

Listening to Ontario



Ontario Smart Growth

A summary of consultations

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Disponible en français

À l'écoute de l'Ontario : Ontario Croissance intelligente
résumé des consultations



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INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ontario has set out as a key priority a commitment to Smart Growth – a vision that promotes and manages growth to sustain a strong economy, strong communities and a healthy environment. In developing approaches to Smart Growth, the government has identified the need to address and link decisions on issues such as transportation, infrastructure, land use, housing and public investment, and to ensure that these choices are appropriately balanced with elements vital to Ontario’s quality of life.

While there are many different viewpoints on how to approach and implement Smart Growth, response to the *idea* of Smart Growth has been almost universally positive. Throughout Ontario, Smart Growth is seen as a concept worth pursuing, and the provincial government remains committed to taking a leadership role in developing a made-in-Ontario Smart Growth strategy. The recent consultations are one step in this process. This summary of Smart Growth consultations reflects the views expressed by the participants and is not an expression of government policy or intent.

Listening to Ontario

In the spring of 2001, the Ontario Government, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, undertook a series of consultations to gather insights and ideas on Smart Growth. The objective of the consultations was to hear what the public and key stakeholders had to say about Smart Growth in their own regions, to assist in the development of a vision and action plan to implement Smart Growth across Ontario.

The consultation process included three main components:

- An invitation to the public to provide input, which resulted in more than 10,000 visits to the Smart Growth Web site and over 460 written submissions.
- 33 meetings with municipal government representatives, including elected representatives and staff.

WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

As described in Get Engaged – a booklet produced to stimulate discussion in the consultation process – Smart Growth is the Ontario government’s strategy for promoting and managing growth in ways that:

- *sustain a strong economy;*
- *build strong communities; and*
- *promote a healthy environment.*

Get Engaged notes that making Smart Growth work will require:

- *collaborating and forming partnerships;*
- *integrating decisions on development, infrastructure and the environment; and*
- *making sure those decisions are fiscally sound.*

SMART GROWTH MINISTRIES

Ontario's Smart Growth initiative involves nine government ministries:

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Ministry of Finance (and SuperBuild)

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

Ministry of the Environment

Ministry of Natural Resources

Ministry of Northern Development and Mines

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation

Ministry of Transportation

- 17 day-long sessions across the province, attended by more than 700 stakeholders from a broad cross-section of community groups and interests, including Ontario municipalities, local business organizations, environmental groups, developers, planners, health-care institutions, social service agencies, colleges and universities, agricultural federations and other interested groups.

Parliamentary assistants from the Smart Growth ministries were invited to the stakeholder sessions, and all MPPs were invited to their local stakeholder session. As part of the stakeholder consultation process, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing established a task force comprising experts in transportation, agriculture, environmental issues, local government and economic development. At least three task force members attended each stakeholder meeting, participating in the discussions and providing background information. (A full list of the task force members is included in the appendix of this consultation summary document.)

To help stimulate the discussions, the ministry produced and distributed *Get Engaged...in Ontario Smart Growth*, a booklet setting out Smart Growth principles, goals and questions, as well as facts and figures about Ontario's population, both current and projected into the future.

The objective of the consultation process was not to forge consensus on particular issues (although in some cases there was widespread agreement), but to provide opportunities for input – to identify concerns, gather insight, and hear innovative ideas to focus and assist in the development of a comprehensive Smart Growth strategy for Ontario.

BACKGROUND

Smart Growth in the Ontario context

To develop a made-in-Ontario Smart Growth strategy, regional variations must be taken into account. For example, we know that northern Ontario is dramatically different from the south, proximity to United States population centres affects trade patterns, and the degree of agricultural activity in a particular area has a major impact on land use. These variations were emphasized throughout the consultations.

Differing populations and growth patterns were also expressed as a key factor in developing Smart Growth strategies. Some places, such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the City of Ottawa, are experiencing rapid growth. (The GTA, for example, is projected to grow by 100,000 people every year over the next two decades). Others, including many mid-sized cities, are growing at a slower pace. And some rural areas and northern communities are not growing at all, resulting in a focus on growth *promotion* rather than the growth *management* concerns prevalent in more densely populated regions.

The term “growth” itself was also seen to have different interpretations, involving not just population and economic growth, but also livestock growth in farming communities, growth in consumption patterns, and growth in demand for services.

Municipal government structure was identified as another factor in the Smart Growth equation. Ontario is made up of counties and regions, single-tier and two-tier systems, and unincorporated areas. Recent municipal restructuring initiatives – and the necessary transition period – were also noted as having an impact on how and where Smart Growth policies can be implemented.

Because of these differences, participants in the consultation almost universally agreed that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to Smart Growth is neither appropriate nor desirable. At the same time, however, there was widespread acknowledgement of the value of province-wide guidelines for managing and promoting growth, to avoid the possibility of ad hoc, piecemeal, and sometimes counter-productive decision-making at the local level. The need for a “big-picture” view of Smart Growth was a common conclusion throughout the consultations.

GROWTH: DIFFERENT REALITIES

Different parts of the province anticipate very different levels of growth in the future, which necessitate different approaches to Smart Growth.

In major urban areas, such as Toronto and Ottawa, high levels of future growth are seen as inevitable and potentially overwhelming. In these communities, the emphasis is on managing growth.

In many smaller cities and towns across the province, more moderate levels of growth are expected. Their challenge will be to sustain, direct and shape this growth.

In much of northern and rural Ontario, growth cannot be taken for granted. Consequently, growth should be promoted to create jobs, sustain a dynamic local economy, and make use of existing infrastructure and community facilities.

The map on the following page illustrates where these different levels of growth are expected to occur.

