

BACKGROUND

The Ten Infrastructure Projects for a More Competitive Ontario

Future-shaping infrastructure projects will enhance Ontario's competitiveness, improve quality of life, bring the dream of home ownership within reach for many

[The Ten Infrastructure Projects for a More Competitive Ontario](#) span the province from corner to corner, both in location and impact. These game-changing, massive infrastructure projects will act as magnets for talent and investment, creating a strong cycle of economic growth.

Each of the ten projects selected for inclusion addresses multiple strategic challenges, has a direct link to Ontario's economic competitiveness, and is a project both of an ambitious scale, and is conceptual or in early planning stages.

This will allow Ontario to pay for the types of infrastructure and public services that spur productivity and improve quality of life, leading to higher paying jobs, business investment, and more opportunities to increase housing supply and affordability.

THE GREATER TORONTO AREA (GTA)

1. A Pearson Transit Hub

The western GTA is an economic powerhouse. The area surrounding Toronto Pearson Airport, referred to by economists and urban planners as the Airport Employment Zone (AEZ), is the second largest employment area in Ontario.

Already home to more than 330,000 jobs, it is second only to downtown Toronto's employment cluster. A transit hub has the potential to increase that to 700,000 jobs by 2035, further increasing the area's GDP contribution by 2.2%.

However, the AEZ is also underserved by transit and is one of the worst areas in Canada for traffic congestion due to local workers traveling to and from work by car. The proposed Pearson Transit Hub would cut through the congestion by integrating several existing and planned transit lines into a new multimodal transportation anchor, similar in size and scope to Union Station. This new hub – a “Union Station West” – would provide a passenger interchange for regional rail lines, such as the Kitchener GO Regional Express Rail and UP Express, and for transit connections to the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, 407 Transit Way, Finch West LRT and Mississauga Bus Rapid Transit.

2. A New Bypass for GTA Freight Rail

The railway tracks that crisscross the GTA were built in the late 1800s with the primary purpose to move goods to market. Since the 1960s, Ontario has been using these same railway tracks to move people to and from work, and moving more and more people each and every year. Just-in-time supply chains and the rise in online retail accentuated by the pandemic will only reinforce existing bottlenecks.

Ontario needs to move goods *and* people, but it can't be done well on the same tracks.

A project long-known as “the Missing Link” would enable significant growth in passenger volumes by separating freight and passenger trains onto distinct railway tracks by constructing new freight track in the west-end of the GTA. This would optimize freight traffic, since these trains would now be able to bypass tracks that currently are also used by passenger rail, allowing people to spend less time commuting and more time at home.

3. Extending the Yonge Subway into York Region

York Region is a major part of the GTA's current and future growth, with the Yonge Street Corridor being home to more than 50,000 jobs, including the largest communications and information technology cluster in Canada on a per capita basis. It is expected to add 300,000 jobs and 600,000 residents by 2041. Congestion, however, is expected to get worse and could limit the Region's ability to grow and prosper.

It's time to complete the connection to York Region by extending the TTC Yonge Line to Richmond Hill, linking Union Station in downtown Toronto with Richmond Hill Centre. Extending the Yonge Subway by approximately 8 kilometres to Richmond Hill will accelerate the corridor's potential by enabling the possible creation of a new multimodal transit hub.

Along with reducing congestion, the Yonge Subway Extension will be the catalyst for transit-oriented communities along the route. This is expected to create complete communities that

unlock employment opportunities and provide the potential for home ownership for 88,000 new residents in 23,000 new residential units.

4. An Eastern GTA Transit Hub

Ontario is already making significant investments in highway infrastructure in the eastern GTA, such as the recent extension to Highway 407 East. Connectivity through transit must be next, as the Durham corridor is expected to accommodate 210,000 new residents and 66,000 more jobs by 2041.

While transit projects in the area still need to be validated and finalized, the Province should try to tie them together with other modes of transit and transportation using a new multimodal Eastern GTA Transit Hub, similar to the proposed Pearson Area Transit Hub and “Union Station North” created by extending the Yonge Subway into York Region.

Done right, an Eastern GTA Transit Hub with rapid transit connections to the 407 Transitway and Scarborough-Durham BRT, and the potential to connect riders to GO Transit, could service a new eastern GTA airport. It would further enhance housing development and economic competitiveness, while providing better connectivity and more reliable transit to Ontario’s Eastern GTA communities.

TORONTO

5. Rapid Transit in Toronto

Toronto needs more rapid transit. The proposed Ontario Line Subway and Waterfront LRT could unlock extensive economic benefits across the City.

Unlike any other transit project proposed for the City of Toronto, the Ontario Line contributes the most obvious benefits for congestion relief and new opportunities for transit-oriented communities (TOC). Previously known as the Downtown Relief Line, the 16-kilometre long Ontario Line will create new north-south and east-west routes to and from the City’s Central Business District, relieving pressure on the overcrowded Yonge Subway.

Toronto’s true development potential is on the waterfront. Requiring collaboration among the City of Toronto, the TTC, Metrolinx and Waterfront Toronto, the proposed Waterfront LRT would connect under-served, high-density nodes connecting Woodbine Avenue in the east with Long Branch in the west, with a new 22-kilometre-long transit corridor. Most notably, this will relieve pressure from the overcrowded 504 King Streetcar allowing faster, dependable and more comfortable travel for commuters.

