Options broadened for mid-peninsula highway

By RICHARD VIVIAN

The Champion

Plans for a mid-peninsula highway are on the move.

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) announced Thursday it would broaden the end connection options to be studied during an environmental assessment of the proposed roadway.

"We have consulted and listened to the public and municipalities," Minister of Transportation Norm Sterling said of the new options list.

"Planning for transportation infrastructure now will ensure our economic competitiveness in the future. We are committed to building more efficient trade corridors that will ease congestion and move people and goods more safely."

The highway is currently proposed to run from Niagara to

Hamilton before swinging east toward Toronto. End connection options on the table include Hwy. 401 in Milton and Hwy. 407 in Burlington.

A third option would see the roadway connect with Hwy. 403, accompanied by the widening of Hwy. 403 through Hamilton and Burlington.

An environmental assessment (EA) has yet to be conducted for the proposed highway, leaving the exact route and end connection undecided. A terms of reference for the EA is currently in devel-

The MTO originally proposed the roadway connect to Hwy. 407, however several concerns have come forward related to environmental issues of such a connection and its impacts on Burlington.

A connection to Hwy. 6 was also discussed.

Area MPP Ted Chudleigh praised the newest option to widen

Hwy. 403, saying he believes it to be the most suitable solution at

this time. "It has a whole bunch of other bonuses for the city of Hamilton — it's pretty jammed up there now during rush hour," he told The Champion.

"If you expanded it (Hwy. 403), it could be useful to Hamilton and also useful as a second alternative to get to the Peninsula other than relying on the Skyway."

Mayor Gord Krantz called the new options list "interesting," saying both council and Town staff will monitor the EA process

"Wherever there's new roads, usually there's other things that follow and you have to be prepared for that. When you start opening up new areas of a community, it certainly does have longrange impacts on growth," he said.

"There are a lot of unknowns at this point in time. This may be just another test balloon. They (Province) seem to be sending up quite a few of them to get public reaction."

Last week, the Milton administration and planning committee defied a MTO request to select a preferred end connection option. Instead, the committee endorsed a motion calling for an expanded transportation plan that includes rail and other mass transit initia-

Town council was expected to address the committee motion last night, but further information was unavailable as of press time.

Regional council to have final say of police budget

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"I think this is just wrong," said Mr. Taylor. "Very regrettable." Chief Algar said a number of police associations are challenging the Province on this issue.

"Justices deserve protection, but we don't see this as core policing. Hopefully we'll see some movement from the government," he said.

Board members had other concerns as well, such as the \$1 million earmarked for facility improvements (like the dilapidated 2 Division station on White Oaks Boulevard in Oakville) that was withdrawn from the budget in order to keep the 8.95 per cent increase from ballooning to 10.9 per cent. The problem, maintained Mr. Taylor, is that this sort of strategy only delays the financial pain to subsequent years.

"This is a people-driven business, but we can't have 10 to 12 per cent budgets ad infinitum," he said.

Mr. Brewer, who said policing has to adhere to the kind of economies now ingrained in private enterprise, added that the police service has to find ways to carry out their mandate "better and cheaper."

"The number of people can't keep going up forever," he said. "It has to stop somewhere."

Added Mr. Bird, "We can't continue to merrily do what we did in the past."

The 2003 budget must now go to regional council, but as it stands now, it would cost the average household 5.6 per cent more than last year, or \$322 in total, for policing. This is based on a \$5.1-million cost increase over 2002, \$4.9-million of which is slated for personnel.

To back up the need for this increase, Chief Algar took pains to explain the enormous pressures on the force, which make the jump

The most recent statistics show Halton officers responding to 95,000 calls for service a year, 18,000 of which are criminal offences.

Some local investigations, especially homicides, are far from over upon arrest, said Chief Algar, and continue to be expensive drains on staffing as the court process commences.

The 2000 murder of Oakville's Gordon Humphreys, for example, consumed \$100,000 and more than 3,000 hours of investiga-

tive time. The current trial for Project Phantom, which busted up a \$20million GST fraud ring, could take as long as six months, said Chief Algar, a case that further illustrates the demands on his officers. Combating ongoing marijuana growing operations is likewise a monumental task.

Staffing is further strained by the loss of 15-plus officers who are annually seconded to inter-jurisdictional investigations — biker gangs, child porn, etc. — that do reap benefits but erode the dayto-day operational strength on local streets.



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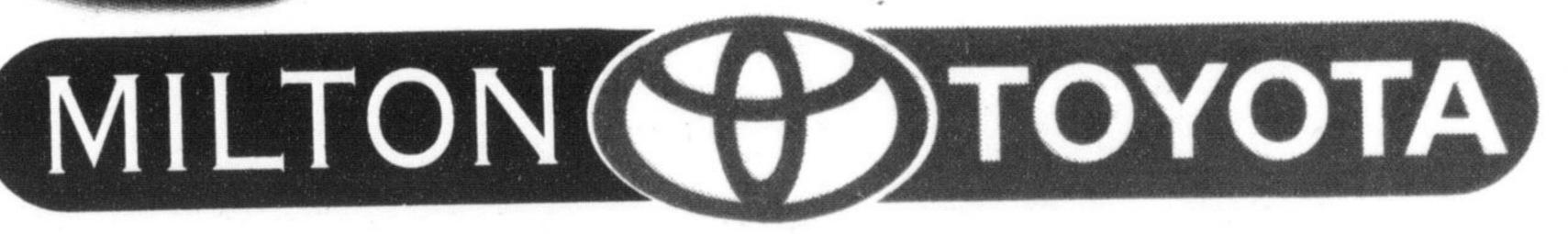
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