

Submission to the Standing Committee on General Government Regarding Bill 27, *the Greenbelt Protection Act*

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Introduction

The Pembina Institute for Appropriate Development (PIAD) is a national, independent not-for profit environmental research and education organization, with offices in Ottawa, Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver and Drayton Valley, Alberta.

The Institute has taken a strong interest in issues related to the environmental, economic and social sustainability of urban communities in Ontario over the past year, publishing two major reports, *Smart Growth in Ontario: The Promise vs. Provincial Performance* (February 2003) and *Building Sustainable Urban Communities in Ontario: Overcoming the Barriers* (December 2003) on the subject.

In this context, the Institute welcomes the introduction of Bill 27, *The Greenbelt Protection Act* as an important first step towards the reform of the land-use planning process in Ontario to curb urban sprawl and promote more sustainable urban development patterns in the golden horseshoe region.

The Pembina Institute supports the government's overall approach of providing a pause in the approval of by-laws, official plans and official plan amendments, and final plans of subdivision in the greenbelt study area while a plan for the establishment of a greenbelt in the study area identified by the Bill is completed.

The Institute is proposing three amendments to Bill 27. These amendments are related to the scope of the greenbelt study area created by the bill, and the status of current major transportation and sewer and water infrastructure initiatives within the study area. The Institute believes that these amendments are essential to the achievement of the bill's underlying purposes.

The Rational for Bill 27

The golden horseshoe region has been under intense development pressures, as a result of the concentration of population growth and economic activity in the region. Ninety per cent of the province's population growth during the 1996 to 2001 period was, for example, in the region.¹ Unfortunately, the dominant development pattern in the region has been one of low-density urban sprawl onto prime agricultural lands and ecologically significant areas.

The consequences of the continuation of these patterns of urban development² in the golden horseshoe region are severe. In August 2002, the Neptis Foundation, (<http://www.neptis.org/>) analyzed and offered projections of the impacts of land-use, transportation and infrastructure associated with the continuation

¹ See Statistics Canada, "2001 Census Analysis Series – A Profile of the Canadian Population: Where we live" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, March 2002).

² Neptis Foundation concluded that although there have been some recent improvements in residential density at the GTA's urban fringe compared to the densities achieved there in earlier periods, the density levels achieved are still two to three times lower than those found in urban areas within pre- and post-war areas of the City of Toronto even, without considering the presence of high-rise apartment buildings in these areas. See Blais, P., "Inching Toward Sustainability: The Evolving Urban Structure of the GTA" (Toronto: Neptis Foundation, March 2000), ch.3.

of ‘business-as-usual’ development patterns in the region³ over the next thirty years.⁴ These projections are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The Impacts of ‘Business-as-Usual’ Urban Sprawl in the Toronto Region

Issue	Impact
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The region’s population will grow from 7.4 million in 2000 to 10.5 million in 2031, an increase of 43%.
Land-use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the region, 1,070 square kilometres of land will be urbanized. This is almost double the area of the City of Toronto and represents a 45% increase in the amount of urbanized land in the region. Of the land on which this urban growth will occur, 92% will be Class 1, 2, or 3 agricultural lands as classified by the Canada Land Inventory; 69% will be Class 1 land.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Automobile ownership in the region will increase by 50% to 19 million vehicles. The value of delays due to traffic congestion, principally in the 905 region surrounding Toronto, will increase from about \$1 billion per year to \$3.8 billion per year. Daily vehicle kilometres of auto travel in the region will increase by 64%. Costs associated with automobile accidents, reflecting this increase in auto travel, will rise from \$3.8 billion in 2000 to \$6.3 billion in 2031. Reflecting the low levels of transit use in the regions outside of the City of Toronto, where most of the growth will occur, the total transit modal share will decrease by 11%. (Transit modal share: for Toronto – 28%; for surrounding area – 5.4%). Emissions of transportation-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are projected to increase by 42%. Reflecting reliance on the automobile for transportation, GHG emissions in new suburban areas are projected to increase 526% relative to their current levels.
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projections suggest that \$33 billion in new investments will be needed in water and wastewater treatment infrastructure. Between 2000 and 2031, \$43.8 billion in investments in transportation infrastructure are projected. Of these investments, 68% are projected to be in roads and highways under business-as-usual scenarios.

