



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Planning Committee
From: Sarah Wilhelm, Manager of Policy Planning
Date: Thursday, May 13, 2021
Subject: **County Official Plan Review – Regionally Significant Economic Development Area**



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1.0 Purpose

To initiate a request with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for a Regionally Significant Economic Development Area in Puslinch. This request is to be submitted in tandem with the request for an alternative housing intensification target (report PD2021-16).

2.0 Background

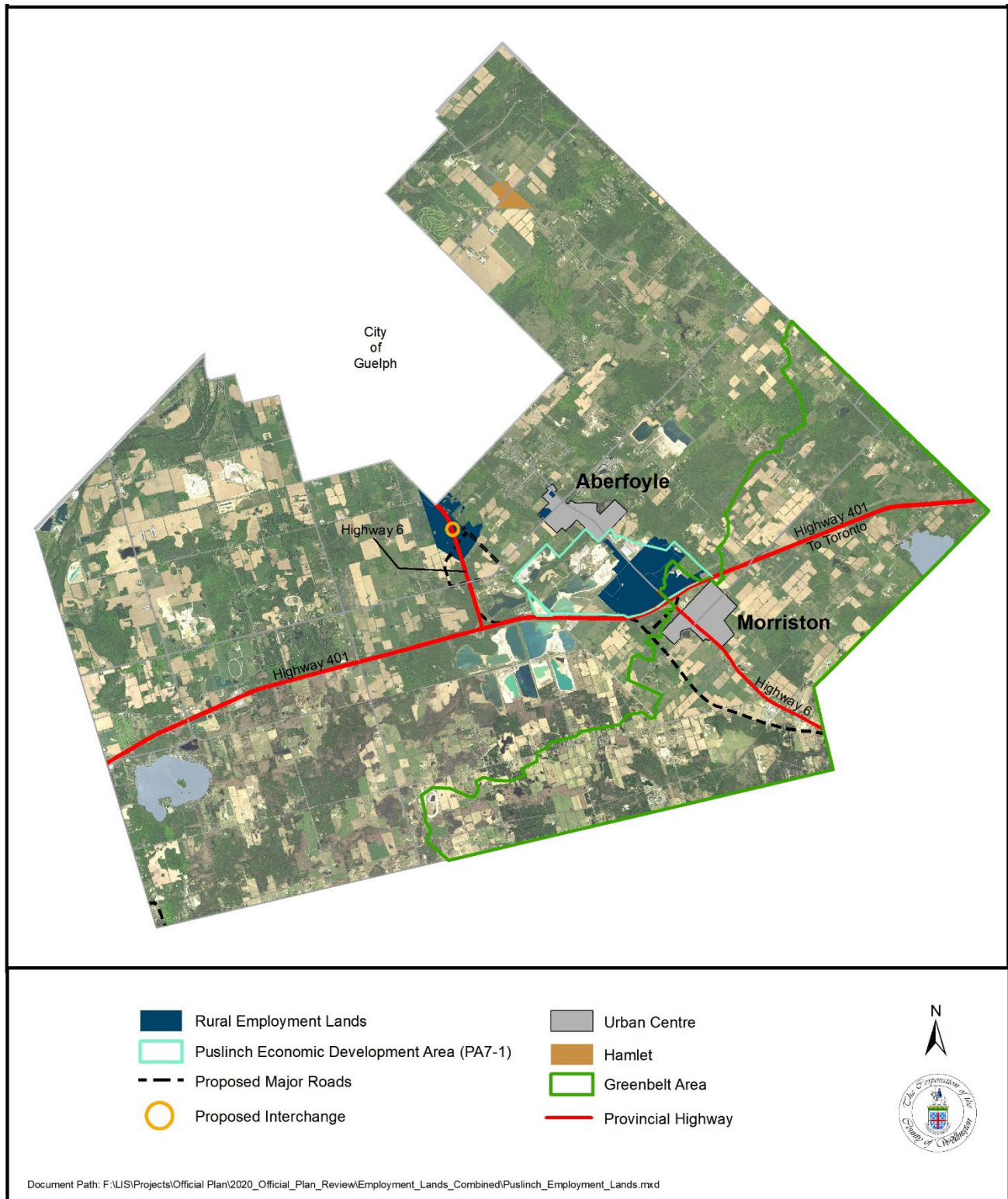
Through the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS, 2020), the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan, 2020 consolidation) and the Greenbelt Plan (2017), the Provincial government sets the parameters for where and how municipalities grow. The Growth Plan builds on the policy foundation of the PPS but provides additional and more specific land use planning policies for places like Wellington County in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area. The Greenbelt Plan is meant to work in concert with the Growth Plan and identifies where urbanization should not occur.

