



# Growing Together :

## Prospects for Renewal in the Toronto Region

A Report Prepared for the City of Toronto

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# GROWING TOGETHER: PROSPECTS FOR RENEWAL IN THE TORONTO REGION

A Report Prepared for the City of Toronto's Departments of Works and Emergency Services, Urban Development Services and the Oak Ridges Moraine Steering Committee, May, 2002

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This report was prepared by GHK Canada at the request of the Oak Ridges Steering Committee and managed by the City of Toronto's Departments of Works and Emergency Services and Urban Development Services. John Gladki from GHK was the project manager assisted by Heather McLean of GHK and Mary Neumann. Other consultants involved in the project were Dr. Eric Miller and his team from the Joint Program on Transportation at the University of Toronto, Werner Wichmann and his team from Earth Tech Canada and Robert Wright and Peter Gozdyra from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines population growth patterns across the Toronto Region over the past few years as a basis of projecting land consumption patterns into the future. The objective is to assess how the evolving urban form in the Toronto Region will impact the natural environment and what kind of future development will support a high quality of life and a strong economy.

We have found that residential densities have been increasing overall in the Toronto Region over the past few years. In fact between 1992 and 1999, population increased by 14 percent in the GTA, but the total amount of land needed to accommodate this population for all purposes (including employment roads, shopping etc.) increased by only 8 percent.

As a result, a significant finding of this study is that if this pattern of land consumption were to continue to 2031, it would be possible to accommodate the additional population of 2.7 million people without any new urban development on the Oak Ridges Moraine. In fact, as Map 1 shows, even if the population of the GTA were to reach 10 million people at some point in the future, development would not need to take place on the Oak Ridges Moraine. This will only be possible; however, if a better urban structure is established over the next 30 years.

At the same time that residential densities have increased, roads have become more and more congested, air quality has deteriorated and some environmentally significant areas are under threat.

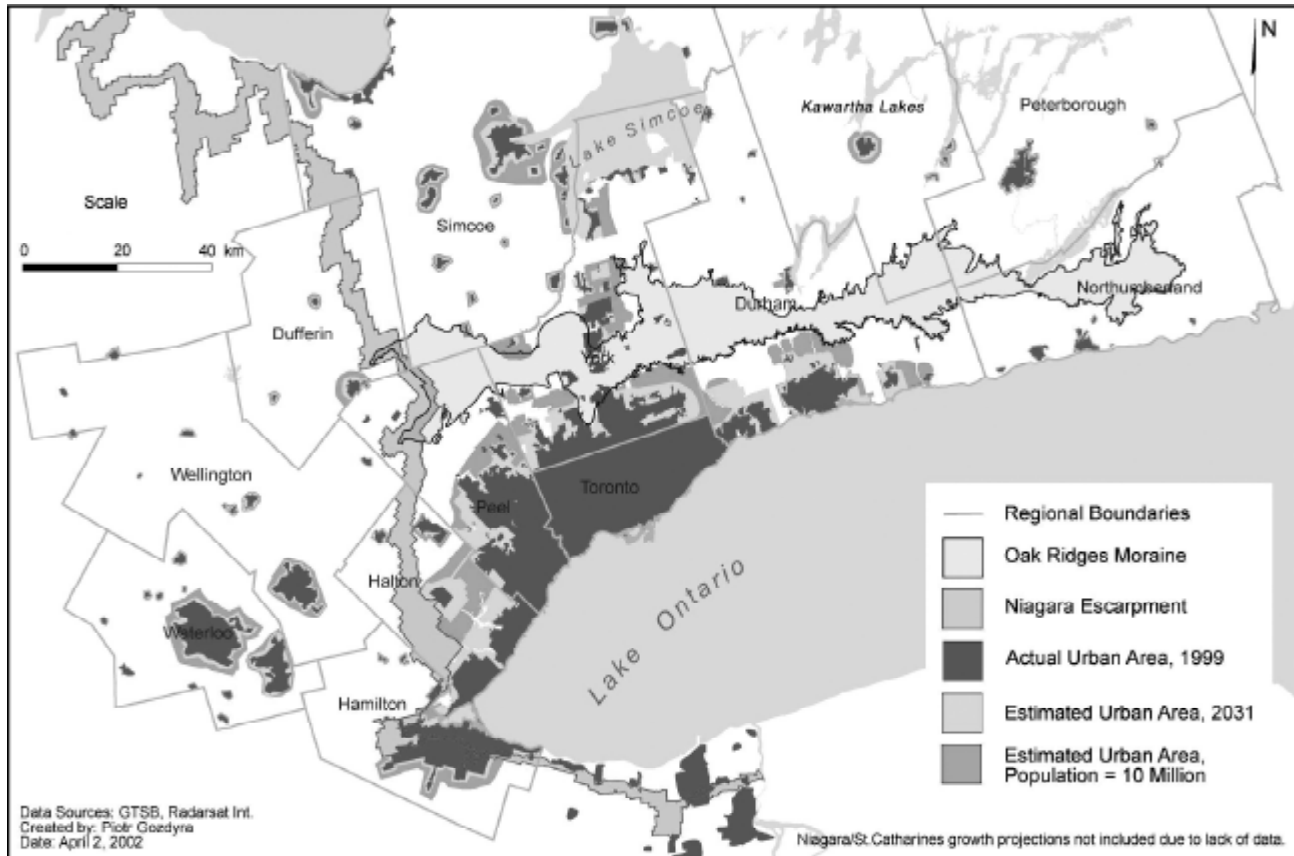
This study shows that increasing residential densities across the GTA, while important, will not be sufficient to protect natural areas, reduce the increase of air pollution, or create a high quality living environment and a healthy economy. Creating an urban growth boundary (which to some extent has been achieved through the protection of large parts of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment) is important. An urban growth boundary such as this, based on natural features, could act to contain and intensify development within the already urbanizing area south of the boundary. But, on its own, this will not result in a sustainable urban form.



