

1.0 Introduction

1.1 General Description of the Undertaking

McCormick Rankin Corporation (MRC) has undertaken this study on behalf of the Ministry of Transportation.

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is continuing with the Route Planning Study for Highway 69. In the initial stages, this study encompassed the planning for a new four-lane Highway 69 from approximately Highway 559 (north of Nobel) to north of Highway 522. The study was later divided into a South Section (north of Nobel to north of Harris Lake Road) and a North Section (north of Harris Lake Road to north of Highway 522) to allow for the additional evaluation of information for the North Section, and the timely completion of the southern portion. This report addresses the North Section. The Route Planning and Environmental Assessment Report for the South Section have been completed and were approved subject to addressing commitments in Detail Design. Exhibit 1-1 identifies the South and North Study Sections.

The study meets the requirements of a Group A project under the *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities (2000)*. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment has established the Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) process for groups of projects in order to ensure compliance with the *Environmental Assessment Act R.S.O. 1990*. Provided that the process is followed, projects and activities included under the Class EA do not require formal ministerial approval under the *Environmental Assessment Act*.

In addition to the environmental assessment component, the study includes an engineering component satisfying the requirements of MTO's traditional Preliminary Design Report process.

1.2 Purpose of the Undertaking

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has a mandate to provide a safe, efficient and reliable transportation system to enhance Ontario's economic competitiveness and quality of life.

The mandate is to:

- Be a leader in providing a cost-effective transportation system that supports the Province's economic, social and environmental objectives;
- Provide a focal point for the identification of transportation needs for the people of Ontario; and

- Address the Province's transportation needs through the effective use of road, rail, transit, air and marine transportation systems and services.

1.2.1 Problems and Opportunities

MTO is carrying out a program to provide and maintain a safe and efficient transportation system between Southern Ontario and Northern Ontario. The approximately 68 km section of Highway 69 which is the subject of this study (from north of Highway 559 northerly to Highway 522) is a major component of this important economic transportation corridor and is of major significance to the resource, tourism and recreational components of Ontario's economy.

The *Northern Ontario Transportation Perspective Study (2001)* has confirmed this, noting the high reliance of major highway links for inter-urban traffic movements in Northern Ontario, together with the importance of the corridor for commercial vehicles (13-16.6% of average traffic volumes, based on 2001 traffic studies) and the above average tourism expenditures in the area.

The Ontario government has taken a lead role in promoting a balanced and integrated transportation system to support Ontario's Smart Growth objectives of sustaining a healthy economy, building strong communities and encouraging a healthy environment. The northeastern Ontario Smart Growth Panel identified four key themes for Northeastern Ontario including *planning, building and investing strategically*. Investment in strategic transportation infrastructure such as Highway 69 is consistent with this theme identified in the final report *Ontario Smart Growth – Shape the Future, Northeastern Ontario Smart Growth Panel* (Spring 2003). The Smart Growth Panel for Northeastern Ontario also specifically recommends completing the four-laning of Highway 69 to Sudbury within a 12-year timeframe as a part of the long-term strategic transportation plan for Northeastern Ontario. The *Highway 69 Action Plan* released in June 2005 reaffirms these commitments and provides details of a plan for the four-laning of Highway 69 between Sudbury and Parry Sound with a recommendation to complete the four-laning from Parry Sound to Sudbury in 12 years.

Clearly, the upgrading of the Highway 69 corridor is consistent with these objectives and recommendations. The upgrading of the facility to modern freeway standards is also consistent with the cornerstone of the MTO's *Core Business Plan (2002-2003)*, namely the provision of safe, efficient transportation facilities.

Highway 69 has been characterized as having several problems that require the attention of the Ministry of Transportation. These problems are defined in general terms as including the need to:

- accommodate increasing traffic demands;
- improve road safety; and
- relieve operational problems, such as safe turning movements and passing.