Planning staff reported on the Government's proposal to expand the Greenbelt Plan area in March 2021 (PD2021-05). In the report, staff raised concerns about the potential impact on the Township of Puslinch in particular. Puslinch has only two small urban centres (Aberfoyle and Morriston) and one hamlet (Arkell) designated in the Official Plan. Morriston is already within the Greenbelt.

While an expansion decision has not been made at the time of writing this report and a new Greenbelt boundary has yet to be determined, the proposed study area surrounds Aberfoyle and part of Arkell (see Appendix A). If these areas are included in the Greenbelt, there would no longer be potential for limited expansion or minor rounding out. For example, even if municipal water and wastewater servicing was available in Aberfoyle, section 2.2.8.2(k)ii of the Growth Plan would limit expansion to no more than a 5 percent increase in area up to a maximum size of 10 hectares, with no more than 50 percent of land for residential development.

As part of the municipal comprehensive review (MCR), the County is required to plan for and protect employment lands (which are primarily directed to municipally serviced urban centres). Much of the currently designated employment land in Puslinch is sandwiched between its two urban centres, identified within the Official Plan as Rural Employment designations and the Puslinch Economic Development Area PA7-1 (Figure 1). These areas would not technically be considered settlement area lands by the Growth Plan policies.

Figure 1 **Current Puslinch Employment Areas**
Rural Employment Lands and Economic Puslinch Development Area



The Growth Plan allows for existing rural employment areas outside of settlement areas to expand (subject to compability), but only if necessary to support the immediate needs of existing businesses. Staff also notes that the Provincially Significant Employment Zones (PSEZs) introduced into the 2019 Growth Plan are not applicable as they are meant to apply to currently designated employment areas located inside of settlement areas.

At the same time, the Growth Plan is meant to:

- provide flexibility to capitalize on new economic and employment opportunities as they emerge; and
- improve the integration of land use planning with planning and investment in infrastructure by all levels of government.

The Greenbelt Plan envisions “a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses” but only for industrial, commercial and institutional uses serving the rural resource and agricultural sectors.

3.0 Support for a Regionally Significant Economic Development Area in Puslinch

The municipalities of Wellington are diverse and in the case of Puslinch, the strategic location of Highways 401 and 6 have created unique economic development opportunities in the southern part of the County (Figure 2). This is evident in the 2020 County of Wellington Credit Review which confirmed that Puslinch is home to 7 of the top 20 corporate taxpayers and some of the County’s largest employers (Table 1).

Background work for the MCR completed by Watson & Associates Economists demonstrates that Puslinch has already exceeded the 2041 employment forecast set out in the last County growth forecast update through Official Plan Amendment 99, which was adopted in 2016. Puslinch has a high concentration of employment, a high economic impact and plays a strategic role in the south Wellington area.

