



OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

A Response to
the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation
Plan Socioeconomic and Transportation
Contexts, and Draft Goals and Objectives

February 2018

Introduction

Over the 60 past years, Friendship Centres have been increasingly vocal about a central issue in their communities affecting their ability to provide essential programming to their urban Indigenous community: access to affordable, adequate transportation.

The Ministry of Transportation's (MTO) Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) Transportation Plan presents a crucial opportunity to address the transportation needs of Indigenous communities in cities and towns in the GGH area. We are pleased to submit our recommendations on the GGH Transportation Plan: Transportation and Socioeconomic Contexts.

About the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

Founded in 1971, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) works to support, advocate for, and build the capacity of member Friendship Centres across Ontario.

Emerging from a nation-wide, grass-roots movement dating back to the 1950's, Friendship Centres are community hubs where Indigenous people living in towns, cities, and urban centres can access culturally-based and culturally-appropriate programs and services every day. Today, Friendship Centres are dynamic hubs of economic and social convergence that create space for Indigenous communities to thrive. Friendship Centres are idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals, they are sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are, and they are safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports.

In Ontario 85 per cent of Indigenous people live in urban or rural communities¹. The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly-growing population through programs and initiatives that span justice, health, family support, long-term care, healing and wellness, employment and training, education, research, and more.

Friendship Centres receive their mandate from their communities, and they are inclusive of all Indigenous people – First Nation, Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit, and those who self-identify as Indigenous.

About the Greater Golden Horseshoe Multimodal Transportation Plan

The GGH Multimodal Transportation Plan is the MTO's long-term planning initiative to inform and support the Province's transportation investments in the GGH for the next 30

¹ Statistics Canada, *Census 2016 Results, Data Table: Aboriginal Identity (9), Dwelling Condition (4), Registered or Treaty Indian Status (3), Residence by Aboriginal Geography (10), Age (12) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households* (Catalogue number 98-400-X2016164)

years. It will include a new 2051 Transportation System Plan and supporting policies, as well as a long-term transportation vision for the year 2071.² The Plan aims to provide a strategic network that moves more people and goods efficiently and supports economic growth and job creation, and a system that is resilient and can adapt to climate change and other major shifts in the global context.

The GGH Transportation Plan will consider a range of transportation options including trucks, cars, transit, railways, cycling and walking, as well as new and emerging mobility models and technologies.³

Friendship Centres participated in the MTO's Indigenous Partners Forum in February 2017 to inform the Ministry's approach to engaging urban Indigenous communities on the development of the GGH Transportation Plan. The Forum aimed to provide an opportunity to share broad-based Indigenous interests and values related to transportation in the GGH. Representatives from the MTO engaged with Friendship Centre Executive Directors on October 9, 2017 at the OFIFC, specifically on the GGH Transportation Plan's Goals and Objectives⁴. Subsequent meetings are expected as the GGH Transportation Plan continues to take shape.

Urban Indigenous Communities and Transportation: Understanding the Context

The GGH is home to seven Friendship Centres⁵ that serve large, rapidly growing, and highly mobile urban Indigenous communities. Given the critical role that Friendship Centres play in the provision of culture-based programs and services within the GGH, it is essential that public policy development that affects Friendship Centre communities, such as the GGH Transportation Plan, consider the historical, social, and economic context in which urban Indigenous communities are situated.

The Friendship Centre movement has grown significantly since the late 1950s when Indigenous community centres were established in Kenora, Thunder Bay, and Toronto, propelled by the growing Indigenous population and the migration of Indigenous people to cities and towns across Ontario. Many urban Indigenous communities still face unacceptable service gaps across areas such as health, education, child care, and housing, and face daunting barriers that get in the way of achieving a quality of life that residents of Ontario should expect. The lack or complete absence of affordable, reliable, and efficient transportation options often exacerbates these service gaps, and only worsens urban Indigenous people's socioeconomic challenges. That and the legacy of colonialism continues to threaten the well-being of urban Indigenous communities. As Premier Kathleen Wynne discusses in *Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to*

² Ontario Ministry of Transportation. "Greater Golden Horseshoe Multimodal Transportation Plan: GGH Transport 2051 website," <https://www.gghtransport2051.ca/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Appendix I - Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Study: Preliminary Goals and Objectives.

