



Ontario Public Health Association
 l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
Established/Établi 1949

The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

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Constituent Societies

Association of Ontario Health Centres

Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario

Association of Supervisors of Public Health Inspectors of Ontario

Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (Ontario Branch)

Community Health Nurses' Initiatives Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario

Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health

The Ontario Association of Public Health Nursing Leaders

Ontario Society of Physical Activity Promoters in Public Health

Charitable Registration
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Ms. Leslie Woo
 Chief Planning Officer
 Planning and Policy, Metrolinx
 97 Front Street West,
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November 17, 2017

Re: Metrolinx's Draft 2041 Regional Transportation Plan: For the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area

Dear Ms. Woo,

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on Metrolinx's *Draft 2041 Regional Transportation Plan: For the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area*. We are supportive of the vision, goals and strategies put forward by the Plan, recognizing the multiple public health benefits that can be achieved through a transportation system that supports healthy communities and healthy environments. As this proposed plan will impact the health of communities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), OPHA is pleased to outline recommendations for enhancing this plan and maximizing the health benefits. These recommendations have been drawn from the expertise of our Built Environment Workgroup that connects professionals from across Ontario on issues that affect public health as it is impacted by the built environment.

Created in 1949, OPHA is a not-for-profit organization committed to providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. Our mission is achieved by providing professional development, timely information and analysis on public health issues, access to multi-disciplinary networks, advocacy on healthy public policy and expertise and consultation.

There is increasing evidence that the way our communities are designed has a direct impact on factors such as: employment; social support networks; and the physical and social environments that influence health and health equity. Research indicates that poorly designed communities adversely affect the health of residents, as shown by increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory illnesses and exposures to environmental contaminants.

This was demonstrated, for example, by the findings from the 2014 *report Improving Health by Design in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area* by the Medical Officers of Health for Peel Region, City of Toronto, Hamilton and Simcoe-Muskoka which showed that:

- The prevalence of diabetes among adults is projected to double in 25 years from 7.1% in 2002 to 16.4% by 2027. Current diabetes-related medical costs attributable to inactivity are over \$550 million in the GTHA each year.
- The annual costs of physical inactivity and obesity in the GTHA are now \$4 billion including \$1.4 billion in direct medical costs.
- Traffic-related emissions in the GTHA are estimated to be responsible for 854 premature deaths each year and 2,812 to 3,939 hospitalizations each year.

Transportation and land use planning play an important role in creating healthy, sustainable and complete communities. Transit-oriented communities which support multi-modal trips and active transportation help promote physical activity, reduce transportation-related air pollutants, help mitigate climate change and have reduced injury rates. Protection and access to greenspace is also critical and provides many health benefits, including opportunities for physical activity and recreation, improving air quality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, preserving water quality, and addressing social and health inequities.

Public Health Units across Ontario are addressing the complex issues and impacts related to health and the built environment including: air quality, climate change, water quality, access to healthy foods, obesity, physical activity, traffic related injuries, falls and general wellbeing across all ages and throughout a lifetime.

The OPHA's Health and Built Environment Workgroup has undertaken a review of the *Metrolinx's Draft 2041 Regional Transportation Plan: For the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area* and has provided the following comments below for your consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh
Executive Director



**Comments and
Recommendations on
Metrolinx's Draft
*2041 Regional
Transportation Plan:
For the Greater
Toronto and Hamilton
Area***

November 17, 2017

OPHA Comments and Feedback on Metrolinx's Draft 2014 Regional Transportation Plan

I. General Comments:

OPHA was pleased to see within this draft regional transportation plan various concepts that can promote health and well-being. We have highlighted below seven of these that would benefit from having a stronger health-related focus to maximize the multiple benefits that can result from this draft plan.

