Regional Accessibility

The last problem is the overall regional accessibility in the Sudbury-Toronto Corridor. The study presents an opportunity to improve accessibility to northern Ontario.

The MTO has a long-term strategic goal to provide improved access to northern Ontario. Incidents on two-lane sections of Highway 69 south of Sudbury show how one accident can close the highway system and result in a significant redirection of traffic. Improved flexibility in the Highway 69 corridor is needed to avoid these restrictions to travel.

### 1.2.2 Timing of Improvements

This planning study was initiated in advance of the actual need. The transportation system will operate for a number of years at a reasonable level of service. However, planning for the next stage of improvements is required. The investigation of reasonable alternatives in advance of the need promotes a better planning and decision-making process. This results in the identification of an alternative that has a minimal environmental impact, and also meets the needs of the people living and travelling in the study area. The future property requirements are then protected in anticipation of the ultimate corridor improvements.

## 1.3 PROJECT HISTORY

In 1994, the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) initiated a Route Planning Study for Highway 69 from the French River area to Sudbury. The study process was documented in an *Environmental Assessment Proposal*, prepared by R.E. Winter and Associates in 1995. Initial phases of the Route Planning Study were later documented in a report for *Highway 69 Planning, Preliminary Design and Environmental Assessment* (GWP 327-91-00), dated November 1999.

In the fall of 1995, the Route Planning Study for the section of Highway 69 from the vicinity of the French River to south of Estaire was postponed. The section from Estaire northerly to Sudbury was carried forward through to the end of the preliminary design as documented in the *Highway 69 Planning, Preliminary Design and Environmental Assessment* (GWP 327-91-00), November 1999. Design work on the section of Highway 69 north of Estaire (to Sudbury) has subsequently progressed from Preliminary Design, and Detail Design is currently underway (at the time this report was prepared).

In 2003, the Route Planning Study for Highway 69 for the section south of Estaire to the vicinity of the French River was recommenced.

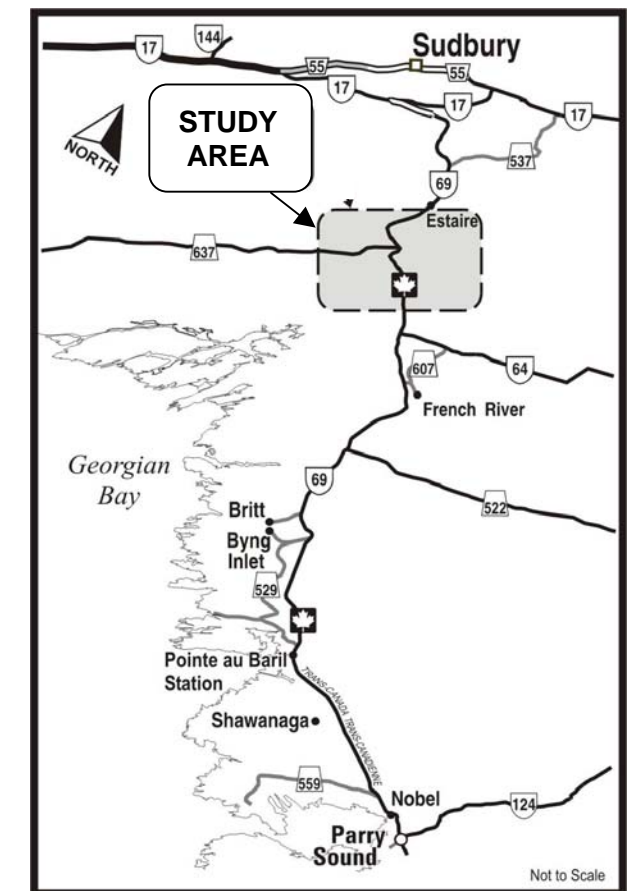
The recommenced study is being carried out in sections. This report pertains to the most northerly section, the limits of which are approximately Estaire southerly to Highway 64 (GWP 5379-02-00), a distance of 21.5 km as shown on Exhibit 3. The Route Planning Study for Highway 69 from Highway 64 to south of Highway 522 is documented in a similar report for GWP 5378-02-00.