Demographic trends in Ontario

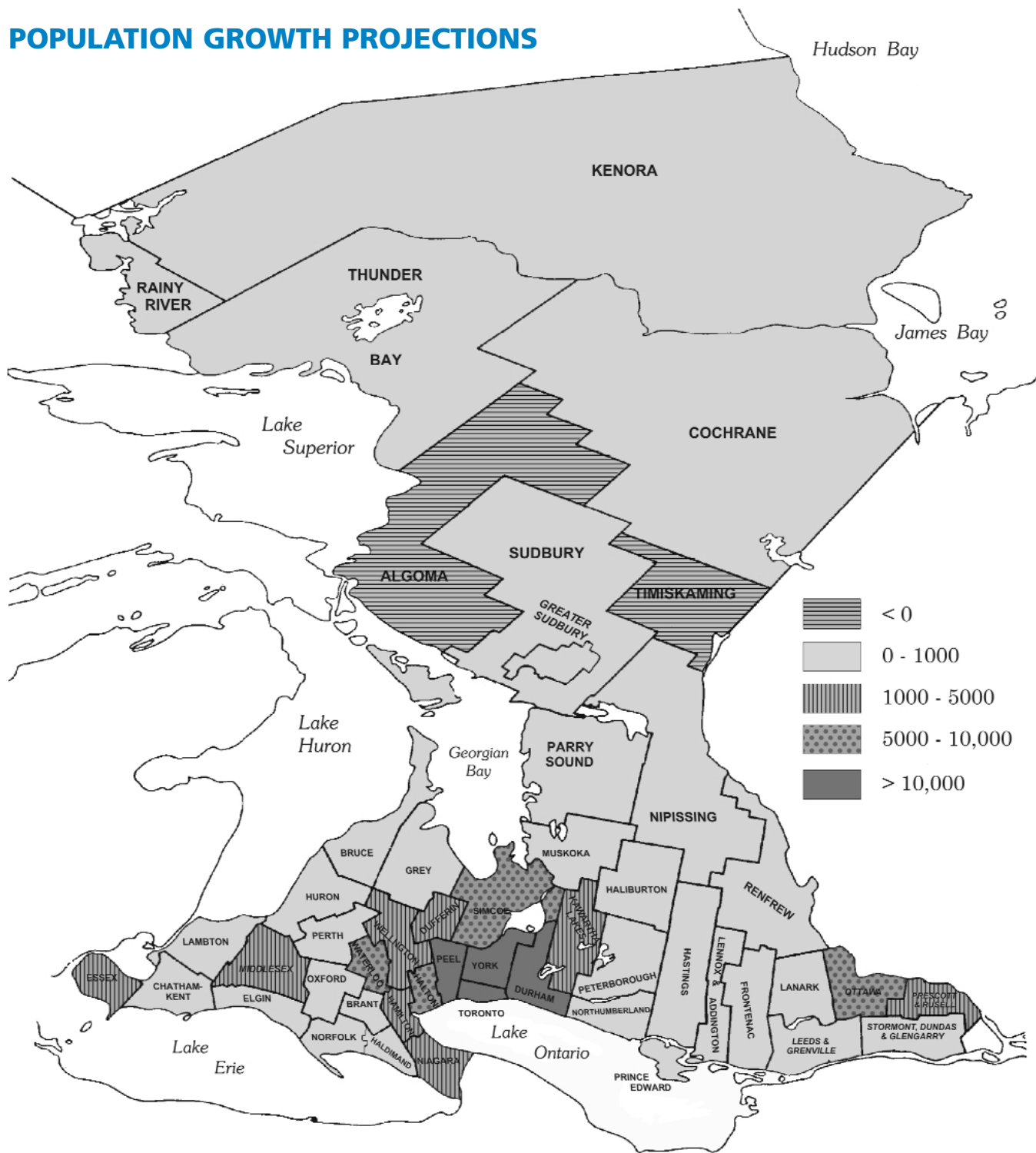
To provide a foundation for discussions of future planning, participants at the municipal and stakeholder sessions were given both provincial and regional demographic information, supplied by the Ministry of Finance.

One of the most significant trends projected for Ontario in the next 20 years is that the proportion of seniors in the population will be much higher by 2021. While this may be mitigated somewhat by immigration of younger people to the province, the aging of the post-Second World War baby boom generation clearly has important implications for Smart Growth, and many participants in the consultation commented that recognizing the needs of seniors and retirees was important, particularly with regard to housing and transportation planning.

Some parts of the province are projected to experience dramatic shifts in their demographic make-up. In northwestern Ontario, for example, some projections indicate that Aboriginals will exceed 50 per cent of the total population in the next few years. Of further demographic significance, the average age within the First Nations is lower than in the population as a whole.

In some cases, the projection figures were the subject of considerable discussion, inasmuch as they are based on past trends and therefore do not reflect a specific area's changing capacity for growth (depending on infrastructure decisions, ability to attract investment, etc.). Several participants suggested that more detailed forecasts would be helpful in planning for the future. A longer timeline was also advocated, with some participants pointing out that a vision for Smart Growth should encompass as much as the next 50 or 100 years.

POPULATION GROWTH PROJECTIONS



ABSOLUTE POPULATION GROWTH PER YEAR As Projected by Ministry of Finance, 1999-2021

Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing
May, 2001

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

In May and June, 2001, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing spearheaded a series of 17 day-long sessions with stakeholders from across the province. The meeting schedule was as follows:

May 18 – Peterborough
May 23 – Kingston
May 24 – Kitchener-Waterloo
May 25 – Ottawa
May 28 – Sudbury
May 29 – North Bay
May 30 – GTA West
May 31 – Toronto
June 4 – GTA North
June 5 – Barrie
June 6 – Orangeville
June 8 – Thunder Bay
June 11 – Niagara/Hamilton
June 12 – London
June 13 – Windsor
June 15 – Sault Ste. Marie
June 18 – Durham

Location and timing of development

Choices about where development should take place and the use of infrastructure (existing and new) to increase the capacity for growth have been identified as two of the key issues central to the Smart Growth strategy.