1. Sustainable/Complete communities

In defining sustainable and complete communities, *we recommend that a more fulsome definition be used that recognizes the many factors that are known to affect a person's health*; some factors we have more control over, whereas others are predominantly caused by the situations that surround us. These are called the social determinants of health and they include the built environment, of which transportation plays a big part. There is a substantial amount of research that links the built environment and transportation to health status. Some considerations are highlighted below:

- **Age friendly, accessible transportation**
 - Seniors have specific mobility and accessibility requirements that need to be addressed when designing and constructing transportation systems.
- **Housing**
 - Access to affordable housing is a strong Social Determinant of Health- When looking at zoning in the planning for transportation systems and land use designs; mixed housing needs to be included. The report suggests that the decreased cost of transit will offset housing prices when living close to transit hubs. Encouraging affordable housing among mixed housing options (social housing and market homes) can help to maximize the benefit of transit-related cost savings among lower income groups.
- **Income a concern**
 - It is encouraging to see the report emphasize the notion that “Low income households tend to depend more on transit, but are more likely to live in areas with poor access to frequent rapid transit” (page 25). This reinforces the opportunity to make transit more equitable by giving those with lesser income greater access to transportation systems by considering the location and cost.
- **Cross communities.**
 - Having transportation systems that help build density in certain areas – but not in isolation between areas can build community connections and better health outcomes.
 - Transportation systems need to seamlessly connect the communities/ and adjacent systems beyond the GTHA and should look specifically

at settlement areas designated in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

2. Aligning the transportation network with land use

There is growing evidence that shows links between features of the built environment and the health of the public¹. Complete streets, density and planning for the future are examples of that.

- **Complete streets definition from Glossary:** As in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017), streets need to be planned to balance the needs of all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit-users, and motorists. A complete streets approach also involves design, operation, and maintenance of roadways to enable safe, convenient, and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation.
- Promoting Density in the Metrolinx Regional Transportation plan; it is important to promote dense pockets to increase walkability and promote active transportation, but not in isolation between cities.
 - Considering the implications of growing settlement areas as listed in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe– both within and outside the GTHA.
 - Creating a system that connects cities and their transportation systems is important for using the Go Transit or other systems.
 - Increasing housing density is needed along transit routes, especially using the mixed housing model.
 - In the report, Strategy 2 discussed the regional plan to “connect Urban Growth Centres, key Mobility Hubs and areas of high population or employment density in the GTHA”. This plan should also connect vulnerable areas of the community –including low income, senior populations, youth, aboriginal, and new Canadians.
 - Partnering density with the benefits of green space on health by reserving green spaces in built environment and planning projects.
 - Facilitating connections with rural communities.
- Collaborating with municipalities and planners to ensure new developments are transit inclusive and have infrastructure to promote active transportation to transit hubs. (i.e. bike lanes and sidewalks).

3. Convenient/Reliable connections

When looking at convenient/ reliable connections of the regional draft plan, it is important to consider the most vulnerable users, active transportation elements and seamless connections to bordering municipalities

- Increase convenience for the most vulnerable users – children and seniors.

- Report statistics demonstrate that seniors are less likely to use transit – this is an opportunity to create a system where they feel valued and safe.
- Incorporate Connections with Active Transportation.
 - Strategy 2: FRT – with bike connections – bike racks at stations – walking accessible.
 - Strategy 3: First and last mile decisions – need to look at active modes of transportation as well as bus and streetcar and rapid transit. “This could use a range of options such as conventional and micro-transit, carpooling, walking and cycling.”
- Connect well with bordering regions due to growth plan for the extended region
 - Strategy 2: “Metrolinx’s mandate includes providing GO rail and bus services to municipalities in the GO Transit Service Areas outside the GTHA.” This also needs to remain a priority.
 - Strategy 1: Connect with MTO rail plans and GO/Via rail plans
 - Connect with the 400 (407 – 412) series expansion. Strategy 2: FRTN buses could access commuter highways in the 400 series with no toll cost.

4. Support quality of life

Equitable access to transportation system means giving priority to the populations/communities with higher need, eliminating physical and social barriers.

