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GTA GRIDLOCK TO BECOME SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE UNLESS ACTION TAKEN, SAYS RCCAO REPORT

TORONTO (November 16, 2006) - By 2031, based on the province's growth policy, the City of Toronto can expect an additional 100,000 cars on its roads and another 50,000 people riding its public transit system during the peak morning commute.

Other areas of the GTA will also see increased traffic as the population swells and government investment in transportation continues to fall behind. For example, it is projected that there will be an additional 146,000 peak morning commuters in Markham, 80,000 in Vaughan, and 154,000 in Brampton over the same period. With these added volumes, roads will be severely congested.

With more than 8 million people expected to be living in the GTA in 25 years, the municipal governments do not have the financial capacity to meet the demand. Nor is there a comprehensive plan in place to address the issues.

*Those are the conclusions of a group of experts, commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario. Their report, *Transportation Challenges in the Greater Toronto Area*, was released at a news conference at Queen's Park today.*

*And the authors acknowledge that even this bleak picture of gridlock might be underestimating the seriousness of the situation. The study is based on the population density forecasts contained in the province's *Places To Grow* policy - forecasts that assume people will choose high-density communities and public transit over suburban homes and automobiles, changing their lifestyles in ways that do not reflect past behaviour.*

*"If *Places To Grow* is not realized and growth continues to evolve, more or less, as it has over the last 10 to 30 years or so, the transportation-related challenges will become even more acute and will occur sooner," said Richard Soberman, the lead author of the report.*

Because Toronto's Official Plan anticipates little or no new road construction, and focuses almost entirely on transit, the city simply will not be able to meet its transportation needs. "Increasingly, companies will be forced to leave the downtown and move to the 905 area to be closer to their workers," said Soberman. "Toronto can probably kiss its aspirations for employment growth goodbye."

Such an exodus would then put additional pressure on the transportation systems of York, Mississauga,

and other areas of the GTA. "Loblaws' decision to relocate to Mississauga Road and 407 in Brampton is indicative of changing attitudes," notes the report.

Since 1992, the population of the GTA has increased by about 33 percent. During the same period, provincial spending on transportation has declined by about 24 per cent as other demands, notably health and education, have taken bigger slices of the budget. Municipalities are also under pressure, as downloading has burdened them with additional social service costs and weakened their ability to adequately fund roads and transit.

The report warns that, unless action is taken soon, the GTA will become increasingly uncompetitive, residents' standard of living will decline, and the environmental impacts of traffic snarls and overburdened transit systems will grow worse. According to the TD Bank Financial Group, the loss from congestion and shipment delays in the GTA already totals some \$2 billion annually.

"Planning for transportation within the GTA has typically been characterized by numerous announcements and relatively few accomplishments. Our collective ability to 'get things done' appears to be on the decline," the report notes.

The report's major recommendations include:

- *The development of a comprehensive transportation plan for the GTA should be the first order of business for the new Greater Toronto Transportation Authority (GTTA).*
- *The provincial government should put regulations in place ensuring that the GTTA is governed by non-elected individuals so that it can make decisions based on long-term needs rather than short-term political considerations.*
- *The GTTA should control the allocation of a substantial portion of both provincial and federal funding, giving it the leverage it needs to bring about transit service and fare integration in the GTA.*
- *There must be stable, multi-year funding commitments from Ottawa and Queen's Park. Predictable and guaranteed funding is a pre-condition for the development of meaningful regional transportation plans.*
- *The first step towards integration should focus on 'seamless' transit connecting the Toronto Transit Commission, York Region Transit, Mississauga Transit and GO Transit, with a smart card universal fare.*
- *The province should declare public transit an essential service, prohibiting strikes and lockouts, and requiring binding arbitration in disputes.*
- *The Environmental Assessment process has become "one of the surest means of ensuring that nothing gets done," says the report. The provincial government should streamline the process to reduce costs and accelerate decision-making.*
- *Municipalities within the GTA should give more serious consideration to public-private partnerships in order to expand transportation infrastructure at lower cost.*

"Acceptance of these main messages may be a lot to expect. But taxpayers in the GTA spend a lot of money on transportation. They should expect a lot in return," concludes the report.

Contributors to the study included Richard Soberman, David Crowley, Harold Dalkie, Peter Dalton, Stephen Karakatsanis, Ed Levy, Thomas McCormack, and Jack Vance.

Founded a year ago, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) is the collective voice for labour and management in the low-rise, high-rise and civil construction sectors. Created to address the major challenges affecting the industry, it works together with governments to offer realistic solutions to problems in such areas as infrastructure development, growth planning, regulatory reform, and immigration reform.

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