In discussing these important issues, participants made a number of insightful observations and suggestions. The following are some of the ideas raised during the consultation process.

Land-use planning

Clear objectives and criteria for making decisions on planning and development were identified as crucial to implementing Smart Growth. To improve on current approaches, a number of suggestions were put forward:

- **Thinking in terms of “total build out”** – picturing what Ontario should look like in the future (and how it would work) and devising the strategies needed to reach that end-state.
- **Avoiding discontinuous or “leapfrog” development on unserved land.**
- **Ensuring that development approvals follow infrastructure commitments** (roads, water mains, sewers, schools, etc.) rather than the other way around. This suggestion was largely put forward by municipal representatives who noted that, while developers pay some of the capital costs of infrastructure, the municipality is still responsible for operating costs, and needs to be able to budget for these costs over the long term.
- **Considering “growth boundaries”** to discourage urban sprawl and regulate development. Some participants advocated setting finite boundaries for development, with no development outside the boundaries allowed until the area inside is fully developed. Others, however, insisted that such limits simply drive up housing costs inside the boundaries, and put added pressure on neighbouring communities to absorb the growth. Others again suggested that sprawl could be avoided by promoting orderly urban development and efficient use of infrastructure.

- **Drawing firm boundaries around specific areas to be protected from development** – i.e. defining where *not* to build.
- **Improving regional planning** to allay some of the difficulty of planning across municipal borders (which, it was noted, are often arbitrary, century-old lines). For example, cities such as Orangeville, Newmarket, Windsor, Barrie and St. Catharines are almost entirely built out within their existing municipal boundaries, so that further growth must come from infill or annexation, or it will spill into neighbouring areas.
- **Improving the planning process**, in particular the appeals process to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Views on the OMB ranged from those suggesting fundamental reforms to those wishing to improve the OMB process by making it more efficient, predictable and less costly. Many participants expressed concern that decisions regarding official plans, zoning by-laws and infrastructure master plans can be rendered meaningless because they can be overturned by the OMB. Other participants submitted that the current system gives too much leeway in appealing planning decisions to the OMB (often negating, for example, decisions to allow higher densities).
- **Developing already serviced sites within existing urban boundaries.** It was noted that while research generally shows many people agree in principle with the need to increase density within urban boundaries, they oppose infill development when it is proposed in their own neighbourhood. This contradiction needs to be addressed.
- **Using new highway corridors as “development corridors”** to draw development pressure away from environmentally sensitive or prime agricultural land (e.g. the Niagara mid-peninsula corridor).
- **Improving integration between development planning and school planning**, and improving communication between municipalities and school boards.

Municipal development decisions

Many participants, particularly in the municipal arena, advocated the need to re-examine the financial framework within which municipalities make development decisions. Concerns were expressed that, because municipalities depend on property taxes and development-related charges as sources of revenue, developments may be approved simply because the municipality needs the increased assessment and development-related charges.

It was also noted that in urban areas that are filling up rapidly, development charges are not a sustainable source of revenue. Once the municipality is fully built out, the development charge revenues dry up.

Growth in existing urban areas

Most participants supported the new provincial legislation for brown-fields, which, if passed, would stimulate the rehabilitation of derelict, under-utilized or contaminated industrial or commercial sites. There was widespread support for any initiative that will help facilitate infill and redevelopment.

Some participants had suggestions to improve the proposed brown-fields legislation. For example, it was recommended that the liability protection provisions in the legislation should be strengthened.

A number of other issues related to redevelopment were raised:

- Some participants noted that some of the sites in their communities most in need of redevelopment are not on contaminated land, but are abandoned or under-utilized buildings such as old schools or vacant plazas, meaning that different incentives will be needed to spur redevelopment of these sites.
- Fragmented and/or absentee ownership was identified as a barrier to downtown revitalization in some communities.
- Tax and assessment policies were seen by some participants as penalizing downtown properties, hindering redevelopment.
- Some communities face unique challenges in encouraging downtown revitalization. For example:
 - Representatives from Hamilton noted that they must cope with a steady stream of truck traffic through the downtown core.
 - Officials from Cambridge reported difficulty for the downtown in competing with suburban malls for retail business.
 - In the North, officials expressed concern that there is little incentive for landowners to redevelop urban land because buildings in northern cities usually have lower commercial or resale value than the cost of construction.

On the other hand, several communities shared their success stories in encouraging downtown revitalization:

- Kingston implemented the Downtown Upper Floor Renewal program to make use of vacant second floors in the downtown business area, providing grants or loans to the owners for renovations, reportedly resulting in the creation of 1,500 apartment units.
- London has rebuilt its downtown market and is implementing policies to encourage infill, heritage preservation and “main streets” revitalization.
- Oshawa has bought an old theatre and is planning to refurbish it as the centrepiece of downtown revitalization.
- North Bay is relocating existing railway lines in preparation for reconnecting its downtown to the lakeshore.

Effective policies

It was noted many times during the consultation process that most Ontario communities already have some policies in place that are reflective of Smart Growth. However, the application of these policies was acknowledged as not being as strategic or consistent as envisioned under Smart Growth.

The following are some of the suggestions directed at improving the development of Smart Growth policies and their implementation:

- Revise the *Planning Act*, the *Municipal Act* and the Provincial Policy Statement, which contains the province’s land-use planning policies, to promote Smart Growth and require that all planning bodies make decisions that contribute to Smart Growth. It was further suggested that municipalities’ official plans should be required to meet Smart Growth criteria.
- Develop a series of Smart Growth indicators for Ontario municipalities, setting out benchmarks, expected results and measurement tools.
- As an incentive for developers to implement Smart Growth principles, develop a provincial Smart Growth “matrix” that would score new development proposals and possibly reduce or waive development fees or accelerate the approval timelines for proposals meeting certain criteria.
- Collect information on successful examples of infill and intensification that can be used to help overcome the public’s reluctance to accept proposals for increased density in their neighbourhoods.
- Reform the Ontario Municipal Board, requiring it to demonstrate how its decisions contribute to Smart Growth, or requiring it to give special weight to Smart Growth factors in its decisions.

