

44 Victoria St., Suite 502
Toronto, ON M5C 1Y2

Tel: (416) 367-3313
Fax: (416) 367-2844
E-mail: admin@opha.on.ca
www.opha.on.ca

President
Karen Ellis-Scharfenberg
E-mail: president@opha.on.ca

Executive Director
Pegeen Walsh
E-mail: PWalsh@opha.on.ca

Constituent Societies

Association of Ontario
Health Centres (AOHC)

Association of Public Health
Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO)

Association of Supervisors of
Public Health Inspectors of Ontario
(ASPHIO)

Canadian Institute of Public Health
Inspectors - Ontario Branch (CIPHIO)

Community Health Nurses'
Initiatives Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario (HPO)

Ontario Association of Public
Health Dentistry (OAPHD)

Ontario Association of Public Health
Nursing Leaders (OAPHNL)

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
(ODPH)

Ontario Society of Physical Activity
Promoters in Public Health
(OSPAPPH)

Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

September 6, 2019

Hon. Caroline Mulroney
Minister of Transportation
5th Floor, 777 Bay St,
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z8

Subject: Request for a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to inform the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Transportation Corridor Route Planning and Environmental Assessment (EA) Study – Stage 2

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) and the members of our Built Environment Workgroup. In this letter, we wish to outline our request, with accompanying rationale, that a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) be completed to support and inform the recently resumed GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment (EA) Study.

We acknowledge that anticipated population and economic growth over the next 25 years will present Ontario with numerous future land use, development, and transportation challenges, and understand that studying the feasibility of the GTA West Corridor is part of determining how best to meet the projected growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area.

A growing body of research identifies that the way our communities and transportation systems are designed, built and operated can impact the health of residents. Transportation planning decisions influence health behaviours, which in turn impact rates of chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, and related conditions such as obesity and physical inactivity, as well as air quality and respiratory illnesses, water quality, access to healthy foods, noise levels, mental health and traffic-related injuries.

The OPHA Built Environment Workgroup has undertaken a preliminary screening and scoping exercise for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Transportation Corridor Route Planning and EA Study – Stage 2. We believe that a completed HIA will support a human-centred design approach to identifying the route, determining interchange locations, and proposing preliminary designs for any new multimodal transportation corridor.

Health Impact Assessment is an evidence-based multi-disciplinary framework that evaluates the potential impacts, whether positive or negative, that a project, policy,

or program could have on community health, and the distribution of those impacts within the community (WHO, 1948; WHO, 1999). This extends beyond the physical impacts on health evaluated by traditional risk assessment approaches such as air quality and noise studies and serves as a 'health lens' for policy-makers, weighing those impacts and providing recommendations to optimize health. An HIA prioritizes human health and provides information on the potential health impacts of a project in one report. Table 1 in Appendix A of this letter outlines the main steps of the HIA process in greater detail.

HIAs integrate well within EA processes and use information from all relevant EA study reports. An approved HIA for the GTA West Corridor EA Study would use the following sources of information:

- Studies conducted as part of the EA (air quality, climate change, noise, traffic, socio-economic, etc.);
- Peer-reviewed primary literature;
- Government and other jurisdictional reports;
- Other HIAs and other health assessments conducted on similar projects;
- Information from relevant stakeholders and subject matter experts (e.g., transportation planners and public health professionals); and
- Grey literature (e.g., WHO, CDC, etc.).

One of the foundational principles of HIAs is engagement with a group of diverse stakeholders that can bring together their knowledge of the project and study areas and help prioritize the scope of the HIA. This input helps ensure an unbiased selection of relevant health determinants and indicators that might be evaluated by an HIA within the prescribed timeline and budget. Table 2 in Appendix A provides an initial list of potential health impacts that may be relevant to the proposed GTA West Corridor, and highlights the importance of including an HIA within the EA study process.

Given all this, the OPHA recommends that an HIA be conducted. Completing an HIA in this instance will demonstrate the Province's commitment to creating healthy, livable and economically vibrant communities, and show Ontario residents that their health is a crucial aspect of the decision-making process.

Thank you for considering our comments. We look forward to the next steps in this process and would be pleased to provide further information and comment as requested.

Sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh
Executive Director

c.c.

Hon. Jeff Yurek – Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Tija Dirks – Director, Environmental Policy, Ministry of Transportation

Trevor Bell – EA Coordinator – Central Region, Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Dr. Karim Kurji – Medical Officer of Health, Regional Municipality of York

Dr. Jessica Hopkins – Medical Officer of Health, Region of Peel

Dr. Hamidah Meghani – Medical Officer of Health, Regional Municipality of Halton

Dr. David Williams – Chief Medical Officer of Health, Province of Ontario

Dr. Brent Moloughney – Medical Director, Health Promotion, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, Public Health Ontario

More about the Ontario Public Health Association

We are a member-based charity that has been advancing the public health agenda since 1949. OPHA provides leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthens the impact of those who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. OPHA does this through a variety of means including promoting public dialogue and education on healthy public policy, capacity building, research and knowledge exchange. Our membership brings together many different disciplines and sectors working together to achieve our shared vision of optimal health for all.

www.opha.on.ca | 416-367-3313 | admin@opha.on.ca

APPENDIX A

Table 1 The General Health Impact Assessment Approach	
Steps of HIA	Purpose
Screening	Determine if HIA is warranted
Scoping	Plan HIA approach, select determinants of health to be assessed and the methods
Assessment/Appraisal	Identify potential impacts to health and the distribution of effects
Recommendations	Suggest strategies to enhance positive health impacts and mitigate negative impacts
Reporting	Communicate results and recommendations to stakeholders and decision-makers
Evaluation/Monitoring	Evaluate impact and effectiveness of HIA and track changes over time

Table 2 Indicators for Evaluating Potential Health Impacts of the GTA West Corridor	
Determinant of Health	Health Outcome of Interest
Air quality	Poor air quality is a risk factor for several diseases and reduces time spent outdoors. It impacts overall health and quality of life. Road projects and site design considerations near roadways need to consider both mitigation measures to reduce traffic emissions as well as adaptation measures to reduce public exposure to Traffic-Related Air Pollution.
Levels of physical activity	High levels of physical activity positively impact health and reduce risk of obesity.
Access to local healthy food sources	Easy access to local healthy food sources, (i.e., fresh fruits and vegetables), lower dietary risk of developing obesity, and promote good health. Depending on the proposed route, a major highway corridor has the potential to limit easy access to healthy grocery stores within a community.

Table 2 Indicators for Evaluating Potential Health Impacts of the GTA West Corridor

Determinant of Health	Health Outcome of Interest
Access to safe active transportation modes, such as walking, biking, etc.	Safe modes of active transportation encourage active transportation behaviour, leading to higher levels of physical activity and reducing the risk of obesity, and promoting better overall health.
Traffic congestion and delay	Increased traffic congestion not only impacts air quality, but also causes stress. High levels of congestion reduce discretionary time for individuals who could have otherwise spent it in social or physical activities. This has the potential to impact both mental and physical health, due to a loss in social capital and increased sedentary time.
Social cohesion	Social cohesion is a measure of collective social well-being. The potential construction of a major highway has the potential to increase community severance, leading to loss of easy access to friends/family and a number of services, such as health services, community facilities, quality and number of play grounds, etc.
Mental health	Individual psychological well-being is a function of a number things related to overall safety and security, availability of discretionary time, stress due to traffic congestion, access to healthy food sources, and as a means of transport.
Climate change	Motorized transportation that uses combustion fuels impacts air quality and increases greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to climate change.