Derek Griffiths - Canadian Imaging Associates Inc.

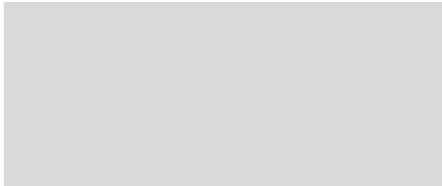
**The challenge for policy makers, developers, planners and politicians is to combine a set of integrated responses that result in a dramatically different pattern of development.**

Map 1: How the Region Will Grow



The challenge for policy makers, developers, planners and politicians is much greater than increasing densities and creating an effective urban growth boundary. The challenge will be to combine a set of integrated responses that result in a dramatically different pattern of development, particularly along arterial roads and in new city centres that resemble in their rich mix of uses, traditional downtowns. The key will be to create transit-supportive development and pedestrian friendly environments rather than the car-oriented streetscapes and single-use environments that now characterize the suburban areas of Toronto and the surrounding Regions. In other words, the objective of planning will increasingly need to shift towards achieving effective density, not just higher density development.

In the study we outline the kinds of initiatives that are needed to achieve these results. We have estimated that based on recent land consumption patterns, when the population of the GTA is projected to reach 7.5 million by 2031, a total of 60,900 hectares of additional land will need to be urbanized in the GTA (an area the size of the current City of Toronto). When the population of the GTA reaches 10 million sometime during the latter part of this Century, a further 60,000 additional hectares of farmland will need to be urbanized. Our study shows however, that if the types of initiatives we examine were to be implemented in the future, the amount of land required for urban development between now and 2031 could be significantly reduced, by 23,000 hectares, or 38 percent.



Urban Development Services City of Toronto<sup>1</sup>



Derek Griffiths - Canadian Imaging Associates Inc.



Town of Markham

But the numbers tell only part of the story. According to the most recent Census information, the vast majority of population growth in the Toronto Region is occurring in areas at the periphery where transit is not an option and where a cohesive mix of uses does not exist. Much more important in the future will be two achieve a qualitative difference in the types of urban environments that will be created both within existing and newly urbanizing areas; places where people can walk, do their errands, live in harmony with nature and have the option to take transit to work or visit friends.

We have identified a number of initiatives including the following:

#### Transit

- Invest in transit infrastructure across the GTA at least to match historical expenditure levels (\$196 in 1976 per person in Toronto compared to \$107 in 2000 per person in the GTA).
- Build connected and integrated transit system across the GTA, based on a grid-pattern of service provision.

#### Housing

- Encourage rental housing through programs and tax initiatives
- Create as of right permission for second units in existing houses.

#### Arterial Roads

- Build 235,000 units along potential transit routes in existing urbanized areas.
- Create pedestrian friendly environments with a mix of uses.
- Significantly reduce surface parking lots.
- Reduce road widths by creating transit priority lanes, boulevards and landscaped traffic islands.

<sup>1</sup> A list of photo/graphic credits for Urban Development Services is shown on page 138.

### Planned City Centres

- Reduce number of planned city centres across the GTA, but make the remaining centres stronger.
- Create downtown-like environments with a full range of uses on smaller blocks, with buildings close together on a grid road system.
- Encourage institutions to locate in new centres.

### Older City Centres

- Strengthen existing centres in Toronto, Hamilton and Oshawa through reinvestment in infrastructure and buildings.
- Encourage intensification.
- Locate institutions in existing downtown areas.