- Draw up performance-based contracts between municipalities and the province, specifying expectations for the growth of each area.
- Implement full-cost pricing for roads, water and waste water systems.
- Set realistic guidelines for compensating owners of land that is declared unsuitable for development.

Each of these suggestions was subject to considerable discussion, with varying degrees of support among the participants.

Transportation

Transportation has been identified as a key component of Smart Growth, including moving people and goods more efficiently and effectively, and improving/expanding transportation alternatives between and within communities. Most participants in the Smart Growth consultation process endorsed these goals, although there were varying ideas about what they meant and how they could be achieved.

Many participants emphasized that building highways, on its own, is not Smart Growth.

In addition to moving goods and people, it was suggested that Smart Growth strategies should be aimed at moving *minds* (changing the way people approach their own decisions about housing, commuting and the environment) and moving *less* (doing things more efficiently and as a result less frequently).

Many participants said that transportation needs should be met in a way that offers choice, and should serve and provide for sound land-use and infrastructure planning, rather than running ahead of them or predetermining them.

Transit

Participants in all parts of the province agreed that transit must be part of any Smart Growth strategy. In congested areas, transit is seen as an important alternative to the automobile, thereby reducing gridlock. In rural areas, transit is seen as a vital link between different communities.

Some highlights from the discussions:

- Better transit coordination among jurisdictions was identified as a key component of Smart Growth. Participants in nearly all communities pointed to the importance of inter-city transit, noting that with many people working in one community and living in another, commuting times are getting longer and congestion is worsening. Suburb-to-suburb travel (e.g., living in Markham and working in Mississauga) was identified as a particular concern, with most inter-city transit now designed to bring commuters downtown. Convenient alternatives to driving, it was suggested, would help alleviate this problem.
- Several participants noted that as the population ages, the demand for transit is likely to increase, as many older citizens (people who are now 55 will be 75 in 2021) will require alternatives to driving.
- Funding was cited as a major factor in improving transit in Ontario. Participants advocating increased emphasis on public transit suggested that alternatives to the current funding system (which relies on fares and municipal property taxes) are essential. Some of the proposed funding alternatives included:
 - dedicated provincial and/or federal fuel taxes,
 - direct provincial and/or federal funding, and
 - allowing private firms to provide transportation along certain routes, using shuttle buses or mini-vans.
- Participants suggested that existing (and previously serviced) rail lines could be re-opened for inter-regional transit to the GTA and beyond (e.g. Peterborough).
- Representatives from post-secondary institutions strongly advocated the need for improved transit to get students to and from classes, both within and between communities.
- Changes in land-use planning for new subdivisions was another suggestion to make transit more effective, given that high densities are needed in strategic locations to support transit routes.

Automobile traffic

Discussions around roads and highways tended to focus on the two main groups that use these thoroughfares: truckers and commuters.

While there was little dispute that economic development requires the efficient movement of goods by truck, it was generally accepted by participants that increasing road and highway capacity usually results

in increased levels of commuter traffic. As a result, the level of congestion relief anticipated for freight traffic is not achieved.

Participants also pointed out the trend toward businesses locating in areas poorly served by public transit, which adds to commuter traffic.

The need to provide alternatives to automobile traffic was deemed of particular importance for a number of reasons, including quality of life (less family time and increased stress resulting from longer commutes), air quality and the environment.

Some stakeholders felt that traffic congestion could be alleviated through travel demand management – policies to reduce rush-hour peaks, discourage commuting and divert some drivers to the transit system. To that end, a number of suggestions were put forward, with varying degrees of support, including:

- High-Occupancy-Vehicle (HOV) lanes and dedicated transit lanes on highways, with strict enforcement of these restrictions.
- Tolls on major highways, including existing highways.
- Expansion of flex-time and telecommuting programs to flatten rush-hour peaks.
- Making employer-provided transit passes a non-taxable employment benefit, to encourage transit use.
- Reducing or eliminating free and subsidized parking spaces in congested areas.

Cycling and walking

Several participants raised cycling and walking as important means of transportation (not just recreation and exercise) that do not burden the environment.

Suggestions to include more human-powered transportation included:

- Give priority to pedestrians and cyclists with more sidewalks, cross-walks, bike paths, walkways and trails.
- Create more bicycle lanes in urban areas.
- Encourage employers to provide secure bicycle storage and change facilities at work.

Trucking

In all parts of the province, truck transportation was identified as vital to the economy.

Southern Ontario participants emphasized the importance of moving freight quickly in an economy where just-in-time inventory management is essential to the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector. They also noted that southern Ontario is an important route to the United States and, in many locations, out-of-province trucks must use local roads to access border crossings.

In northern Ontario, expanded highways were advocated by several participants as a prerequisite for economic development. One participant in Sault Ste. Marie expressed the view succinctly: “Four-lane the North.” Others noted that northern Ontario businesses need to ensure that their goods are not delayed by congestion elsewhere in the province on their way to markets.