### 1.3.1 Previous Studies within the Study Area

The four-laning of Highway 69 between Parry Sound and Sudbury has a significant project history as it has been the subject of several studies carried out over the last four decades. Furthermore, areas to the south of Parry Sound and in the vicinity of (or beyond) Sudbury have also been the subject of highway planning studies that are indirectly associated with the history of this project. This section of the report provides a brief history of other studies within and beyond the project limits.

Of interest and overall guidance to this Route Planning Study, has been the *Northern Ontario Transportation Perspective Study Draft Final Technical Report November 2001* and the *Strategic*

EXHIBIT 3: STUDY AREA LOCATION



## INTRODUCTION

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*Transportation Directions January 2002 Draft*. These two broad based examinations of highway infrastructure, network connectivity and provincial growth provide the overall guidance for consideration of a four-lane Highway 69.

A Feasibility Study for Highway 69 from the French River to Estaire was carried out and documented in October 1973.

Three route alternatives were examined in the previous study, including:

- Expansion of the existing highway over the project limits
- New route alternatives located to the east of the existing highway
- New route alternatives located to the west of the existing highway

The routes to the east of the existing highway followed a ridge located west of the Murdock River. The river acts as a barrier to the location of the highway further east. These options were not carried forward in the study due to environmental considerations and the costs associated with the railway crossings, river crossings and the extensive rock excavation/earth grading.

The routes located to the west were one to four kilometres west of the existing highway. These options required a major structure between Kakakianganda Lake and Rock Bay. Other natural environmental impacts included river crossings at Crooked Lake and the Murdock River. The Rock Bay crossing would affect the local cottage community.

The preferred corridor from this Feasibility Study (1973) followed the existing Highway 69 alignment with exceptions in the Ink Lake and Highway 637 areas.

### 1.3.2 Previous Studies Outside the Study Area

A number of studies were conducted previously or are currently underway along Highway 69 outside this study area. These studies provide background information to the corridor requirements. The studies located adjacent to this study area are described below.

#### 1.3.2.1 Studies South of the Study Area

Immediately south of this study area, a Route Planning Study for Highway 69 from Highway 64, southerly to Highway 522 (GWP 5378-02-00) is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2004. The Ministry is also currently working on a Route Planning Study from Nobel northerly to Highway 522 (GWP 5377-02-00.) This study is scheduled for completion in 2005.

Other studies that have been completed south of this study area include:

- Highway 69, Port Severn to Tower Road, GWP 81-81-00
- Highway 69, South of Tower Road to 2.7 km North of Highway 141, GWP 529-89-00
- Highway 69, North of Highway 141 to North of Secondary Highway 559, GWP 530-89-00

- Highway 559 Access Review Study from Highway 69 northerly for 3.5 km, GWP 335-00-00

#### 1.3.2.2 Studies North of the Study Area

North of this study area, a *Planning, Preliminary Design and Environmental Assessment Study* was completed for Highway 69 Burwash to Sudbury from south of Trout Lake Road to 2 km north of Sudbury Regional Boundary: 20 km (GWP 327-91-00). This project is currently in the Detail Design phase (at the time that this report was prepared).

Other studies north of Estaire have included the *Sudbury Southeast Bypass Study* (1987) and the *Sudbury Bypass Feasibility Report* (1974). The Sudbury Southeast Bypass has subsequently been constructed and was opened to traffic in 1994.

## 1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT APPROVAL REGULATIONS

The work on a planning study of this type must be carried out in accordance with the applicable environmental legislation and the current government policies and procedures. These are described below.

### 1.4.1 Ontario Environmental Assessment Act

The *Ontario Environmental Assessment Act* (EAA) governs the conduct of planning studies in the province of Ontario. The purpose of the EAA is to make sure that:

- A reasonable and traceable planning process is followed
- The need for the project is demonstrated
- The public has input into the process and investigations
- The study includes a review of a full range of alternatives
- The selected alternative minimizes any environmental impacts or provides mitigation strategies resulting from the improvements

### 1.4.2 Environmental Assessment Status

This project complies with the requirements of the *Ministry of Transportation's Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) for Provincial Highway Projects*. The Class EA process is for projects of a defined scope and magnitude, where the impact can effectively be determined and mitigated. This project will be documented in an Environmental Assessment Report and made available for a formal public review period.

If a request for an Individual Environmental Assessment is received during the 30-day review period for the EA Report, the Minister of Environment will rule on the need for an Individual Environmental Assessment.