**Figure 2 Major Transportation Systems
South Wellington County and Vicinity**

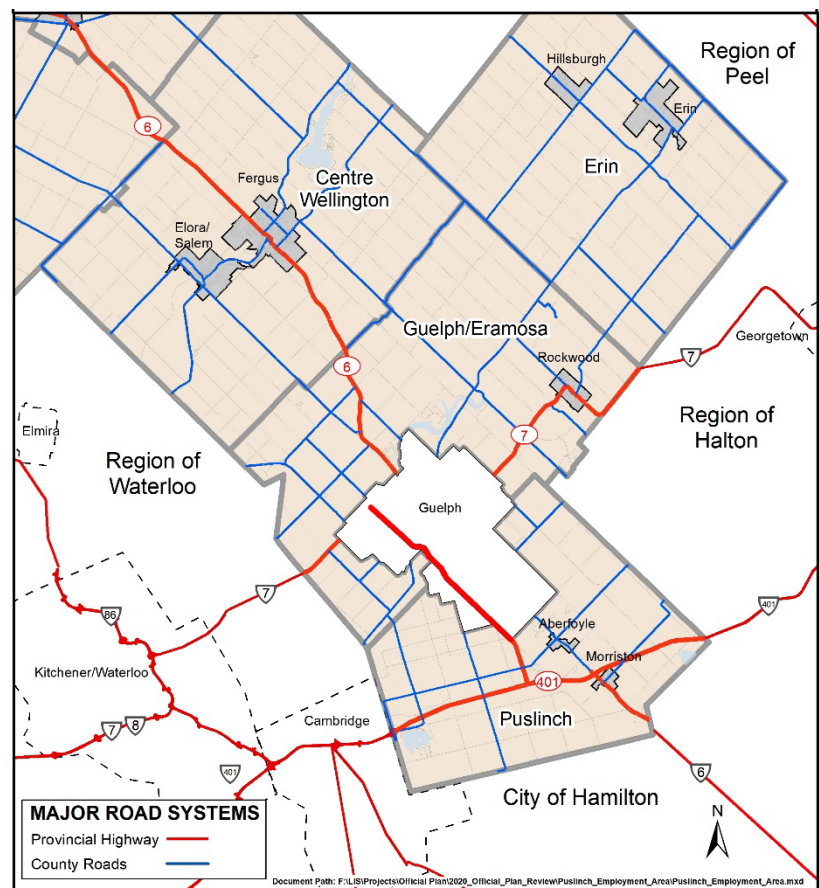


Table 1 Puslinch Top Employers

Employees	Business	Sector
400 – 499	Nestle Waters Canada	Manufacturing of Soft Drinks
	Mammoet Crane	Crane Rental, Heavy Lifting, Transport Specialist
	Schneider National	Transportation
200 – 299	Concast Inc.	Manufacturing of Concrete Piping
	Cascade Canada Ltd.	Manufacturing of Material Handling Equipment
	Royal Canin Canada	Manufacturing of Dog and Cat Food
100 – 199	Pentalift Equipment Corp	Manufacturing of Loading Dock, Materials Handling Equipment
	Capital Paving Inc.	Paving Contractor
	Llewelly Security	Security Systems and Technology
	Maple Leaf Foods	Food Storage
	Cherry Forest Products	Manufacturing of Lumber, Hardwood and Softwood Pallets, Skids and Crates
	Edward Jones	Financial

Source: County of Wellington Credit Review, 2020

As the Province continues in its commitment to complete a significant expansion of Highways 6 and 401 through Puslinch it will increase capacity for Highway 401 and alleviate traffic congestion on Highway 6 through Morriston. These, and other improvements identified in Appendix B, will further support these corridors as a regional economic development driver.

Section 2.2.5.5 of the Growth Plan encourages municipalities to designate and preserve lands “...located adjacent to or near major goods movement facilities and corridors, including major highway interchanges, as areas for manufacturing, warehousing and logistics, and appropriate associated uses and ancillary facilities.” This policy however, only applies to lands within settlement areas.

As it currently stands, the Growth Plan framework and potential expansion of the Greenbelt does not support the long-term viability of Puslinch or the economic development significance of the Highways 6 and 401 corridors to the regional area. Staff also notes that most of the land between Morriston and Aberfoyle is developed or is being extracted. Below water table extraction will reduce both the available land base and the feasibility of employment-related after uses for some sites. The new Hanlon interchange and connecting roads will consume designated rural employment lands and may also constrain access to the remaining lands.

A number of factors reinforce the need for Provincial support for a new approach to plan for and identify new areas for rural employment growth in the Highway 6 and 401 corridors in Puslinch, including:

- a much higher than forecast absorption of rural employment land;
- a need for additional rural employment land identified in preliminary MCR forecasts to the new 2051 planning horizon;
- the need to strategically identify more large, continuous, constraint-free lots (e.g. >10 acres);
- an opportunity to accommodate land consumptive uses that have low water use and do not generate significant effluent; and
- to capitalize on the commitment by the Provincial government to invest in infrastructure to improve Highway 6 North and South and Highway 401 and integrate this with land use planning for the area.

The Provincial government has identified other areas in the Growth Plan which recognize unique needs and circumstances in Simcoe County for the following:

- Bradford West Gwillimbury Strategic Settlement Employment Area
- Innisfil Heights Strategic Settlement Employment Area
- Lake Simcoe Regional Airport Economic Employment District
- Rama Road Economic Employment District

The Growth Plan defines economic employment districts as:

“Areas that have been identified by the Minister that are to be planned and protected for locally significant employment uses. These areas are not settlement areas.”

Strategic settlement employment areas are defined as:

“Areas that have been identified by the Minister that are to be planned and protected for employment uses that require large lots of land and depend upon efficient movement of goods and access to Highway 400. These are not settlement areas. Major retail and residential uses are not permitted.”

The situation in Puslich is similar to the above areas.

Conclusion

There is no clear path within current Provincial policies to identify new rural employment land in Puslinch to serve the broader area without the support of the Province. As there is a recognized process to request an alternative density target, Planning staff proposes to make this submission to the Minister at the same time.