### Offices

- Encourage re location of offices buildings out of industrial areas onto arterial roads or city centres.
- Intensify “office parks”.

### Natural Areas

- Change Planning Act to eliminate appeals to Ontario Municipal Board for urban development permission on non urban designated land.
- Set up conservation easements.

### Farmland

- Set up agricultural easements
- Find ways to make farming economically viable.

### Water, Sewage and Stormwater

- Reduce the amount of impervious surfaces dedicated to roads, parking and buildings to significantly reduce water runoff volumes.
- Improve utilization and sharing of existing infrastructure across the Region.
- Improve planning and management of water resources across jurisdictions.

### Financing

- Provide municipalities with share of consumption and/or income taxes.
- Address inequities in property tax system.

The breakdown for how these initiatives can help conserve land between now and 2031 is shown below:

Initiatives	Results
More rental housing and second units	5 % reduction (3,000 ha)
Intensive development along arterials	18 % reduction (10,700 ha)
Consolidating office development	5.5 % reduction (3,450 ha)
Intensification in Oshawa and Hamilton	9.5 % reduction (5,800 ha)
Total	38 % reduction (23,000 ha)



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Much of the conservation of land will come from intensification of the existing urbanized areas both in the City of Toronto and in the surrounding Regions. This makes sense from the point of view of conserving natural resources, including habitats, soil and water. But it also makes sense because it leads to more efficient use of existing infrastructure. As the companion report prepared by Earth Tech Canada shows, the majority of water and wastewater treatment plants and some water transmission / trunk sewer facilities are operating at near capacity but municipalities in general, have developed plans for the expansion of infrastructure to accommodate projected growth over the next 10 to 20 years. Furthermore, as the various parts of the system reach the point where they need to be upgraded, there is an opportunity to add capacity and support the creation of the high quality transit supportive and pedestrian friendly environments.



Burlington Economic Development  
**Urban design decisions significantly impact quality of life in the GTA.**

An important part of this study was to work with the Joint Program in Transportation at the University of Toronto to develop a model for measuring twenty-four hour auto emissions and congestion impacts for different land development scenarios in the GTA. Previously the only models available were based on morning peak hour transportation activity. The twenty-four hour model developed for this study more accurately measures transportation activity over the course of the entire day and provides a more complete assessment of air emissions and congestion.

Our research shows that over the course of a day, total emissions amount to 2.5 times what they are during the morning peak period. The modelling also shows that air quality in the GTA will continue to deteriorate at a significant rate if development were to occur along the same pattern as in the past. In fact, if there are no improvements in the transportation system CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are projected to increase an average of 2 percent a year over the period between 1996 and 2031, representing a total increase of 75 percent over current levels. This does not bode well for achieving Kyoto type objectives with respect to greenhouse gas emissions. However, making transit more convenient and encouraging people to use transit more extensively as proposed in this report, will help to improve air quality.

Many municipalities across the GTA are already initiating programs to address some of these challenges. For example: Burlington and Oakville are intensifying their historic downtowns; Vaughan is creating a mixed use “Corporate City Centre” at Jane Street and Highway 7; Milton is planning an “Eco-Village”; Mississauga is attempting to generate rental housing production; Newmarket is preparing a policy to allow second suites in existing houses; York Region is planning a busway along Yonge Street; Markham has developed Cornell, a community based on compact residential design principles; Pickering has introduced agricultural easements to protect farmland; and Durham has strong policies to protect rural settlements. Many other examples of interventions to create mixed use, more compact and transit supportive environments exist in other parts of the GTA.

There is, however, no plan to bring all of the elements together into a coordinated growth management strategy for the Toronto Region. As a first step, these initiatives need to be integrated in order to help create an urban form that is more compact and that will reduce direct and indirect impacts of urbanization on the natural environment. This will require significant cooperation from all the governments in the Region. Better cooperation can also lead to better use of infrastructure including, as we show in this report, sharing of water and wastewater infrastructure.

An important initiative to help implement the strategy will involve setting up redevelopment and renewal authorities to stimulate and coordinate efforts to rebuild urban and suburban areas. Existing patterns of development will be difficult to change. The entire development/approval system is geared to recreate what is there now. A leap of imagination is needed to create a different environment along arterials, in power centres and office parks. Without leadership from redevelopment and renewal authorities these new environments will have little chance of being built.

The GTA is truly at a crossroads. If we get the form of future development right, we have the opportunity to once again become one of the leading urban regions in North America. We need to take advantage of the progress we have made over the past few years in increasing residential densities and protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine to set our sights higher. The decisions made today will shape the form of the Region for decades to come. There is no time to waste. The time to act is now.



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