Among the other opinions expressed about highways during the consultations:

- The province’s recent announcement about new highways was seen by many participants as a boost to the economy and as an opportunity to draw growth away from the more congested areas of the Greater Toronto Area. A Niagara mid-peninsula corridor, for example, was praised as having the potential to divert traffic and associated highway development away from the current QEW corridor, which cuts through tender fruit lands.
- Concerns about increased highway commuting led some participants to wonder if the gains in new highway construction would be wiped out by increased congestion. It was suggested on several occasions that the highways could help move goods and people more efficiently, if new highway rights-of-way included space for rail lines as well.
- In general, participants agreed that highways need to be planned in conjunction with other modes of transportation, not separately.
- Many participants talked about the federal government’s responsibility for highways. This was of particular concern in the North, where it was noted that, although Ontario contains a long stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway, the federal government does not contribute funding for this stretch in proportion to its extent and importance. Several participants made comparisons with the

inter-state network in the United States as an example of a highway system that is strategically designed to connect all parts of the country, which receives federal funding for maintenance and upgrading.

Railways

Congestion on the roads and escalating fuel prices were cited as key factors behind a renewed interest in rail freight in many parts of the province.

It was noted that some municipalities are entering into partnerships to preserve existing rail corridors for future use.

In general, participants agreed that if rail freight is to offer an effective alternative to trucking, it needs to be coordinated with highways.

Some communities expressed specific local concerns that need to be addressed. For example:

- In Durham, it was pointed out that there is a need for an inter-modal transfer station on the east side of Toronto (the existing station is in Brampton).
- In Windsor, it was suggested that fully loaded trucks could be put on railcars for the trip between Toronto and Windsor, to reduce road congestion and air pollution and to improve safety on that stretch of Highway 401.

Shipping

Consultation participants in areas along major waterways, including St. Catharines, Hamilton and Thunder Bay, mentioned the importance of keeping harbours open for shipping as another fuel-efficient way of diverting freight traffic from crowded highways – especially for bulky commodities such as aggregates, road salt and raw sugar.

Another participant suggested that opportunities exist to create public/private partnerships for more effective harbour operations (e.g. Goderich).

It was noted that federal involvement is essential in ensuring optimum use of shipping routes throughout the province.

Air transportation

At several of the consultation meetings, airports were identified as vital regional economic engines, making important contributions to the economy by creating jobs and attracting investment. However, concerns were raised about the way in which smaller airports are funded, with the cost of maintaining and operating these facilities largely borne by municipalities.

Participants suggested that all levels of government – municipal, provincial, federal – should be involved in ensuring that airports continue to provide economic benefits in their regions, as well as to the province and the country as a whole.

Another suggestion was that the private sector can have a productive role in the provision of airport services. For example, the John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport is owned by the City of Hamilton, but uses a private-sector operator.

Another facet of air transportation mentioned in the consultations was the high cost of air travel between northern and southern Ontario, which was cited as hindering tourism opportunities in the North. However, participants mentioned that the recently offered no-frills air service to Thunder Bay has improved this situation.

Telecommunications

In more than half of the stakeholder consultation meetings, participants stressed the need for improved telecommunications infrastructure. It became evident, however, that achieving this goal will require different strategies in different parts of the province, as significant disparities in telecommunications capacity emerged throughout the consultations. In some parts of the province, it was pointed out, some residents are still on party lines and therefore do not have access to the Internet.

In northern Ontario, telecommunications infrastructure was identified as a high priority for a number of reasons. Information technology was cited by stakeholders in northern communities as helping to create jobs. It was pointed out that northeastern Ontario is a popular choice for call centres, because of a sizeable bilingual workforce. Telecommunications was also seen as having the potential to bring services such as tele-health and distance education to rural and northern communities.

Several municipalities reported using telecommunications to provide new services. The Municipality of Chatham-Kent, for example, talked about how it has linked hospitals, school boards and other institutions electronically, and is using these links to reduce costs through joint purchasing and other shared services.

While increased telecommunications capacity was largely seen as a desirable objective, not all stakeholders expressed support. It was pointed out that while telecommunications has the potential to allow people in a small community to work for distant clients, it also allows companies in large urban centres to serve clients in rural communities, potentially eliminating jobs in those smaller centres.

On the whole, however, most participants agreed that expanding the fibre optic network to all parts of the province would contribute to economic and community development, and had the potential to reduce commuting by allowing people to conduct business from remote locations.

Environmental protection

Protecting the environment was a major topic of discussion throughout the Smart Growth consultations, producing a wide range of environmental issues and concerns, which varied across the province. For example:

- York Region stakeholders pointed to rapid growth causing intense pressure to allow development on the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- Toronto stakeholders spoke of grappling with smog, an overloaded storm sewer system, and conflicts over solid waste disposal.
- People in resort areas like the Kawarthas and Muskoka expressed concern over the environmental effects of increased development and recreational activity around lakes.
- Participants at the Orangeville meeting talked about the environmental effects of intensive livestock farming.
- Stakeholders in northern Ontario emphasized the importance of eco-tourism as an important economic opportunity.

In many cases, participants in the consultation process advocated that protecting the environment should be given high prominence in the list of Smart Growth goals.

Provincial perspective

One of the common conclusions reached by participants was that the environment is too important and too large an issue to be left solely to local decision-making. It was stated at several meetings that provincial guidelines are needed, backed by meaningful, enforceable legislation, to ensure region-wide or ecosystem planning with local implementation.

Some of the observations regarding this objective:

- The location and timing of development were frequently described as inextricably linked to environmental protection. Questions about where and when to allow development were often framed as questions about how best to preserve important environmental features and functions.
- Several participants talked about directing and controlling growth – directing it away from environmentally sensitive areas and controlling it so that these areas are not threatened by encroaching development.
- Fragmented decision-making was cited as a key impediment to environmental protection. It was noted that municipal boundaries often bear no relation to the shapes of natural ecosystems and watersheds. For example, Lake Simcoe’s status as a cold-water lake is currently threatened by waste water from the surrounding communities (e.g. Barrie) and fertilizer run-off from intensive farm operations in the area.
- Some participants also argued that fragmented decision-making is exacerbated by Ontario Municipal Board decisions that are made in isolation, not in the context of interdependent ecosystems or watersheds.
- Conservation authorities expressed concern that they have varying levels of authority in different parts of the province. Insufficient funding to ensure environmental protection was also cited as a key concern for conservation authorities.
- Representatives of municipalities emphasized a need for effective municipal tools to help them protect sensitive areas and green space. It was pointed out that few municipalities can afford to buy up land to preserve it from development. Greater ability for municipalities to form public-private partnerships and “stewardship” arrangements to protect certain lands was suggested as a possible solution.