This request is to establish a Regionally Significant Economic Development Area along the Highway 401 and 6 corridors. The area would be planned and protected for employment uses that require large lots of land and depend upon efficient movement of goods and access to Highway 401. If the Ministry is open to such consideration, further planning and consultation could proceed to identify appropriate boundaries and policies.

Recommendations

That the report “County Official Plan Review – Regionally Significant Economic Development Area” be received for information.

That a request be made to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to consider establishment of a Regionally Significant Economic Development Area in Puslinch along the Highway 401 and 6 corridors prior to finalization of a boundary for Greenbelt Plan expansion (if applicable).

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Wilhelm', with a stylized flourish at the end.

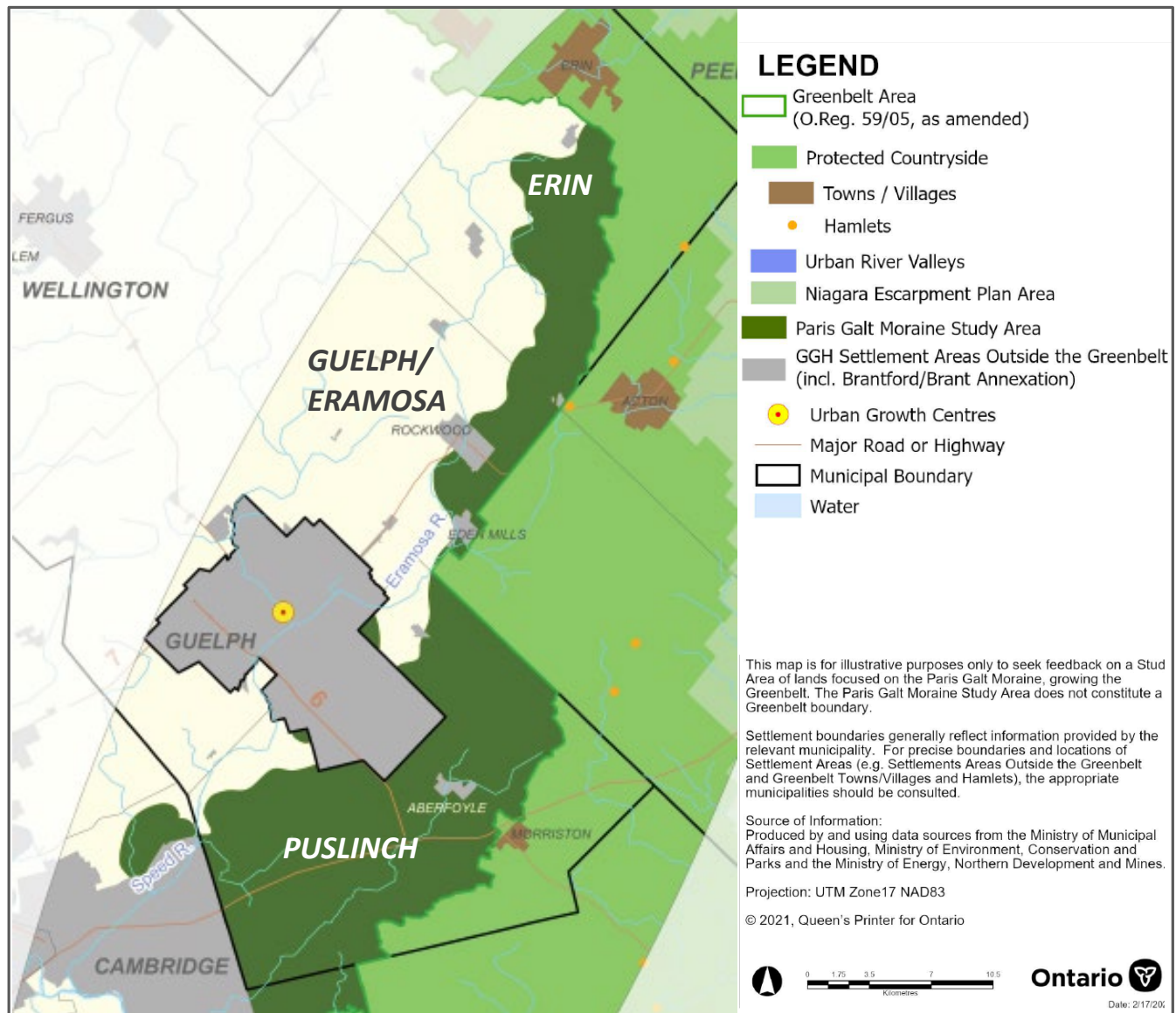
Sarah Wilhelm, MCIP, RPP
Manager of Policy Planning