- Active transportation increases health and physically active lifestyle and is often a way to offset transit costs. Systems should support active transportation.
- “Equitable access and affordability of transit will need to be a key consideration of the GTHA fare strategy” is mentioned in Strategy 3
 - Cost equity should be considered for people with low SES who primarily use transit. Fees should reflect income.
- Transit barriers disproportionately impact youth, children, differently abled, seniors and new Canadians. Platform level boarding and specialized seating should be prioritized for those who have different abilities.

5. Support competitive economy

When communities, families, and individuals are able to access employment income, affordable housing, and health care; communities are healthier and support a competitive economy.

- Strategy 2 mentions: “Lower-income households are more likely to rely on transit, and members of low income households are more likely to hold part-time or contract jobs. A reliable 24-hour transit network throughout the region would help to improve access to employment and other opportunities for people” Creating an inclusive system that provides access to employment also provides health benefits given that income is one of the main social determinant of health.
- Efficient movement of people and goods is essential for a competitive economy. The region’s plan is an opportunity to look at incorporating other modalities of movement. (i.e. Bike/rail)

6. Protect the environment

“Changing the dominance of the car” is a quote from Strategy 2 which highlights the need for plans to make active change now as well as have a plan that will be flexible enough to accommodate new advancements in the future.

- Creating systems to support active transportation provides health and environmental benefits. Active transportation reduces gas emissions and in turn air pollution.
- The benefits of green space while planning to connect transportation systems should be considered as a strategy to help mitigate urban heat island effect and reduce urban air pollution.
- Priority bus lanes discussed in Strategy 2 is (dedicated transit space) are encouraged as conducive to transitioning to more environmentally friendly modes of transportation in the future. (bike, electric, ..)

7. Improve Air Quality

Improving air quality within the region is an important goal.

- Page 11: Roles of Government: Metrolinx: “emissions of smog precursors and Greenhouse Gases in the regional transportation area;” OPHA suggests using the term “air pollutant emissions” to better reflect a range of transportation related air pollutants.
- OPHA supports the recommendations put forward by the Residents Reference Panel in relation to improving air quality. Poor air quality has significant impacts on human health including respiratory and cardiovascular disease. It is important that the plan takes into consideration measures to reduce both overall transportation emissions (e.g. street designs that do not disrupt the flow of traffic, promote public transit, and discourage car use) and exposure to these emissions (e.g. streetscaping design elements and noise barriers on roadways).
- OPHA is pleased to see that Metrolinx is in the process of addressing all of the recommendations made in the report from Dr. Greg Evans to reduce exposure to diesel exhaust emissions:
http://www.metrolinx.com/en/aboutus/mediarelations/news/20170207_Response_Research_Findings_Air_Quality.aspx; <http://allergen-nce.ca/go-train-diesel-exhaust/>.

II. Vision

Metrolinx Vision is that the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area urban region will have a transportation system that supports complete communities by firmly aligning the transportation network with land use. The system will provide travelers with convenient and reliable connections and support a high quality of life, a prosperous and competitive economy, and a protected environment.

Vision Recommendations:

OPHA recommends adding an affordability dimension to the vision statement, in addition to highlighting convenient and reliable travel in the GTHA urban region.

Healthy and complete communities should be outlined as the end goal, where health and wellbeing is supported through the integration of a cross-jurisdictional transportation network that strives to expand active travel opportunities, reduce exposure to traffic related air pollutants, increase climate resiliency and improve safety.

Strategies and Actions

OPHA supports the strategies and actions outlined in the Plan. They are mutually reinforcing and will contribute to the overall vision and goals of complete and sustainable communities. They also recognize public health co-benefits. For example, actions under Strategy 4 - Integrate Land Use and Transportation and Strategy 5- Prepare for an Uncertain Future, can help achieve improved health outcomes by reducing exposure to traffic related air pollution and increasing climate resiliency of individuals and communities.

III. Strategy-Specific Recommendations

Strategy 1: Complete the Delivery of Current Regional Transit Projects

- Priorities for Strategy one look to “complete the delivery of regional transit projects that are currently In Delivery and In Development and modify some of the projects from The Big Move to reflect more up-to-date information” (page 47).
- Recommendation: All projects past and present should be completed with an equity lens that will support the most vulnerable in the community.