⁵ The seven Friendship Centres are: Barrie Native Friendship Centre; Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre; Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre; Hamilton Regional Indian Centre; Niagara Regional Native Centre; N'Amerind Friendship Centre (London).

Reconciliation with Indigenous People, Canadian policies based on racism and deceit have been disempowering and devastating for Indigenous communities.

This context shapes the need for all people in Ontario to take meaningful steps toward reconciliation. Reconciliation looks like meaningful policy change that involves Indigenous people from the start, and building partnerships based on mutual respect and shared benefits – we need to continue to build momentum around this work through initiatives designed to bring meaningful change to the lives of Indigenous people and communities. As the GGH is being developed, it is imperative that reconciliation through respectful relationship-building with urban Indigenous communities remains a driving principle.

A Note on Terminology

While many members of Friendship Centre communities have close ties to, or may have migrated from First Nation reserves, people in urban Indigenous communities have unique needs and priorities as a result of living in towns, cities, or other urban areas in Ontario. Recognition of the similarities (including shared historical and social context) and differences between urban Indigenous communities and on-reserve First Nation communities is important. The appropriate use of terminology – not using First Nation as a catch-all term for all Indigenous communities in northern Ontario—is an important step towards reconciliation that should remain a central tenet in the way MTO interacts with Friendship Centre communities. Ideally, culturally specific terms such as Anishinaabe, Mohawk, Métis, etc. should be used whenever possible.

Our Position and Priorities for Transportation

Improving Local and Intercommunity Transportation: What We've Heard from Friendship Centres

Friendship Centres have participated in several engagement initiatives to provide advice and share their lived experiences with transportation issues in local communities. On October 9, 2017, Friendship Centres provided input on the Goals and Objectives of the GGH Transportation plan, and ways that these goals could enhance the positive impact of the GGH plan on urban Indigenous communities. The following are some key highlights and priorities expressed by Friendship Centres around transportation needs.

- **Equity and Access for Urban Indigenous People:** There should be equitable access to transportation regardless of geographic location and economic circumstances; equity should be a key driver in the goals of transportation initiatives.
- **Building Local Capacity:** There is a lack of support and resources for community-based transportation needs. Friendship Centres fill in the gaps when accessible transportation is lacking, stretching program resources, staff time, and organizational capacity. Transportation policy should build on existing community

transportation initiatives, and recognize the important role of Friendship Centres as providers of transportation to critical social services.

- **Local Partnership Development:** Lack of support for the development of transportation partnerships, including a need for long-term funding once a pilot project has ended. This impacts Friendship Centre service-user consistency in access to programs in the Friendship Centre over time.
- **Transportation and Safety:** Poor access to transportation impacts *Ontario Human Rights Code*-protected groups (disabled persons, women, youth, Indigenous people, etc.) at a greater and disproportionate rate than the general population. Women and youth particularly may hitchhike to attend important appointments or visit family and friends, which is often a major threat to their safety.

Transportation as Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure is a type of infrastructure that embodies or accommodates access to social services, such as housing, government social services, and not-for-profit organizations like the Friendship Centres.⁶ Transportation is crucial social infrastructure for urban Indigenous communities across Ontario. In many Friendship Centre communities, public transportation is not available locally or within the region, is unreliable, or unaffordable, which increases the barriers to accessing crucial services. A holistic approach to transportation is required, one which considers how it is a form of social infrastructure that determines whether urban Indigenous communities have access to vital services and programs for their economic and personal wellbeing. The lack of affordable, reliable and efficient transportation affects health, housing, child care, and various other critical areas of urban Indigenous day-to-day life.