Appendix A 2021 Growing the Greenbelt Study Area
Appendix B Highways 6 & 401 Improvements

Appendix A

2021 Growing the Greenbelt Study Area – Paris Galt Moraine

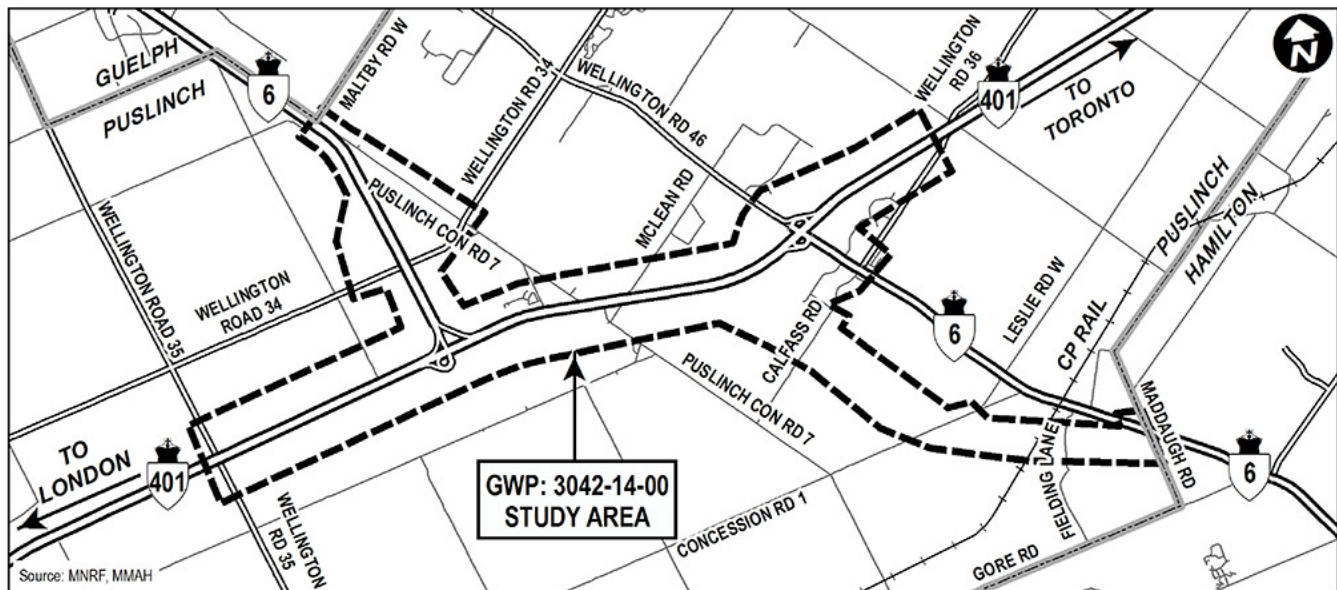
(Map excerpt)