- Some small municipalities expressed concern about a lack of funding and expertise to undertake sufficient environmental studies, such as lake capacity studies in resort areas or groundwater protection for pits and quarries. They noted that they are dependent on provincial agencies to supply the expertise they lack.

Planning for the environment

Certainty in the area of planning for the environment emerged as a high priority for many stakeholders. Both environmentalists and developers agreed that a set of clearly articulated rules about what is and is not protected would be an important step in the direction of Smart Growth, although they acknowledged that agreement on those rules would likely require extensive negotiation.

Most participants agreed that preventing development on environmentally sensitive or significant land and enforcing those decisions, is an essential part of Smart Growth. Among the suggestions to achieve this goal:

- Land banking, using money from user fees and/or taxes.
- Tax concessions for owners of environmentally sensitive lands, so they will not sell to developers.
- Setting firm boundaries around environmentally sensitive areas, and implementing legislation to protect these areas from any future development.
- Offering tax deductions, similar to those for charitable donations, to developers and landowners who donate land to public or not-for-profit agencies.
- Stricter enforcement of environmental policies that require the replacement of lost environmentally sensitive features.

Air and water quality

Water and air quality were frequently identified as key environmental concerns. Participants had numerous suggestions for improving air and water quality, including:

- Reducing automobile commuting through increased opportunities for transit use.
- Greater use of alternative energy sources to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

- Controls on development on river headwater areas, such as the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- Guidelines for lakeside development, especially in resort areas.
- Waste diversion, to decrease the amount of waste going to landfills and the potential for groundwater contamination.
- Following the lead of some U.S. cities, which have found that by planting trees and growing plants on flat rooftops, the summer temperature of an entire city can be lowered, thereby lowering energy costs for air conditioning and reducing air pollution.

Education

Participants in several meetings mentioned the need to improve environmental education in Ontario schools. Some went so far as to suggest that helping students make environmentally sustainable choices should be given the same priority as anti-smoking and anti-drug education.

One participant pointed out that the new Ontario curriculum provides an opportunity to emphasize environmental awareness in schools across the province.

Economic development

The concept of Smart Growth as a catalyst for sustained economic growth was a universal theme throughout the consultation process. Even in areas where explosive growth has caused congestion and housing concerns, it was agreed that continued economic growth is a priority, and that Smart Growth strategies are needed to ensure that Ontario's quality of life and economic prosperity are both enhanced.

Creating jobs in rural and northern communities

Increasing economic development emerged as the top issue in all of the northern Ontario consultations, and as a high priority in many rural areas. In these communities, static or declining populations were cited as a major concern, with young people leaving and their parents often following when they retire to be closer to their children's families.

With traditional job sources in the North and rural areas changing (a result of the increased use of technology in mining, forestry and agriculture, requiring fewer workers), many participants spoke about the need to increase entrepreneurship opportunities, especially in tourism and technology-intensive businesses.

Among the suggested approaches (which had varying levels of support) for promoting economic development in northern and rural communities:

- Establishing two new tourist businesses in every Living Legacy area over the next 10 years.
- Developing fish farms.
- Pursuing new energy generation projects.
- Cultivating the economic spin-offs of the proposed Northern Medical School.
- Promoting industry partnerships to create value-added businesses.
- Promoting partnerships with universities and colleges to offer economic opportunities related to research or education. Representatives from Collège Boréal in Sudbury, for example, noted their success in creating distance education programs and small university-based businesses with help from industry and the provincial government.
- Focusing on industries that add value to primary resources (such as processing wood before shipping it to market).
- Focusing on improved economic development for First Nations, given that Aboriginal peoples make up the fastest-growing segment in northern Ontario.
- Boosting financing for entrepreneurs, through initiatives such as government micro-loans or loan guarantees for small business start-ups.
- Using public funds to bring information technology to rural and northern communities (a suggestion based on the belief that the private sector will not extend telecommunications infrastructure to all communities).
- Allowing northern municipalities to offer incentives to business (on the grounds that these municipalities are competing not with southern Ontario communities, but with cities around the world where such incentives are an established practice).
- Directing public funding to business sectors rather than to individual businesses to encourage cooperation, resource sharing and clustering.
- Applying a 0.5 per cent tax on the mining and forestry industry to create a fund for northern economic development.
- Improving skills training, such as providing entrepreneurship training for people retiring from work in the primary industries, and improving the links between apprenticeship programs, community colleges and universities, to allow people to upgrade their skills.

- Encouraging partnerships through programs to match older, experienced business people with younger people looking to start up new businesses, and to bring together entrepreneurs from the North with experienced businesspeople from southern Ontario.
- Designating enterprise zones with special zoning and tax concessions in northern and rural municipalities as pilot projects to stimulate new business.
- Setting quality assurance standards and certification programs in the tourist industry.
- Cooperative marketing of northern tourist attractions.

Agriculture

Agricultural stakeholders characterized Ontario's current situation as a dilemma: the province, particularly southern Ontario, contains some of the best farmland in Canada, but much of it is located near urbanized areas, and there is strong pressure to develop it.