For example, the lack of adequate transportation plays an often overlooked role in limiting access between schools and community programming, which is necessary to move toward school-community integration in urban Indigenous communities. This has been cited as a major reason also why students are unable to access the Alternative Secondary School Program (ASSP) at Friendship Centres, an innovative and locally-driven school program geared to meet Indigenous students' individual needs and connect them to culture-based, community-driven Friendship Centre supports. Friendship Centre clients are also having to rely on personal networks or even hitchhiking in order to access necessary services; hitchhiking is especially dangerous for youth and women.⁷ Likewise, some urban Indigenous families who live in more rural areas in the GGH, like Fort Erie, have trouble reaching the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centres for necessary developmental programs for their children which impacts family

⁶ New Zealand Social Infrastructure Fund, "What is Social Infrastructure?", New Zealand Social Infrastructure Fund Limited, 2009. <http://www.nzsif.co.nz/Social-Infrastructure/What-is-Social-Infrastructure>

⁷ Native Women's Association of Canada, *What their Stories Tell Us: Research findings from the Sisters in Spirit Initiative* (Ottawa, ON: Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010), 7.

well-being. More generally, lack of access to transportation impacts the ability of urban Indigenous people to participate fully in the labour market, because of a lack of reliable transportation to and from employment opportunities or job assistance programs.

Our Response to GGH Transportation Plan Goals and Objectives and Executive Summaries

The GGH Draft Goals and Objectives were presented to Friendship Centres during the MTO Engagement in October 2017; the 8 goals and 38 objectives will feed into the eventual measurement framework of the plan⁸. The GGH Transportation Plan Socioeconomic and Transportation Context documents discuss relevant social, environmental, and transportation issues in the GGH area, as well as key outlooks that will affect transportation in the future, all of which are foundational inputs to the transportation plan. If there is a lack of analysis of the transportation needs and gaps that impact urban Indigenous populations, then there is a risk that these issues will not inform the policy development of the plan, further disregarding or marginalizing the priorities of urban Indigenous communities. The potential impact of this continued neglect is a final GGH Transportation Plan that does not further the wellbeing of underserved urban Indigenous communities in the GGH, and will therefore fail to fulfill its goals and objectives.

Incorporate Equity and Social Infrastructure as Guiding Principles

One major theme that emerged both from the GGH Transportation Plan documents is the focus on high-density areas in the region. This is especially seen in the Transportation Context document that devotes little attention to rural areas in the GGH region and their unique transportation needs.⁹ A key message that emerged from the MTO's engagement with Friendship Centres in October 2017 was the need for equity to be a guiding principle throughout the objectives and context-setting of the plan, integrated into all the goals and objectives, rather than compartmentalized as one separate goal. Prioritizing cities with large populations and high rates of economic growth is inequitable because GGH Transportation Initiatives will then benefit only city-dwellers, without meaningfully addressing the transportation needs of those who live in more isolated parts of the GGH that find it difficult to access services

For example, there are some areas of the GGH, such as Fort Erie, that still lack public transportation. This means that Indigenous patients have to rely on more costly methods of transportation, like taxis, in order to access health services. Long commutes combined with a referral for treatment, diagnostics, or assessments creates additional burdens to accessing health services that can jeopardize receiving health care for urban Indigenous communities. Ongoing medical services, such as dialysis, require regular transportation several times per week.

⁸ See Appendix I - Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Study: Preliminary Goals and Objectives.

⁹ Ministry of Transportation, Urban Strategies Inc., HDR, *Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan: Transportation Profile* (Urban Strategies Inc., November 2017)

Incorporating equity as a guiding principle throughout the plan would prompt the MTO to identify areas such as Fort Erie within the GGH that are suffering from inequitable access to transportation, and therefore guide better investment in local community transportation initiatives and urban Indigenous organizations. The recent shift towards recognizing local community transportation initiatives has been demonstrated by other branches of the MTO (including the Community Transportation Grant Program led by the Municipal Transit Policy Office), and responds directly to Friendship Centre requests while also paving the way for Friendship Centre communities and clients to access the services they need.

Incorporate Urban Indigenous 2016 Census Statistics into Labour Market Analysis

Individuals who face barriers to the labour market (i.e. living in rural communities, accessibility needs, etc.) could enhance their participation in the economy if there were more accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation systems in their community. The MTO's Socioeconomic Context report, while recognizing the urban Indigenous population, must also realize that it is young and growing in order to appropriately respond with initiatives and investments to reduce labour market barriers facing urban Indigenous communities.

