

3.0 TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Highway 17 is the only east-west highway link between Kenora and the Manitoba border. It serves long-distance commercial and tourist traffic, local community traffic, and provides access to the lands surrounding the highway. As such, Highway 17 is an essential component of the regional and provincial economies.

As part of the *Ontario Places to Grow Act*, background documents recommend the improvement of northwestern Ontario highways for road safety and economic benefits. Northwestern Ontario highways are mostly two-lanes, and have infrequent passing lanes and rest stops. Accidents may lead to highway closures, which in many cases result in lost time and money, especially where the highway is the only east-west highway link.

More specifically, *Enhancing the Economy of Northwestern Ontario* and the *Northwestern Ontario Economic Facilitator Report* call for the four-laning of Highway 17 between the Manitoba border and White River, and between the Manitoba border and Kenora, respectively.

In 2009, the Federal and Provincial governments jointly announced financing for the four-laning of 10 km of Highway 17, from the Manitoba border easterly. This funding will allow construction to start in 2010, pending environmental approvals. These improvements are expected to lower the accident rates in the area and provide long-term capacity for traffic growth.

By 2016, daily traffic is expected to grow by approximately 20-25% from 2006 levels. This would bring the annual average daily traffic to 5220 vehicles, and the summer average daily traffic to 8640 vehicles. A four-lane highway would provide adequate capacity to accommodate the future traffic increase.

3.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project objective is to four-lane Highway 17 from the Manitoba / Ontario border 5 km easterly, to 700 m west of Gundy Lake Road (5 km).

The purpose of this Route Planning Study is to:

- Identify a preferred solution that meets short-term and long-term needs.
- Investigate all significant issues, concerns and deficiencies within the project limits.
- Develop, assess and evaluate a complete range of alternatives that address the operational and safety concerns along Highway 17 within the project limits.