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### 1.4.3 Information on the Environmental Assessment Process

For more information on the environmental assessment process, interested parties may contact the Ministry of Environment, Environmental Assessment Branch. Documents are available to assist with understanding the process. Relevant publications include:

- *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities*, MTO, July 2000
- *Guideline for Preparing Environmental Assessments*, MTO, November 1993
- *Guideline for Preparing Environmental Assessment Proposals*, MOE, May 1992

### 1.4.4 Other Approval Requirements

Undertaking an Environmental Assessment also requires consideration of other approvals and review agencies. They include:

- Federal Review Requirements and Approvals
  - Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA)
  - Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) for fisheries habitat
  - Transport Canada for navigable water crossings
- Provincial Review/Policy Requirements
  - The Environmental Protection Act
  - Ontario Wetlands Policy/Ontario Fisheries Protocol/Noise Protocol/Archaeological Protocol
- Municipal Policy
  - Development control, Official and Secondary Plans
  - Zoning Bylaws
  - Transportation planning policy

### 1.5 STUDY APPROACH

The study approach for the Highway 69 Planning Study and Environmental Assessment was to:

- Work with the travelling public, stakeholders and the residents of the study area to gain input regarding the future needs of the area
- Define the need for transportation improvements in the corridor
- Identify and evaluate a full range of alternative transportation improvements to meet future needs
- Select a preferred alternative that addresses the future needs in an efficient, cost effective and environmentally sensitive manner
- Identify the benefits of the proposed improvements and avoid or mitigate possible negative impacts

- Identify the alignment and property needs
- Document the study process and recommendations

The study approach was documented in an *Environmental Assessment Proposal* (EAP) prepared by R.E. Winter and Associates in the spring of 1995. At the start of the recommenced Route Planning Study, the EAP was updated in a *Study Design Report*, dated September 2003. The report, as contained in Appendix A, describes the study approach and process. Additional information on the *Study Design Report* is provided in Section 2.4.

### 1.6 STUDY PROCESS

The Environmental Assessment process requires a comprehensive planning procedure to identify alternatives, the associated environmental impacts and a plan for a solution that has minimum impact, while addressing the project needs. This is undertaken in a five-stage planning process. The stages of the planning process are illustrated in Exhibit 4:

This flow-chart illustrates the relationship of the project stages with the activities, recommendations and opportunities for public input. A brief outline of the five study stages is provided below - full details are described in the *Study Design Report* (see Appendix A).

#### Stage 1 – Project Initiation (see Section 2.0)

The need for the undertaking was assessed and the different ways of meeting the need were studied. Alternative transportation options, including “do nothing” were evaluated and screened out or carried forward.

#### Stage 2 – Development of Highway Corridor Alternatives (see Sections 3.0 and 4.0)

The environment within the study area was reviewed on a regional scale (Section 3.0) and reasonable transportation alternatives were identified (Section 4.0).

Highway corridor alternatives were generated for an evaluation process. Some were screened out early in the process and not carried forward for further consideration because the environmental impacts were too severe or they were not practical solutions to the problem.

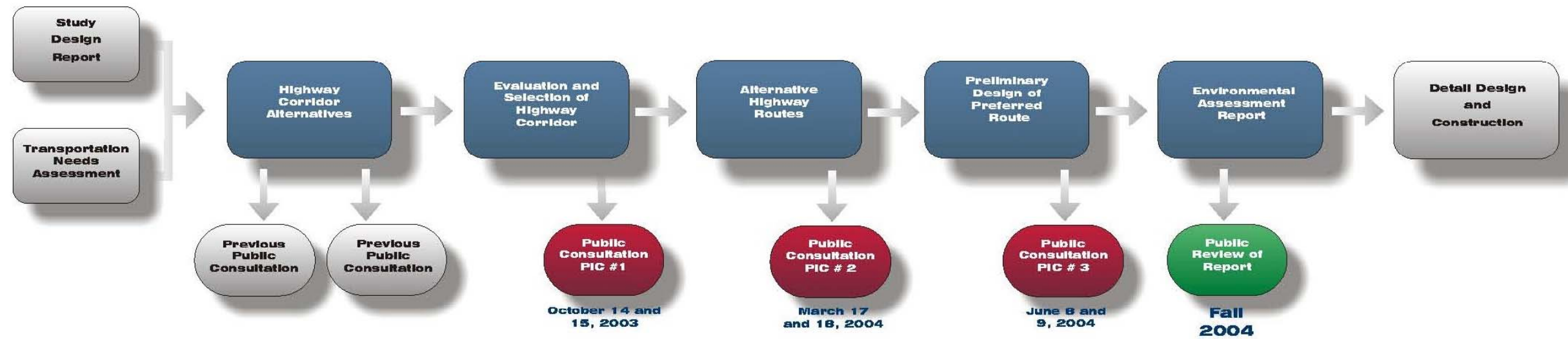
Several highway corridor alternatives were carried forward for further study and an evaluation process.

