

STUDY BACKGROUND

The intent of this document is to provide information on the current status of the above mentioned project. 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 THE 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 for Section 3 (between Rush Bay Road and Kenora) by following the *Class Environmental Assessment (EA) for Provincial Transportation Facilities*. Impacts and benefits will be assessed for each alternative (highway routes); public consultation is required throughout the planning process to ensure local considerations are being addressed. The environmental assessment process requires that roadway improvements are provided with a minimum of environmental impact. The environment includes natural, social and economic considerations.

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

Prior to the Public Information Centres #2 (May and July 2010), the project team evaluated a long list of 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 (i.e. aspects related to the socio-economic, natural and cultural environments as well as transportation and engineering).

Based on the information gathered and comments received, the project team has re-assessed some of the corridor alternatives. PIC #3 has been arranged to present refined route alternatives for Section 3 prior to a preferred route being selected. No decision has been made on a preferred route.

3. 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, a number of potential route alternatives are being considered, including routes 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 route alternative will be selected has not been made and is subject to analysis and consideration as part of the short list route 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.

4. Will the route alternatives on the north side of the highway have less natural environmental impact on the Lake of the Woods area than the route alternatives on the south side?

All of the route alternatives will have some environmental impact, although the degree and type of impact will vary depending upon site specific conditions (i.e. topography, vegetation, soil). The impact associated with each route alternative will be taken into consideration in the assessment and evaluation process.

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

The MNR Clearwater Bay 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.

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

The significance of all water bodies in the area 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 Ministry of Natural Resources Restricted Area Order by minimizing potential impacts to all water bodies subject to the order. 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) and other relevant legislation.

The assessment and evaluation of route alternatives will be based on a range of environmental factors (i.e. aspects related to the socio-economic, natural and cultural environments as well as transportation and engineering). Once the preferred highway route has been selected, the project team will work to mitigate direct and indirect impacts associated with the improvements.

7. What is the status of the north-most corridor alternatives that were to be re-examined after PIC #2?

The north-most corridor alternatives along new alignments (SW-3, NW-1 and NE-2) for the four-lane divided highway were initially screened out due to high potential impacts and engineering challenges. These corridors were re-evaluated by the project team as a result of stakeholder interest. It was confirmed that the north-most corridors are not preferred for the highway improvements. Key reasons for this decision include significant impacts to large undisturbed wildlife habitat areas, incompatibility with the existing transportation network (i.e. less efficient connections within study area limits, between the highway and existing roads) and considerable additional construction cost due to the rugged topography, deep swamps and water crossings.

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 inform property owners and entrance users of the study that was underway and to gather information regarding the use of existing accesses.

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. At some locations 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?

The project team will review the potential impacts to a section of abandoned highway along Deception Creek.

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?

The project team will continue to consider the need to accommodate seasonal property owners and stakeholders when undertaking consultation. PIC #3 will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 2nd, 2010 at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #12, 300 McClellan Avenue, Kenora. The PIC #3 advertisement will appear in newspapers on September 16, 17 and 18. The PIC display material will be posted on the project website on the day of the PIC. After the PIC, project information is also available at the MTO Offices in Kenora during office hours (808 Robertson St., Kenora). Key ministry and consultant staff are available at any time to discuss project details: Mr. Neil Ahmed, MRC (toll-free at 1-877-562-7947 ext. 1241) and Mr. Dan Preley, MTO (toll-free at 1-800-465-5034). 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 through the identified key project contacts for the duration of the study. Discussions are also being held with representatives of interest groups and agencies as appropriate.

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

Based on comments expressed at PIC #2 regarding the desire for additional public consultation opportunities, the project team has revised the consultation schedule by adding an additional PIC prior to the selection of a preferred route. The project team is in the process of obtaining further background information and conducting further field investigations before assessing and evaluating the short list of route alternatives. The purpose of this process is to ensure that the constraints and challenges associated with each route alternative are known prior to evaluation and selection of a preferred route. It is anticipated that the process of selecting a preferred route will be completed in early 2011.

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

The evaluation process considers the advantages and disadvantages of each route alternative against a range of evaluation factors (i.e. aspects related to the socio-economic, natural and cultural environments as well as transportation and engineering). 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 steps following PIC #3 include:

- Review the comments received at PIC #3 and respond to any questions;
- Undertake further data collection and field investigations;
- Assess and evaluate the short list of route alternatives;
- Identify a preferred route;
- Hold PIC #4 tentatively scheduled for early 2011;
- Identify long-term highway improvements and property requirements;
- Complete Preliminary Design of the preferred route;
- Hold PIC #5 tentatively scheduled for summer 2011; and,
- Complete Transportation Environmental Study Report(s) and filing for public review in late 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. What is the status of the design and construct for the four-lane divided highway between the Manitoba/Ontario border and Rush Bay Road?

The design is complete. MTO is currently pursuing provincial/federal environmental approvals and permits. The start of construction for Sections 1 and 2 will begin once all necessary approvals and permits are obtained for the project. Information regarding the detail design study is available on the project website at www.4lanehighway17kenora.ca.

20. What will be constructed along Highway 17 within Sections 1 and 2?

A four-lane divided highway (predominantly achieved through twinning the existing highway) with at-grade intersections.