The case for preserving farmland was stated repeatedly, with farms valued as sources of local food, green space, wildlife habitats, heritage landscapes and, in some cases, as tourist attractions. It was also noted that agri-food is one of the largest industries in Ontario, with the potential to boost the economy with the development of specialty crops and new products, such as bio-fuel (e.g. ethanol) and bio-pharmaceuticals (plants grown to produce chemical compounds used in drug manufacturing).

At the same time, some stakeholders pointed out the burden farms place on the environment, through the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and dense livestock populations producing large amounts of manure.

Consultation participants also noted that most farmland is private property, and many farmers consider their land to be a retirement nest-egg, with the right to sell the land at the highest possible price.

The degree to which preserving farms should be a Smart Growth goal was the subject of much discussion, but it was generally agreed that action on two fronts is required to protect farmland:

- Land-use policies that direct growth as much as possible to already urbanized areas, including creating buffers between subdivisions and working farms to reduce land-use conflicts.

- Maintaining farming as a profitable economic activity, which some stakeholders suggested will require reform of the property tax and assessment system. It was also suggested that appropriate non-farm activities should be allowed on farmland to give farmers additional sources of income.

Other suggestions relating to agriculture included:

- Reforestation of abandoned farms, to prevent erosion and benefit the environment, and as an economic activity (tree farming).
- Special regulations regarding agri-business and agri-tourism, to deal with enterprises that cross land-use categories (such as wineries expanding and building banquet halls and conference centres).
- Bringing natural gas to rural areas to allow for expanded greenhouse facilities on farms.
- Regulations regarding greenhouses on prime farmland, to ensure that fertile land is not sacrificed to semi-industrial use.

Housing

One of the key Smart Growth issues raised throughout the consultation process was a need to ensure a range of housing choices, easily connected to where people work and spend their leisure time. Several participants, especially in urban areas, pointed to a shortage of rental housing, increasing demand for seniors' housing and a need for affordable housing in all forms as key issues.

The need for a national housing strategy was raised at a number of consultation meetings.

The lack of rental housing was seen as an impediment to prosperity in areas where jobs are being created and where there are large numbers of students, such as Ottawa, Waterloo and Toronto. Stakeholders in smaller cities, such as Barrie and Orangeville, also expressed concern about a shortage of rental housing.

Participants' suggestions to promote a range of housing choices included:

- Offering income and property tax breaks to developers and owners of rental housing.
- Equalizing property taxes between multi-unit rental housing and other types of housing.

- Introducing a convert-to-rent program to encourage, for example, shop owners to create apartments in unused space above their premises.
- Expanding the Provincial Sales Tax rebate system for rental housing to include larger units. This suggestion is based on the understanding that the current size limit is only suitable for apartments in the Greater Toronto Area; apartments in other cities are usually larger on average.
- Changing by-laws in some municipalities to permit the creation of small units for students and single workers.
- Creating a public awareness program to help people understand the benefits and value of rental housing, to reduce local resistance to rental housing proposals.
- Removing restrictions on seniors' housing in all residential areas, similar to the current status of group homes.
- Improving housing for seniors in the North, where conventional housing is not suitable for seniors who can no longer drive but want to remain independent.
- Removing barriers to affordable home construction, such as having all three levels of government waive taxes for certain kinds of housing.
- Providing for accelerated capital cost allowances on provincial and federal income taxes to give developers an incentive to build more rental housing that is accessible to low-income earners.
- Ensuring that a full range of housing types are available and affordable, recognizing the preferences of Ontario home buyers.

Municipalities

Growth costs

Municipal politicians expressed concern about the current municipal financing system, citing fears about shrinking tax bases and increasing social service costs during economic downturns. They also emphasized the lack of a clear relationship between the need for “hard” services (roads, transit, bridges, water and sewers, etc.) and the municipality’s ability to pay for them.

Concerns were also raised across the province about the responsibility for potential costs and implementation of any future Smart Growth related initiatives.

Among the other concerns raised during municipal consultations:

- Some rural municipalities pointed to the difficulties inherent in having a large, sparsely populated land mass, meaning an increased per capita cost for infrastructure – especially for expensive facilities like rural bridges.
- Some urban municipalities which attract workers from surrounding areas talked about the challenges of providing infrastructure used as much by non-residents as by residents.
- Small, isolated municipalities noted the disadvantage they face in being unable to pool revenue across several communities (which can be done by larger amalgamated municipalities).
- Some municipalities argued that it was unfair to have to pay for the operation and maintenance of facilities, such as airports, that were created with federal or provincial funding.

Among the suggestions put forward during the consultations to address municipalities' concerns:

- Provide municipalities with additional sources of tax revenue, such as hotel taxes or sales taxes.
- Enhance municipalities' ability to raise money through debt financing.
- Provide provincial funding for the acquisition of green space.
- Provide sustainable provincial funding for services that cannot be supported by property taxes – e.g. supporting transit through a dedicated fuel tax.
- Give municipalities more authority to enter into public-private partnerships to create facilities, deliver services and preserve natural or man-made heritage.
- Reform the Ontario Municipal Board process.
- Introduce full-cost pricing of certain services, such as water and roads, to encourage taxpayers to make smarter decisions about their use of resources.

Jurisdiction

Although the Smart Growth consultations did not focus on municipal amalgamation – given that the issue continues to be dealt with in other forums – it was nonetheless raised by many municipal officials.

For example, amalgamation in Sudbury was cited in allowing for coordination of transit in the area, resulting in an increase in ridership.

While some municipalities expressed continuing difficulty with amalgamation issues, others spoke of the benefits of amalgamation – especially as it pertains to Smart Growth – including pooled assessment, coordination of services, and region-wide planning and environmental protection.

Some municipalities said they would like to access similar benefits, but amalgamation is not taking place in their area.