**INTRODUCTION**

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EXHIBIT 4: ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY PROCESS

### Environmental Study Process Highway 69 Four-Laning - Estaire to Highway 64



## INTRODUCTION

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### Stage 3 – Evaluation and Selection of Highway Corridor (see Section 4.0)

The study included an evaluation of highway corridor alternatives and the selection of a Preferred Corridor. The highway corridors were approximately 300 metres wide – much wider than the actual highway right-of-way requirements in order to permit detailed data collection. The corridors were intended to contain a narrower future highway right-of-way, including service road connections and interchanges, to be developed in Stage 4 of the study.

### Stage 4 – Identification of Alternative Highway Routes within the Selected Corridor and Preliminary Design of a Preferred Route (see Sections 3.0, and 5.0 to 7.0)

This stage assessed the environment within the Preferred Highway Corridor (Section 3.0). Alternative routes were identified with the objective of minimizing the overall environmental impacts while adhering to engineering requirements. The routes were evaluated and compared resulting in the selection of a Preferred Route (Section 5.0).

This stage also involved the preparation of the preliminary design for the Preferred Route with more detailed environmental investigations undertaken to refine the design. Specific recommendations are set out to minimize the environmental impacts during the construction and operation of the facility (Sections 6.0 and 7.0).

The Preferred Route includes interchanges and service roads that provide access to the future four-lane highway.

### Stage 5 – Environmental Assessment Report

This stage involves documenting the previous study stages in a Route Planning and EA Report. The report is then made available for a formal public review period.

## 1.7 CONSULTATION PROGRAM

Public input was sought throughout the study process. Details of the consultation program, including input received and responses provided during each stage of the process, are described in the section of the report that describes that stage of the study.

The public consultation process provided an opportunity for the Project Team and representatives from MTO to discuss the study process or any other issues relating to the project with the public including property owners, external agencies and stakeholders.

The process aims to notify all interested parties of the project and to provide an opportunity for input to the study and decision-making processes. The opportunity for this input is through a communication process. This process is accomplished by presenting the findings of each stage of work to the public,

and through ongoing discussions with the various government agencies and ministries, non-government interest groups and property owners.

### 1.7.1 Formal Points of Notification

The public was contacted several times formally throughout the study process and provided with opportunities for input to the Route Planning Study. Input was sought at five Public Information Centres (PICs) during the Route Planning Study. To make sure that all interested members of the public were contacted, an extensive notification process was used. It consisted of:

- Announcements in newspapers at the commencement (and recommencement) of the Route Planning Study
- Mailings to property owners in the study area as well as members of the public that had indicated an interest in the study in previous study phases (i.e. requested to be added to project mailing list)
- Establishment of a Highway 69 project Web Site ([www.highway69.ca](http://www.highway69.ca)) that provided continuous updated information on the study
- Notification of Public Information Centres by contacting the people on the project mailing list (through direct correspondence), through advertisements in the local newspapers and on the project Web Site
- Newspaper advertisements, direct mailings and use of the project Web Site to announce the study completion and the start of the public review period for final study documentation

The consultation program was carried out in accordance with the French Language Services Act.

Newspaper notices, PIC materials and Project Web Site information are contained in Appendix B, Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively. Summaries of input received and responses provided during each stage of the planning study are provided in the sections of the report that describe those stages of the planning process. Input received through correspondence is provided in Appendix E.

### 1.7.2 Government Ministry/Agency Liaison

The Route Planning Study has been co-ordinated with a full range of government agencies and ministries. The co-ordination occurs with all three levels of government (i.e. Federal, Provincial and municipal). Each government ministry/agency was contacted at the outset of the study to inform them of the study commencement and to discuss the project need, justification, goals and objectives.