Virtually all of the urban expansion that has taken place in the region over the past three decades has been on prime agricultural land. Between 1976 and 1996, for example, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) lost approximately 60,000 hectares of farmland to urbanization, an area roughly equivalent in size to the post-

³ Defined as the region from Barrie in the north to Fort Erie in the south, and from Kitchener-Waterloo in the west to Peterborough in the east.

⁴ IBI Group in association with Dillon Consulting Ltd, “Toronto-Related Region Futures Study/ Interim Report: Implications of Business-As-Usual Development” (Toronto: Neptis Foundation, August 2002)

amalgamation City of Toronto.⁵ The GTA is currently estimated to lose approximately 3,000 hectares of farmland each year to development.⁶ In addition, the proportional decrease in transit use and increase in automobile use associated with the continuation of current urban growth patterns has serious negative implications for air quality and greenhouse gas emissions in the region.

In this context, the establishment of a greenbelt in the golden horseshoe region has the potential to limit sprawling development patterns, encourage the redevelopment and strengthening of existing communities, and the establishment of development patterns for which non-automobile based transportation modes, such as walking and public transit, are viable and attractive options.

Significant population growth is projected for Ontario over the next thirty years, and this is expected to be concentrated in the golden horseshoe region. Research undertaken for the Neptis Foundation has concluded the anticipated population growth in the region can be accommodated within lands already designed as urban in official plans (much of which is currently undeveloped) until 2021 and in some municipalities until 2031 at relatively low densities (i.e. much lower densities than currently exist within older residential parts of the City of Toronto).⁷

This implies that the anticipated population growth in the region could easily be accommodated on substantially less land than is currently designated as urban in existing official plans, if development occurs at higher densities than is currently the case, but does not necessarily involve extensive highrise development.⁸ In other words, there is no need to expand the existing urban settlement area in the region to accommodate future population growth over the next thirty years. Indeed, the projected population growth in the region could still be accommodated even if some of the lands currently designated for urban development are added to the proposed greenbelt.

Specific Comments on Bill 27

The Pembina Institute's comments with respect to Bill 27 are focused on two areas, the scope of the greenbelt study area, and the status of major infrastructure initiatives that may affect the greenbelt initiative and its underlying goals.

Infrastructure Initiatives

The limitations placed on municipal planning powers within the greenbelt study area established by Bill 27 are an important first step in the greenbelt planning process. However, it is also important that steps be taken to ensure that other actions by local and provincial agencies during the study period do not undermine the goals of the greenbelt initiative. Provincial transportation initiatives, particularly highway extensions and expansions, and the development of large-scale sewer and water infrastructure can have a major influence on future development patterns.

The previous government, through its SuperBuild Corporation, initiated a program of 400-series highway extensions in the golden horseshoe region. These projects included:

⁵ Blais, P. "Inching Toward Sustainability," pg. 24.

⁶ Blais, P. "Inching Toward Sustainability," pg. 28.

⁷ IBI Group "Toronto Related Region Futures Study," pp. E17-E19.

⁸ See, also Blais, "Inching Toward Sustainability," pg. 13.

- the eastward extension of Highway 407 to Highway 35/115
- the extension of Highway 404 around the east and south sides of Lake Simcoe
- the northward and eastward extension of Highway 427 to Barrie
- the construction of a new mid-peninsula highway from Burlington to the US border in the Niagara region
- the creation of a new east–west GTA transportation corridor.
- the extension of Highway 410 northwards “at least” to highway 89.

The map attached to this brief, prepared by the Pembina Institute and the Neptis Foundation provides information on the planning, approvals and construction status of these projects as of March 2004. All of these projects would run through areas that are identified in by the government as potential elements of the golden horseshoe greenbelt.

