

STUDY BACKGROUND

The intent of this document is to provide further information on the current status of the above mentioned project and provide clarification regarding some of the common concerns expressed by stakeholders on the Public Information Centre (PIC) material. For general information regarding the project and the environmental assessment process, please refer to the project website at www.4lanehighway17kenora.ca.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

SECTION 3 BETWEEN RUSH BAY ROAD AND KENORA

1. What is the purpose of the Planning and Preliminary Design phase?

The Planning and Preliminary Design phase will establish the location of the four-lane divided highway corridor, considering stakeholder feedback, engineering standards, area community and businesses and the natural environment. The purpose of the study for Section 3 is to identify and protect a preferred corridor for a four-lane divided highway between Rush Bay Road and Kenora. Route planning and preliminary design has begun with the development of corridor alternatives for Section 3.

2. What is the current status of the Section 3 Planning Study?

Prior to the PIC sessions held in May 2010, the project team carried out an evaluation on the long-list corridor alternatives to determine which to carry forward for further analysis. The evaluation process considered the advantages and disadvantages of each corridor alternative against a range of evaluation factors (Socio-economic environment, natural environment, cultural environment and transportation). On this basis, a number of alternatives were carried forward for further consideration and others were not.

No decision has been made on which alternative should be selected overall.

3. How can I provide input on the project if I was unable to attend the PIC sessions held in May?

In response to wide public interest, an additional PIC session will be held on **Saturday July 24, 2010**, in order to ensure that seasonal property owners, businesses and residents within the study area have a further opportunity to review corridor alternatives locally and provide input. Further information on the PIC location and format are provided in the attached notification. *The material available at the PIC will be similar to what was presented at the previous sessions.* If you are unable to attend the PIC and wish to review PIC display material or provide comments regarding the project, please visit our project website. Project information is also available at the MTO Offices in Kenora during office hours (808 Robertson St., Kenora).

4. Why are you considering twinning on the south side of the highway?

It is a common practice to consider all potentially feasible route alternatives as part of the Environmental Assessment process. A component of this process is to assess and evaluate potential alternative methods of carrying out the project (i.e. different Highway 17 four-laning route alternatives). Due to the complexity of constraints within the Clearwater Bay area, a number of potential corridor alternatives are being considered, including corridors north and south of the existing highway. This could include retaining the existing highway as the eastbound or westbound lanes in the future scenario. A decision on which alternative will be selected has not been made and is subject to analysis and consideration as part of the corridor evaluation process. The intent of this evaluation process is to determine a recommended alternative based on a range of factor areas and varying stakeholder perspectives.

5. Will twinning on the north side of the highway have less natural environmental impact on the Lake of the Woods area than twinning on the south side?

All of the corridor alternatives will have some environmental impact within the Clearwater Bay area, although the degree and type of impact will vary. The north-most corridor alternatives (SW-3, NW-1 and NE-2) were screened out partially due to high potential impacts to undisturbed forest, wildlife habitat and a poor crossing of Deception Creek. It is recognized that there are other environmental impacts associated with twinning to the south and this will be taken into consideration in the assessment and evaluation process for these alternatives. A decision on which alternative will be selected has not been made and is subject to analysis and consideration as part of the corridor evaluation process. The intent of this evaluation process is to determine a recommended alternative based on a range of factor areas and varying stakeholder perspectives.

6. What is the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) “Clearwater Bay Restricted Area Order”?

The MNR Clearwater Restricted Area Order (“the Order”) is a development restriction policy subject to Section 13 (Restricted Areas) of the *Public Lands Act*. The Order was put in place in 1991 to ensure that additional development on private lands within the Restricted Area will not negatively impact water quality and lake trout habitat. The Order was put in place by MNR as a result of the conclusions from water quality studies conducted between 1984 and 1987.

7. What impact will the MNR “Clearwater Bay Restricted Area Order” have during the selection of alignment alternatives and preferred alignment?

The Order provides guidelines intended to set out minimum dimensions of lots, the minimum setback from any lakeshore, and other factors governing development in the Clearwater Bay area. Although MTO transportation facilities are not subject to the Order, they are subject to the requirements of the *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities* (2000). For more information on this process please see the project website.

The importance of the lakeshore is recognized by MTO and through the assessment and evaluation of highway route alternatives, the project team will work to respect the intent of the Order by minimizing potential impacts to Lake of the Woods water quality. A decision on which corridor alternative should be selected has not yet been made.

8. Why did you post a sign on my entrance?

Public Notice signs were posted at entrances along Highway 17 throughout the study area. The purpose of this exercise was to gather information regarding the use of existing accesses and to inform property owners and entrance users of the study.

9. Will you be closing my entrance?

In order to improve highway safety and operations, it is necessary to review the existing accesses as part of the proposed highway improvements and determine if the number of entrances can be reduced. This will be accomplished by consolidating some accesses, and by closing redundant and/or unused entrances. Access to all properties in the study area will still be provided, although some existing accesses may be combined with adjacent accesses.

