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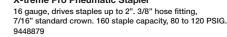
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Traffic congestion costs average GTA household \$125 a year, report says

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Smart traffic signals, clearing accidents quickly and opening up paved shoulders to vehicles during rush hour would improve congestion on GTA highways - a problem that is costing the average household \$125 a year, according to a report from the Toronto Region Board of Trade.One million tonnes - \$3 billion worth of goods - are trucked through the region every day, according to the board.

But congestion on the highways connecting the cities is creating delays that cost \$500 million to \$650 million per year in higher prices.

"What surprised me the most I guess was that for a region of this size - Greater Toronto, Hamilton, Barrie, Kitchener-Waterloo - which we are calling the corridor we currently don't have a regional strategy," said the author of the report, Natasha Apollonova, assistant vice-president, policy, Toronto Region Board of Trade.

"I think there needs to be someone who is co-ordinating all of this and who has the responsibility for really driving the regional strate-

"The report points out that much of the road network in the corridor doesn't take full advantage of even

existing technologies and could benefit from emerging technologies like smart signals.

Smart signals use cameras and sensors embedded in the pavement to respond to traffic patterns in real time, according to the report, for example, eliminating an advance left turn signal if no cars are waiting in line to turn left. Smart signals can allow extended green signals for turning trucks trying to clear an intersection.

Efforts should be made to maximize the existing infrastructure, including permitting vehicles to use paved shoulders on the Don Valley Parkway in peak traffic; variable speed limits and rapid accident clearance, which would help avoid long unexpected delavs, according to the report.

The report cites as an example the Ontario Provincial Police and Halton region, which are using drones to quickly record accident scenes, reducing the clearance process from to 15 minutes from between one and two hours.

The report also calls for smarter enforcement, including cracking down on vehicles that block traffic by making illegal turns.It suggests moving truck traffic to Highway 407 by providing financial incentives to trucking companies.

The solution would also include improving public transit in the region, to get more passenger cars off the roads.

"It highlights a whole bunch of the work that we have on the go now," said Barbara Gray, general manager, transportation services, City of Toronto, adding that the city is about to embark on a citywide look at freight and goods movement with stakeholders.In November the city announced it was launching a pilot project to test smart traffic signals at 22 intersections across the city.

The project is part of a city initiative to modernize its traffic signal systems.It will take a few more months to gather data from those trials, said Gray."Smart signal technology is really going to be a game changer. I know that in those jurisdictions that have started some testing, they've seen some real benefits," she said.

Gray pointed out that while Toronto was an early adopter of adaptive traffic technology when it first emerged, it's time for an update.

Whether or not shoulder lanes on the DVP could be used as extra lanes during peak periods remains to be seen, said Gray: currently they provide a quick way for emergency vehicles to get to the scene of an accident or clear a stalled vehicle.

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Featured items include: Diamond ring, guitar, game boy set, mantle clock, vintage books and more!

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