OTTAWA & EASTERN ONTARIO

6. Frequent and Reliable Rail Service between Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal

The Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal triangle is Canada's most densely populated region. Travelling between these thriving economic centres isn't as easy as it should be, a major obstacle to the region's growth and competitiveness.

Fast, frequent and reliable passenger service, known as High-Frequency Rail to many, would address this operational challenge by creating new, dedicated tracks for passenger trains from Toronto to Coteau, Quebec, at which point they would then reconnect with track already owned by VIA Rail. This would make the train more competitive with car travel, saving travellers and commuters time and money while further reducing congestion in and around Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa.

In addition to unlocking the economic benefits of improved connectivity between these dynamic economic engines, the project would also extend the commutable distance to metropolitan areas, which increases access and choice to more affordable home ownership along the route. The more choices people have, the more competitive Ontario becomes.

NIAGARA & SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

7. A New Freeway and 21st Century Border Infrastructure for the Niagara Peninsula

Niagara and Southwestern Ontario are Ontario's gateway to the United States, ensuring Ontario's goods and services can be delivered across the continent. These trade routes and the region's logistical, manufacturing and agricultural clusters are critical to the entire Province's competitiveness.

The Niagara Peninsula is a trade superhighway. On average, prepandemic, 1,600 trucks and 5,800 cars crossed the Peace Bridge each day between Fort Erie and Buffalo. Congestion on the QEW, the Peninsula's only major roadway to and from the border, is a major strategic challenge. The highway is near capacity and expansion isn't tenable.

In addition to the need to protect some of Canada's most valuable agricultural land, limiting expansion, Niagara Region's total employment is forecast to swell by 30% over the next 25 years. A new route is needed and planning for it must resume today.

A new freeway, often referred to as the Mid-Peninsula Highway, would create a supplemental transportation corridor to the QEW between the western GTA and the U.S. border. This will enable efficient movement of goods and people, but also will foster increased prosperity between Hamilton-Burlington and Kitchener-Waterloo as part of Canada's Innovation Corridor.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

8. A Strategic Transportation Link to Ontario's Ring of Fire

Roughly 500-kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay lies Canada's largest known source of untapped mineral wealth, Ontario's "Ring of Fire". Development of most of the minerals in the Ring of Fire will require year-round, land-based transportation links – a key challenge for all involved is the area's remoteness to existing transportation infrastructure.

Accessing the Ring of Fire with long-distance road or rail infrastructure will define Ontario's relationship with its Far North for a century. It presents opportunities to work alongside Indigenous communities to ensure environmental impacts are considered, land rights are respected and economic benefits are realized equitably.

Many First Nations in the Far North do not have year-round, land-based transportation access. Marten Falls First Nation, about halfway between the Ring of Fire region and the region's existing transportation links, only has winter road access – inhibiting access to core necessities, such as fuel, medical supplies and healthy food. This proposed project will provide many First Nations in the Far North with year-round, land-based transportation access.

This ecologically sensitive land traverses the traditional territory of several Indigenous communities and should only be accessed in true partnership, consultation, and shared prosperity.

PROVINCEWIDE

9. Broadband to address the Urban-Rural Digital Divide

Our economy will be reshaped by global trends in digitization, the Internet of Things and next generation manufacturing. Across Ontario, tech-focused urban centres like Waterloo and Ottawa thrive while many rural areas struggle to adapt to plant closures, population loss and working from home. Wired and wireless broadband are essential twenty-first century economic infrastructure, and crucial to economic competitiveness.

Over the past year, the gaps that have persisted for far too long became crystal clear. Far too many people in a vast number of areas do not have connectivity. High-speed internet access in rural and remote communities is touch-and-go and it's impossible to work from home, attend virtual class, operate a small business or start a new one without a reliable internet connection.

Enhancing the connectivity of rural and remote communities in the post-pandemic economic landscape will help level the economic playing field, increase productivity and make it easier to attract and retain businesses, investment and people. Most importantly, it will improve the quality of day-to-day life for many Ontarians. The Province's unwavering commitment to this investment is critical.

10. Ontario's Clean Energy Potential

Ontario is a proud leader in clean electricity. We began the twentieth century by harnessing Niagara Falls to produce low-cost green power and, early in the twenty-first century, became the first province or state in North America to eliminate the use of coal for electricity generation. Ontario currently has a head start on other jurisdictions with 96% of our electricity produced from emissions-free sources.

Unfortunately, power generation isn't the only source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Ontario. Ninety-seven percent of emissions now come from other sources. Solutions like renewable natural gas and hydrogen, or a combination of the two, are leading candidates for mitigating these other emissions. It's also a perfect fit for Ontario's innovation economy, which boasts some of the world's leading scientists, engineers and energy professionals.

OREA supports the in-depth exploration of these opportunities. This will ensure that Ontario is prepared with infrastructure projects that can support initial processing, future fueling and distribution facilities, and the testing of potential new end-use applications. These sustainable energy solutions can generate high-paying jobs, foster innovation and accelerate the industry with the potential for wide applications within Ontario.

OREA invites Ontarians to take the top ten infrastructure projects list as a starting point and to engage the association in an important dialogue about how we can use infrastructure to enhance Ontario's competitiveness. To learn more about all ten projects, please visit top10projects.ca.

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