Among the other jurisdictional issues raised during the municipal consultations:

- It was suggested that the province give municipalities the broadest range of powers to give them the ability to implement Smart Growth.
- Some counties expressed frustration that some municipalities do not participate in county-wide planning and government, making it difficult to undertake planning over a broader area, such as a watershed.
- Some participants felt that Smart Growth presupposed regional planning and coordination of services, but that this goal could not be achieved under the existing system.
- In the Greater Toronto Area, participants discussed the mandate of the Greater Toronto Services Board as a regional coordinating body. Some felt that it had a useful role to play in coordinating transportation infrastructure and delivery and related urban development across the GTA. Others felt it threatened the authority of the existing regional governments. Some submitted that it could not be effective unless it received appropriate funding to carry out its work.
- Northern representatives talked about the need to solve the problem of unincorporated communities, which often benefit from the services provided at the expense of their neighbours in municipalities.
- In several meetings, participants mentioned the need to ensure greater cooperation among provincial ministries.
- At nearly every meeting, participants remarked that Smart Growth cannot take place without federal involvement and recognition by the federal government of the importance of Ontario communities to the country's economy. Several municipal representatives recommended reviving the federal Ministry of Urban Affairs. Others

suggested that the federal government is waiting for the provincial government to take the lead in areas such as housing and transit, and that once the province is involved, the federal government would return to these areas.

- It was noted that if the federal government does get involved in urban affairs again, it will be important for its decisions to be coordinated with those of other levels of government, to ensure the certainty and predictability in decision-making identified as essential to Smart Growth.
- In border communities, participants mentioned the need to involve their American counterparts in Smart Growth discussions.

MAKING IT WORK

Building on success

Throughout the consultation process, participants pointed to local initiatives that they felt constituted Smart Growth. As such, there was a general feeling that Ontario communities would not have to start from scratch in developing and implementing Smart Growth strategies and approaches.

Some examples of “Smart Growth” initiatives already under way:

- One municipality gets a discount from its transit authority on bulk purchases of transit passes for its employees to encourage greater transit use.
- Contact North offers distance education using video and audio conferencing technology.
- A county government recently sponsored a Children’s Groundwater Festival, helping to educate children on the importance of water quality and water conservation.
- A coalition in southern Ontario brings together representatives from federations of agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, colleges and municipalities to work on agricultural development strategies.
- A group of northern Ontario municipalities have collaborated to provide access to resources related to tourism, business development and health care.
- The creation of the District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) in the District of Cochrane has encouraged greater cooperation between Timmins and the surrounding communities.
- One municipality waives development charges and building permit fees and defers property taxes for three years on appropriate new development in the downtown core, and has bought downtown property to create a new urban market.
- A technology centre in northern Ontario brings together experienced businesspeople and younger people to encourage entrepreneurship.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

As part of the stakeholder consultation meetings, participants completed a questionnaire which asked them to identify their Smart Growth priorities. The following are the results compiled from the questionnaire responses:

Results by region – top five Smart Growth goals

Smart Growth Goals	North	East	GTA	Central	South-west
(a) Develop new opportunities for continued economic growth and development in Ontario's cities, towns and rural areas	✓				
(b) Reward investment and entrepreneurship to encourage more competitive economies	✓				
(c) Move people and goods more efficiently			✓		✓
(d) Use existing infrastructure and resources to increase the capacity for economic growth; invest wisely in new infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
(e) Promote technological innovation to keep Ontario competitive in the global economy	✓	✓			
(f) Manage growth by making tough choices about where development should go		✓	✓	✓	
(g) Strengthen quality of life by developing vibrant and attractive communities with the facilities, services and green spaces that people want		✓		✓	✓
(h) Offer a range of housing choices easily connected to where people work and play					
(i) Expand transportation choices within and between communities		✓	✓		✓
(j) Help communities become financially stable and self sufficient	✓				
(k) Protect natural areas and farmland for future generations					
(l) Respect the environment by promoting measures that aim to reduce the impacts on air, land and water			✓	✓	✓
(m) Encourage growth in areas where it will have the least impact on the environment				✓	
(n) Clean up brownfield sites by removing the barriers to their redevelopment					
<p>Note: 17 regional stakeholder consultations were held – <u>North</u> (Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, North Bay, Thunder Bay) <u>East</u> (Ottawa, Kingston, Peterborough) <u>GTA</u> (Toronto, Mississauga, Markham, Durham) <u>Central</u> (Barrie, Orangeville, Niagara/ Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo), <u>South-west</u> (Windsor, London)</p>					

It was agreed throughout the consultations that one of the keys to the made-in-Ontario Smart Growth strategy will be opportunities for communities around the province to learn from each others' best practices. One suggestion was that a Web site be created as a single source for this information.

Cooperation and coordination

It was generally agreed throughout the consultations that Smart Growth requires provincial guidelines for growth, region-wide planning and local implementation of these plans. In nearly all meetings, participants talked about the need for more and better coordination – between municipalities, across regions, within and between provincial ministries, among all levels of government, and in the private, public and non-profit sectors.

One of the notions agreed upon by virtually all participants was the need to develop a clear vision for Smart Growth. All sectors, all levels of government and all residents of Ontario will need to work together toward that vision, to ensure that Ontario maintains a strong economy, strong communities and healthy environment as the cornerstones of Smart Growth.

While there were a variety of opinions and viewpoints expressed on a wide range of issues, two conclusions became apparent throughout the consultations:

- Smart Growth is a complex undertaking; and
- Cooperation is essential, with all sectors, communities and governments needing to work together to make the difficult decisions and implement the policies necessary to achieve Smart Growth.

Perhaps most encouraging was the expressed willingness of community leaders across Ontario to work with their counterparts and the provincial and federal governments to realize many of the goals and opportunities that will be made possible by a made-in-Ontario Smart Growth strategy.

The Government of Ontario thanks all of the participants in the consultation process, and looks forward to continuing the dialogue as it works towards a made-in-Ontario Smart Growth strategy.

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APPENDIX

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