As the study progresses, the project team will review the need to close or consolidate accesses on an individual basis. If you are currently using one or more entrance road(s) within the study area it is important that you communicate this to the Ministry of Transportation Kenora District Office – Corridor Management (Phone: 807-468-2762).

10. What will happen to my entrance?

Existing accesses may be consolidated with other access and/or relocated to tie in to the improved highway alignment. After initial construction, accesses will be configured as either right-in/right-out intersections, or intersections with a median crossover. Intersections with a median crossover will provide access to both east- and westbound Highway 17. Right-in/right-out intersections will provide access to and from one direction only, with U-turn movements permitted at median crossovers.

Intersection type and location will be determined by a number of factors, including safety, traffic operations, geometric design requirements, topography, land use and other constraints.

11. Will I have direct access to the highway?

As described above, highway improvements will include a reduction of the number of accesses in order to improve highway safety and operations. Thus, some existing direct accesses from the highway will be combined with other accesses and/or relocated; unused or redundant accesses may be closed. Access treatments will be determined on an individual basis as the study progresses.

12. Will the section of old highway alignment along Deception Creek be impacted by the project?

As the project progresses, the project team will be considering design refinements to reduce potential impacts to a section of abandoned highway along Deception Creek, which although is not a designated trail, is frequently used by property owners in the area.

13. Will future Public Information Centres be held during the cottaging season? If not, how will seasonal property owners be provided opportunity to review and comment on project progress?

As noted under 'next steps' below, there are a number of steps for the project team to undertake prior to selecting a preferred route and presenting it at the next PIC. The current project schedule has the next PIC tentatively scheduled for early October. We recognize that this may not be ideal for seasonal residents and will work to ensure advanced notice is provided and all of the material is available on the project website. Ministry and consultant staff are available at any time to discuss project details. Please see the attached notification for key project contact information (Mr. Neil Ahmed, MRC and Mr. Dan Preley, MTO). Comments can also be submitted through the project website at www.4lanehighway17kenora.ca.

14. Are there opportunities for members of the community to be involved in the decision making process?

The project team welcomes input from stakeholders throughout the process. We encourage you to inform others who may have an interest in the study to contact us or review information on the project website. In addition to holding PICs to solicit stakeholder input, comments can be received through the project website and key project contacts for the duration of the study.

15. When will the final preferred four-lane highway alignment be selected?

The project team is in the process of obtaining further background information and conducting further field investigations before the short-list assessment and evaluation process can be completed. As additional background information regarding the study area is collected, route alternatives within the short-list corridor alternatives will be developed and refined. The purpose of this process is to ensure that the constraints and challenges associated with each of the short-list corridor alternatives are known prior to the evaluation of route alternatives and selection of a preferred route. It is anticipated that the process of selecting a preferred route will be completed in the fall of 2010.

16. How will stakeholder comments influence the selection of the preferred four-lane highway alignment?

As discussed previously, the evaluation process considers the advantages and disadvantages of each corridor / route alternative against a range of evaluation factors (Socio-economic environment, natural environment, cultural environment and transportation). Local knowledge and feedback from stakeholders on project elements provides supporting information that is used in the assessment and evaluation process. The objective of this evaluation process is to find a balance between all factors under consideration.

17. What are the next steps for the Section 3 Planning Study?

Based on the current project schedule, the next steps include:

- Holding an additional PIC session on July 24, 2010, with notification in *the Kenora Daily Miner and News*, *Lake of the Woods Enterprise*, *Sioux Lookout Wawatay News* and *the Winnipeg Free Press*.
- Considering input received and refining routes accordingly.
- Undertaking further data collection and field investigations and refining routes accordingly.
- Confirming locations of route alternatives and determining access treatments.
- Identifying a preferred route.
- Holding a Public Information Centre in the fall of 2010.
- Identifying long-term highway improvements and property requirements.
- Completing Preliminary Design of the preferred route.
- Holding a Public Information Centre in mid-2011.
- Completing Transportation Environmental Study Report(s) and filing for public review in the fall of 2011.

18. When will the MTO construct a four-lane divided highway between Rush Bay Road and Kenora?

There is no current funding or scheduling commitment to proceed with design and construction of Section 3.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: SECTIONS 1 AND 2 BETWEEN
THE MANITOBA / ONTARIO BORDER AND RUSH BAY ROAD**

19. When will the design be completed for the four-laning between the Manitoba/Ontario border and Rush Bay Road?

It is anticipated that the design will be completed during 2010. Information regarding the detail design study is available on the project website at www.4lanehighway17kenora.ca.

20. When will the MTO construct a four-lane divided highway between the Manitoba/Ontario border and Rush Bay Road?

Construction will commence during 2010 conditional upon obtaining environmental approvals.

21. What will be constructed along this section of highway?

A four-lane divided highway with at-grade intersections.