In the MTO's Socioeconomic Context document, an increasingly aging population was cited as a primary reason for increasing mobility issues and changes to the labour market.¹⁰ Incorporating the 2016 Census results into this analysis will further illuminate the importance of designing transportation policy that responds to the steadily and rapidly increasing urban Indigenous youth population. The 2016 Census results demonstrate that the Indigenous population in Ontario continues to be significantly younger than the non-Indigenous population. One of the main factors driving the high growth rate of Indigenous populations (up 42.5% across Canada since 2006, more than four times the growth of the non-Indigenous population; 54.1% in Ontario) is natural growth, which includes increased life expectancy and relatively high fertility rates¹¹. In Ontario, almost half (42%) of Indigenous people are under the age of 25.¹²

While adequate investments are still needed in education, housing, and mental health supports to increase Indigenous youth's access to the labour force, without the appropriate transportation infrastructure in place, the province risks not adequately supporting the next generation of urban Indigenous youth who are poised to make up an even larger proportion of Ontario's population.

¹⁰ Ministry of Transportation, Urban Strategies Inc., HDR, *Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan: Socioeconomic Profile* (Urban Strategies Inc., December 2017), 15, 38.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census," *The Daily*, October 25, 2017. URL: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm?HPA=1>.

¹² Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples: Fact Sheet for Ontario," Statistics Canada Website, March 14, 2016. URL: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-656-x/89-656-x2016007-eng.htm>.

Consider Local and Community Economic Development Opportunities

Local transportation plays a major role in boosting community economic development opportunities, particularly in more rural and isolated areas. Through the GGH Transportation plan, the MTO has a unique opportunity to invest directly into communities to address the lack of accessible, affordable, and reliable transportation.

At the community level, economic development looks like improved local transportation and increased access to key programs and services for Indigenous people. Not all economic development is large-scale in nature – investments into community organizations like Friendship Centres is an often overlooked and underestimated policy tool that can ultimately have significant impact and economic multiplier effects in a community, particularly for community members that have historically been marginalized and continue to face poverty and multiple barriers to economic participation.

A closer review of the GGH Transportation Plan's objectives reveals gaps around supporting local economic development, which is a common thread in several provincial transportation-focused policy initiatives. While the GGH Transportation Plan includes an objective about ensuring that "major employment areas" are supported by a full range of transportation options, this fails to address the local economic development being driven by Friendship Centres in smaller communities in the GGH region. This economic development is two-fold: the seven Friendship Centres in the GGH Region are an important resource for urban Indigenous programming and services that bolsters urban Indigenous communities' access to the labour market; these and other Friendship Centres also create employment in their communities, particularly for often-marginalized urban Indigenous people. Using a community economic development approach that emphasizes the importance of community voice in meeting local social and economic needs is the type of inclusive approach to policymaking that GGH should adopt in order to distinctly serve the needs of Friendship Centre communities within the region and bolster urban Indigenous participation in economic development opportunities.

Conclusion

The GGH is home to a strong and vibrant network of Friendship Centres that serve Indigenous community members who experience significant challenges in accessing services and opportunities due in large part to a total lack of responsive transportation options. In order to achieve more equitable outcomes for urban Indigenous people, GGH transportation planning must meaningfully respond to the context and needs of urban Indigenous communities in the region. Transportation policy development must recognize relationships and culture as foundational requirements for policy and program development, and develop community-responsive and inclusive policies that meet the needs of urban Indigenous communities. The GGH should be doing this work by understanding not just the transportation context unique to urban Indigenous communities, but by also adopting a more nuanced lens in order to see transportation

as a type of social infrastructure that either facilitates or restricts urban Indigenous access to necessary services.

Recommendations:

The OFIFC recommends that the MTO:

1. Incorporate equity-based principles into all aspects of the plan, and centre the continued inequities experienced by urban Indigenous communities as a barrier that needs to be addressed in the policy development process.
2. Recognize transportation as a form of social infrastructure, and develop initiatives within the GGH Transportation Plan that recognize transportation as a tool to access necessary services.
3. Consider local and community economic development opportunities by recognizing and leveraging current community transportation initiatives by urban Indigenous organizations.
4. Recognize the role of Friendship Centres as community economic drivers, and amplify this impact by including Friendship Centres in transportation planning.
5. Continue to engage with urban Indigenous communities throughout the development of the GGH Transportation Plan.

Appendix I – GGH Transportation Plan Goals and Objectives

[See Attached Document]