In addition to their direct impacts on important ecological features like the Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment, the projects are already encouraging automobile-dependant ‘leapfrog’ development well beyond existing urban areas and the boundaries of the government’s proposed greenbelt. The problem has been evident, for example, in recent proposals for large-scale residential developments between Bond Head and Bradford along the path of the proposed Highway 404-400 Bradford By-Pass in Simcoe County.

There are also strong development pressures in the region of the Highway 427 extension north of the Oak Ridges Moraine, and on the north side of Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, Oshawa, and Clarington, where the proposed Highway 407 extensions are promoting urban expansion onto prime agricultural lands and sensitive watersheds. In addition to encouraging further urban sprawl, the highway projects are encouraging long-distance automobile commuting from these areas to the GTA.

Despite the challenges presented to the government’s greenbelt initiative by the highway extension projects, planning and approvals processes in relation to these projects are continuing to advance.

Recommendation

Bill 27 should be amended to add a clause placing planning and approvals for extensions of 400 series highways, and expansions of the capacity of existing 400 series highways, and extensions or expansions of municipal roadways of equivalent size (i.e. four lanes or more) in the greenbelt study area, identified in Schedule 1 of the Bill, in abeyance during the greenbelt study period. In particular, no applications or grantings of approvals under the Planning Act, Environmental Assessment Act or other provincial for such projects should be permitted during the study period.

A similar provision should be added regarding the approval of extensions or expansions of sewer and water infrastructure beyond existing urban settlement areas in the greenbelt study area under the Ontario Water Resources Act, Environmental Assessment Act, and other provincial legislation except where such infrastructure is required to service existing dwellings in the study area.

The Greenbelt Study Area

The greenbelt study area is defined in Schedule 1 of the bill to include the Regional Municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel and York, the Cities of Toronto and Hamilton and the Niagara Escarpment Planning Area, Oak Ridges Moraine Area, and Niagara tender fruit and grape areas. However, Schedule 2 of the bill provides that the restrictions on applications for and approvals by-laws, official plans, official plan amendments and plans of subdivisions do not apply to the Niagara Escarpment Planning Area.

The Niagara Escarpment is central to the ecological integrity of the region, and there are significant development pressures within the Planning Area. Castle Glen Development Corporation, for example, is applying to construct a four-season fully serviced community with commercial areas, schools, gas station, health clinic, three golf courses, institutional uses, plus 300 hotel rooms and 1,600 homes – effectively an entirely new urban area – on 620 hectares of Niagara Escarpment lands in the Town of Blue Mountains.⁹ These pressures should be dealt with as part of the overall greenbelt strategy.

Recommendation:

Schedule 2 of Bill 27 should be amended to remove the reference to the Niagara Escarpment Planning Area.

Significant development pressures are also emerging in the areas immediately beyond the greenbelt study area to be established through Bill 27. These potential developments highlight the possibility for ‘leapfrog’ low-density urbanization in response to the greenbelt initiative. Such development patterns would defeat the underlying purposes of the greenbelt initiative of containing urban sprawl in the region.

These development pressures are particularly acute in Simcoe County. The Geranium Corporation’s proposal for a 2400 hectare subdivision with projected population of 115,000 on agricultural land south of Lake Simcoe between Bradford and Bond Head is a leading example of this problem.¹⁰

Recommendation:

Schedule 1 of Bill 27 would be amended to include Simcoe County.

The Pembina Institute welcomes Bill 27 as a first step towards the development of more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable urban communities in the golden horseshoe region. The Institute looks forward to the completion and implementation of the greenbelt protection plan and other measures proposed by the government, including the reform of the *Planning Act*, Ontario Municipal Board Appeal process, and the Provincial Policy Statement made under the *Planning Act* needed to make this vision a reality.

⁹ Coalition for the Niagara Escarpment, Current Cases & Campaigns, www.niagaraescarpment.org/page_current_cases.html.

¹⁰ K.Harries, “From farmland to city sprawl in one swoop,” Toronto Star, April 12, 2004. See also Bond Head Development Corporation, “Bradford Bond Head Planning Area Project,” April 2004.

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