Strategy 2: Connect More of the Region with Frequent Rapid Transit

- OPHA is encouraged that strategy two focuses on neighbourhoods of low income when designing future projects specifically around frequent rapid transit network. Other priority demographics to consider include high densities of new Immigrants, seniors and young families.
- Priorities for new developments and stations at Rapid transit stops to look at income, demographics of communities and gaps in present service.
- Priority Bus corridors is a great opportunity to integrate separate bike lanes as well. This can create safer environments for cyclists or pedestrians due to less traffic.
- By making a transportation system that is accessible and inclusive to all in our communities Metrolinx can improve safety and narrow gaps of inequity for equity seeking populations.
- Page 86: Develop a Regional Cycling Network: Where possible in the planning and development of the Regional Cycling Network, consider dedicated and physically separated bicycle lanes to separate motor vehicles from cyclists, in order to increase safety and reduce exposure to air pollution from vehicles.

Strategy 3: Optimize the Transportation System

- Integrating fare and services is an important aspect of optimizing transportation systems, integrating service also needs to ensure that taking public transportation is the easy choice to make-both financially and functionally.

- Multi modal connections should ensure first and last mile solutions include robust options for active transportation and the safety of transit users, this would include well-lit and well-designed bike and walk ways. Consideration should also be paid to continuous bike and walk paths with suitable destinations. This type of planning needs to be integrated with city planning to create sustainable communities that transit is a part of.
- Consider Universal Access by ensuring that income is not a hindrance to accessing convenient transit options. OPHA recommends ensuring there aren't tiered options that will disadvantage people of lower income into options that aren't as expedient or well connected.
- TDM measures should include indicators that assess reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gases and other health benefits of transportation demand management.

Strategy 4: Integrate Land Use and Transportation

- OPHA urges the adoption of health indicators (including measures of active transportation, and injury) and environmental health indicators as part of this strategy.
- Consider how mobility hubs will be integrated with cycling networks and other networks to ensure first and last mile planning is included.
- Mention the purpose of Environmental Assessments (EAs) as part of strategy 4. Public Health anticipates playing a greater role as a commenting agency in EAs that have a significant human health component.
 - We are aware that the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change is currently revising the Class Environmental Assessment process that will require proponents to better address the impacts of their proposed projects on climate change and air quality.
 - Changes to the Class EA process would also affect commenting agencies who are engaged in consultations, and who provide comments on draft EA documents. The changes to the EA processes provide opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration between Metrolinx and public health agencies that would advance health-protective practices and address health impacts.
- Consider the inclusion of Health Equity Impact Assessments (HEIA) for application on Metrolinx projects.
 - HEIA presents a number of recommendations for healthy communities and a broad range of built environment factors to consider - e.g. safe and affordable housing, greenspace, growth plans and transportation systems that address physical activity, air quality, urban heat islands, access to healthy foods, traffic injuries and mental health. See Saskatoon's Growth Plan example: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0U9o9nlpWKIQWp4RXNpNHYxclU/view>. The researchers used the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's HEIA model to assess Saskatoon's Growth Plan.
- Public Health professionals have been important players in active and sustainable school travel planning across the GTHA. Consider recognizing their contributions by **adding Public Health Units to the list of key stakeholders in action 4.9 of the draft plan.**