Appendix B

Highways 6 & 401 Improvements

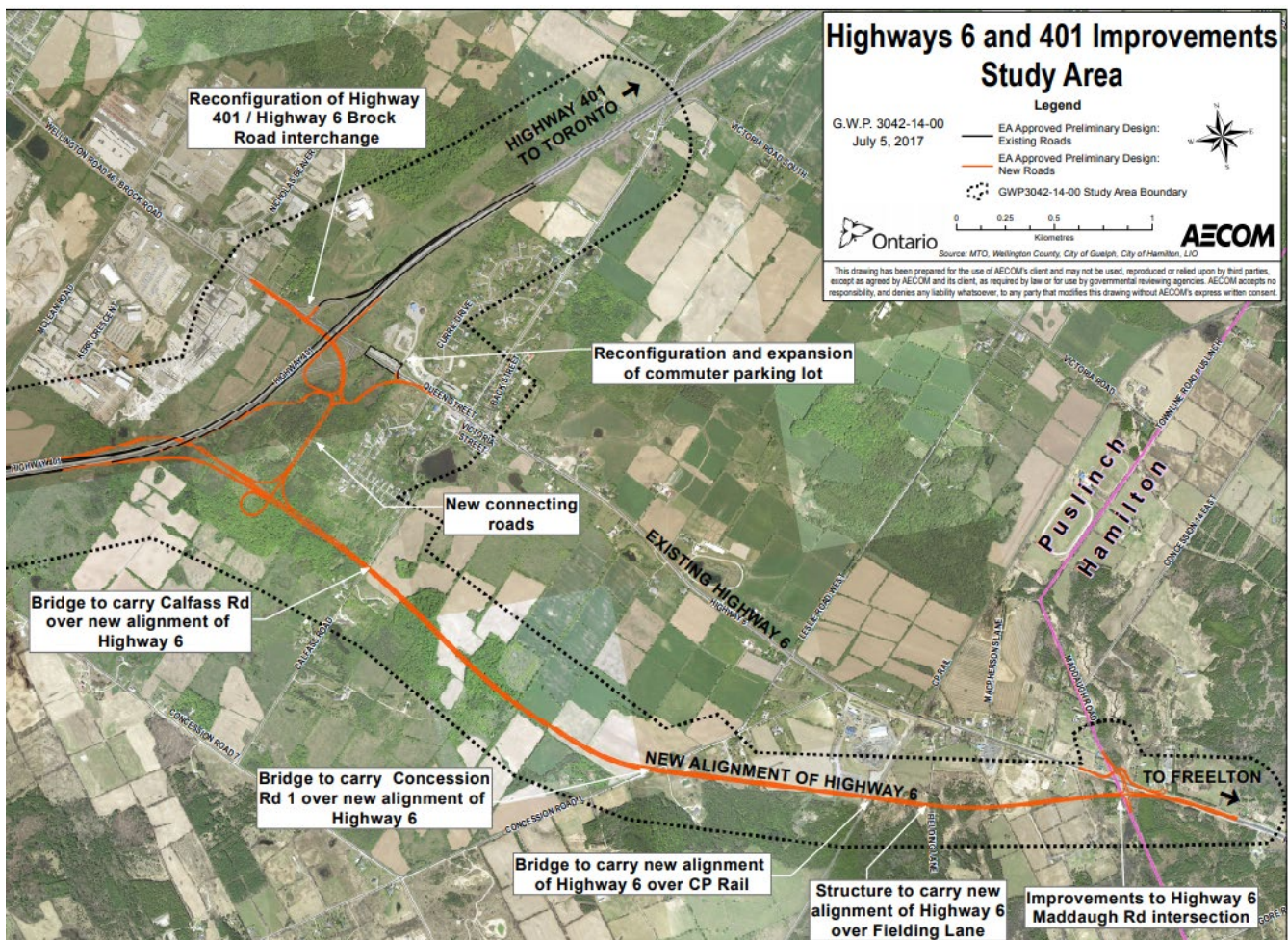
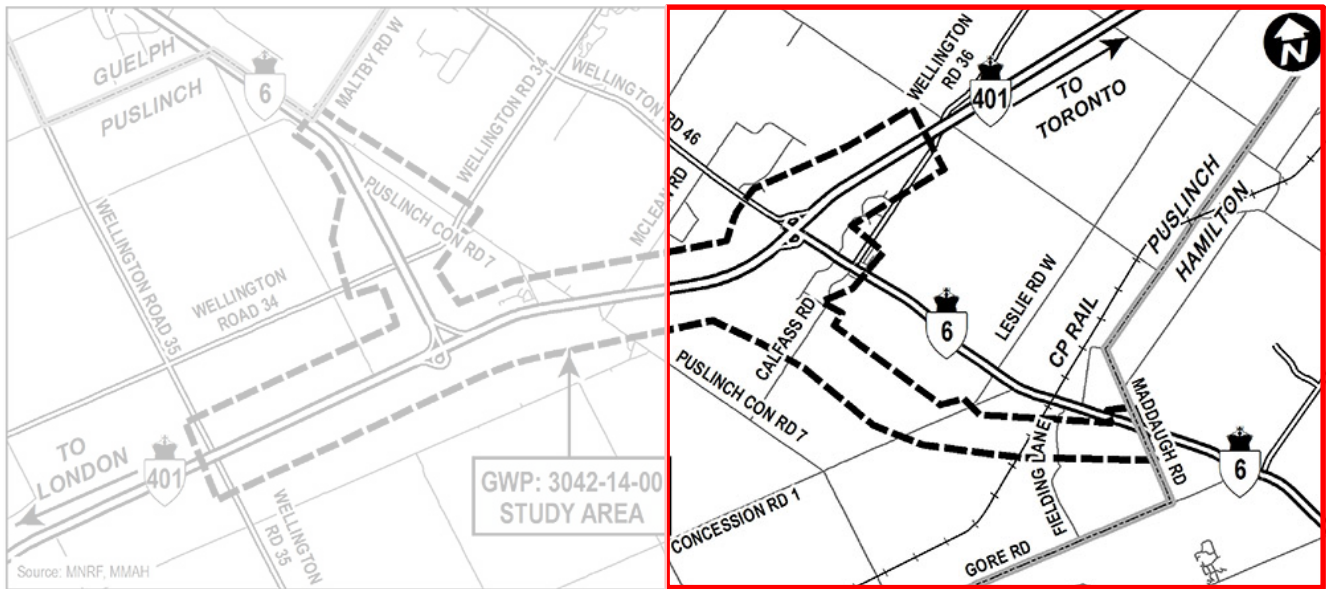
from Hamilton north limits to Guelph south limits