The contact list included:

- Federal ministries/agencies (i.e. CEAA, INAC, Transportation, Fisheries and Oceans)
- Provincial ministries/agencies (i.e. Ministries of the Environment, Culture, Natural Resources, Tourism/Recreation, Ontario Parks, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP))
- Local and district municipalities including the Municipalities of French River and Killarney

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- Agencies and organizations with an interest in the project (i.e. school boards, hospital and emergency service providers)
- Utility companies and services within the study area including railways, the Hydro authority, gas, telephone and cable companies
- Interest groups and associations including cottage associations, snowmobile clubs, businesses and tourist associations

Presentations were made to municipal Councils prior to each Public Information Centre.

### 1.7.3 First Nation Contact

The Route Planning Study has included considerable consultation with First Nations in and around the Highway 69 corridor between Parry Sound and Sudbury, as well as First Nations within a larger study area. The First Nations contacted included: Henvey Inlet First Nation, Shawanaga First Nation, Waabnoong Bemjiwang Association of First Nation, Whitefish Lake First Nation, Whitefish River First Nation, Anishinabek Nation, Nipissing First Nation, Metis Nation of Ontario, Dokis First Nation, Magnetawan First Nation, Sagamok Anishinawbek, and Wikwemikong First Nation.

The Project Team is aware of federal guidelines regarding Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) and recognizes the value of ATK as a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature.

Although this study area does not include any First Nation lands within its limits, the consultation program included written communications with several First Nations and meetings with Henvey Inlet First Nation, whose community is located approximately 20 kilometres south of Highway 64, at the Pickerel River. Details of consultation with First Nations, throughout the EA process are described in Sections 4.0, 5.0 and 6.0.

### 1.7.4 Ongoing Public Contact

The public plays a key role in the study. Public input was received at each of five Public Information Centres as well as continuously during the study. As the project progressed, contact was made with a number of groups and organizations that have an interest in the study area. The range of public organizations with an interest in the project included communities and cottage groups, snowmobile clubs and local business owners.

People interested in the project were requested to express their interest to be added to the project mailing list by contacting a member of the Project Team.

Input received and responses provided from ongoing consultation during the Route Planning Study are summarized in relevant sections of this report.

### 1.7.5 Future Consultation

Public consultation is an ongoing and continuous process that extends beyond the timeframe of a planning project. Consultation will continue after the Route Planning Study is completed as described in Section 7.1.

## 1.8 ECOLOGICAL AND WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Responsible planning for new facilities such as a four-lane highway should take into consideration the goals of ecological and watershed management planning in the area. The goal of watershed management planning is to provide a framework to protect, maintain and restore a healthy natural watershed system, while balancing environmental, social and economic requirements. It requires consideration of a number of factors at a much broader scale than the study area of a typical highway improvement or Route Planning Study.

Watershed management planning is a co-operative effort by stakeholders, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Parks, municipalities and other government agencies to create a long-term management plan for resources within the watershed. Although a formal watershed management plan does not exist for the Parry Sound or Sudbury area, the concept of ecological and watershed planning is important and was considered in this Route Planning Study. The existing environment, including ecological and watershed resources within the study area are summarized in Section 3.0 and described in greater detail in the *Terrestrial Resources: Existing Conditions Report* contained in Appendix F.

The methods by which ecological and watershed management planning were taken into consideration during specific stages of this Route Planning Study are described throughout the report. For example, ecological and watershed management goals played an important role in the selection of a Preferred Corridor for the future four-lane Highway 69 (as described in Section 4.0) because it led to the selection of a corridor that is largely located within the existing highway corridor and minimizes change to the already established relationship between the existing highway and the watershed or ecological resources in the area.

The goals of ecological planning also played a significant role in the selection of a Preferred Route (as described in Section 5.0) and the Recommended Plan (as described in Section 6.0) because it led to the selection of routes within the corridor and structure types that could maintain wildlife corridors and continuous natural areas wherever feasible, namely, at the Murdock River, in between Rock Bay and Lovering Lake and at the western end of Sheppard Lake.

Considerable input on the significance of ecological and watershed planning was provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Parks and the general public throughout this study. For example, the MNR and the public confirmed that the movement of wildlife (i.e. moose, deer etc.) across Highway 69 (in an east-west direction) is an important and unique feature of this study area, one that the Project Team addressed with wildlife crossings (i.e. eco-passages) as described in subsequent sections of the report.