Strategy 5: Prepare for an Uncertain Future

- Page 95: Build Resilience to Climate Change: It is important that green spaces/green infrastructure be mentioned in the building resilience to climate change section due to the beneficial effects on human health (e.g. green spaces provide natural shade and help to mitigate exposure to air pollution, extreme heat, urban heat islands, flooding).
- Page 95: The plan should mention various vulnerability assessment tools available to municipalities and key sectors to determine climate change risks and areas of opportunity.
 - The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has developed Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Guidelines for health units across Ontario. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change is developing climate and health models to support the health vulnerability assessment. Examples such as this showcase the value of cross-sectoral collaboration in the development of tools to assess climate change impacts, and in the implementation of action plans to build resiliency.
- Page 98: Develop a regional transportation big data strategy:
 - OPHA recommends Metrolinx utilize the wealth of data that will become available to monitor the performance, benefits and risks of new mobility technology, including the public health benefits (e.g. reductions in air pollutant emissions and GHG reductions of shifting to sustainable modes of transportation, improvements in safety, and increases in active transportation).
 - OPHA encourages support for research that will help identify these benefits and risks and support policies to increase the uptake of new technologies that have the potential to improve health be supported. In addition to congestion, safety and accessibility; it is important to support next generation mobility research in areas such as air quality and climate change.
 - Consider including performance measurements to estimate the health benefits. This could be illustrated as how future reduction in emissions can provide benefits to health. Public Health can provide support for the development of an indicator in this area. The impact of traffic related air pollution in terms of health care cost and resulting health outcomes has been estimated by health units using different methods. For example, the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) 2014 report “Improving Health by Design” estimates the health impact of traffic-related emissions in the GTHA to be over 700 premature deaths each year, with an economic impact of over \$4.6 billion. Traffic-related emissions are also estimated to be responsible for over 2,800 annual hospitalizations due to heart and lung conditions.
- Page 103: In preparing for new business models and the use of big data, two of the items to be aware of is the protection of privacy of individual data and ensuring that public agencies involved in the transportation transaction have access to appropriate trip data for planning, evaluation and transparency related goals.
- Page 104: Part of building a resilient transportation system is to support a regional system that protects the population’s ability to function normally even in extreme or unusual weather. This could involve encouraging local systems to plan for more resiliencies so that the whole system can keep moving in a safe and predictable manner. This is especially important for priority populations.

- Page 104: Reducing transportation related greenhouse gases is an important goal. The modal shift goals may need to be increased to achieve sustainable reductions. Ideally Metrolinx could clarify how it is going to support safe active transportation infrastructure with their current business model.
- Page 105: Partnerships for innovation is favourable. OPHA recommends clarifying which of the many aspects of the RTP 2041 would be a priority for this type of initiative and how would it be evaluated. As an example, would this include increased equity and access to the regional transportation system? Better air quality?
- OPHA recommends using traveler-centric language in place of language focused on commuters.
 - The term commuter has the connotation of workers and people travelling to 9-to-5 jobs. A regional transportation system that aims to lower carbon emissions should look more inclusively to support the activities of daily living of many people not just workers. Additionally the system should ensure inclusivity of people of all abilities, and of people who do not work, who go to school, who work non-traditional hours, and who are retired.

How will the Plan Make a Difference?

- Page 109: Supporting an aggressive modal shift is important to achieving many of the goals outlined in the RTP 2041.
- Page 111: The issue of affordability and access to the entire regional system must be addressed in fair and equitable manner. One aspect of this discussion is addressing the regional variation in cost-recovery and provincial transit funding and its impact on single and integrated fares.
- The healthy design of stations will also be important. OPHA recommends that stations function to promote and support safe active transportation. Ensuring that the station facilities are inclusive and accessible for travelers of all ages and abilities is critical; this should also extend to station washrooms and water fountains.

Making it Happen

- Page 113: Regional decision making is complicated, issues like appropriate weighting of benefits in evaluation may prove to be challenging, especially if the RTP 2041 is focused more narrowly on issues important to commuters and not the broader population of travelers (see above).
- More clarification is needed around how local governments and agencies (like public health) will be involved in the identification, prioritization, planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. A balanced approach is recommended that reflects regional perspectives, local governments and transit agencies. Transparency and evidence-based criteria for decision making will be essential.
- Generally, more clarification is needed on the issue of identifying funding for the building and maintenance of the planned system and ensuring a fair and equitable system for active transportation infrastructure.

ⁱ Canadian Medical Association. (2013). *Policy on the Built Environment and Health*. Retrieved from: <http://policybase.cma.ca/dbtw-wpd%5CPolicypdf%5CPD14-05.pdf>