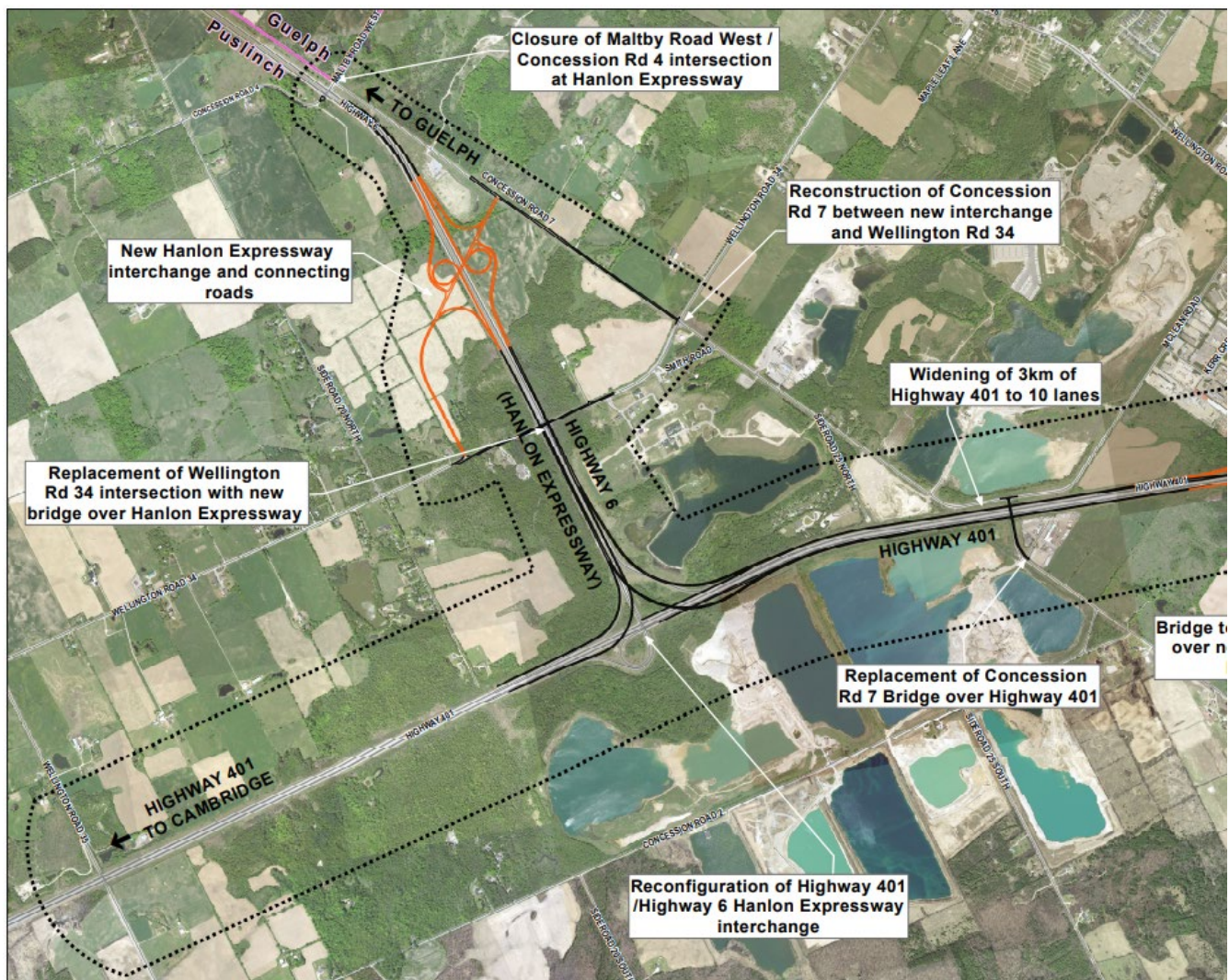
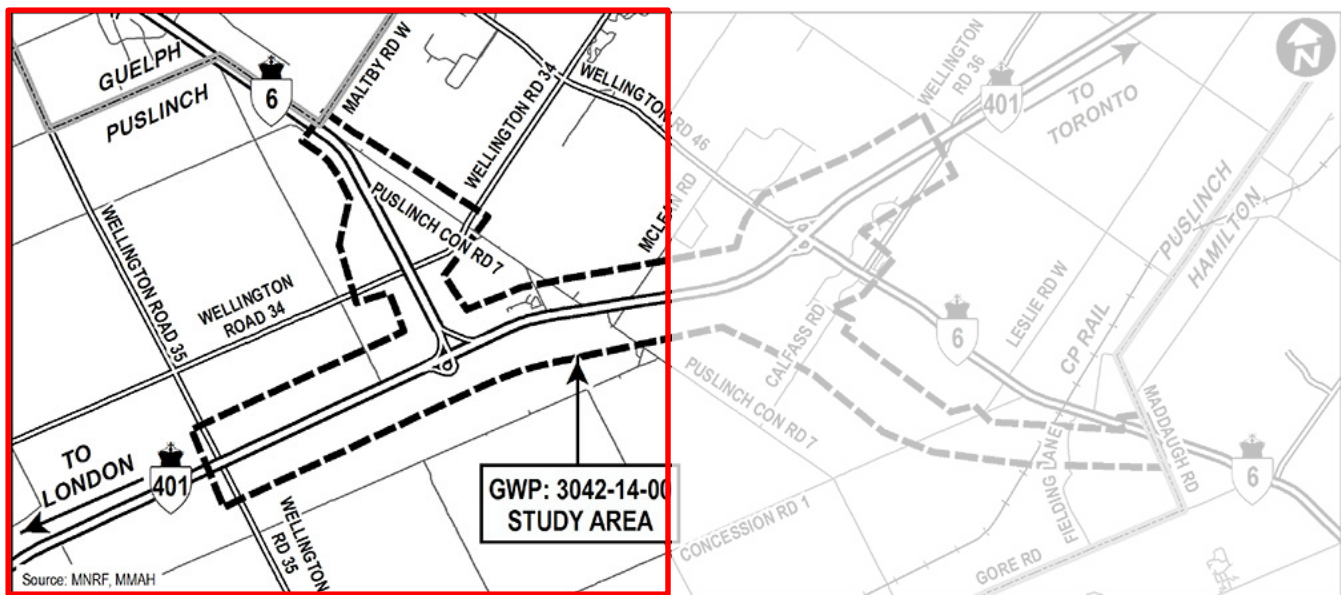
Approved preliminary design includes:

- A new controlled access four-lane alignment of Highway 6 west of the existing highway, from Highway 6 at Maddaugh Road northerly to Highway 401;
- Improvements to the Highway 6 / Maddaugh Road intersection;
- Structures to carry CP Rail, Calfass Road, Concession Road 1 and Fielding Lane across the new Highway 6 alignment;
- A new two-lane connection road north of the community of Morriston, linking the existing and new alignments of Highway 6;
- Reconfiguration of the Highway 401 interchanges at Highway 6 / Wellington Road 46 (Brock Road), and at Highway 6 (Hanlon Expressway);
- Widening of approximately 3 km of Highway 401 to 10 lanes including High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes between the two Highway 6 interchanges;
- Replacement of the Hanlon Expressway intersection at Wellington Road 34 with a bridge (no connection to the highway);
- Closure of the Hanlon Expressway intersection at Maltby Road / Concession Road 4;
- A new Hanlon Expressway interchange approximately mid-way between Wellington Road 34 and Maltby Road / Concession Road 4 linking Wellington Road 34 on the west side of the Hanlon Expressway to Concession Road 7 on the east side of the Hanlon Expressway;
- Reconstruction of the section of Concession Road 7 between the new interchange and Wellington Road 34;
- Replacement of the Puslinch Concession Road 7 Bridge over Highway 401 (Completed in 2020 as part of an advanced construction project, G.W.P. 3224-15-00); and
- Reconfiguration and expansion of the Wellington Road 46 (Brock Road) commuter parking lot.

Source: [Project Overview - Highways 6 & 401 Improvements \(highways6and401hamiltontoguelph.ca\)](https://highways6and401hamiltontoguelph.ca)



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