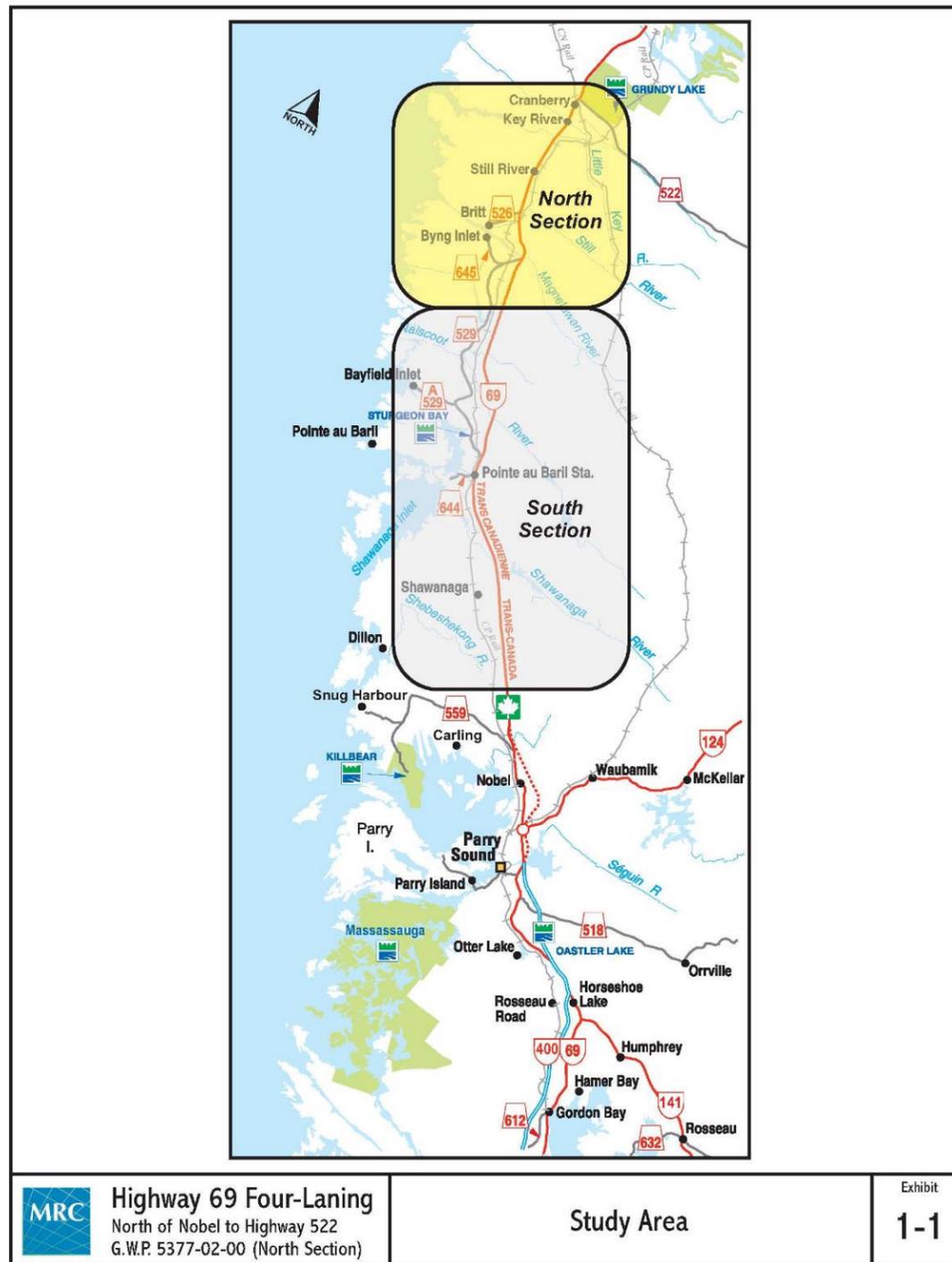
1.2.2 Study Purpose and Objectives

The Ministry of Transportation is responsible for providing a safe and efficient provincial transportation system in Ontario. Highway 69 is an important route that connects rural communities, urban areas, First Nation communities and recreational areas within Northern Ontario. As part of the Trans-Canada Highway System, Highway 69 is also one of the two vital highway links (along with Highway 11) between Northern Ontario/Western Canada and Southern Ontario via connection with Highway 400. As Highway 69 has been four-laned, south of the project it has been re-numbered to Highway 400.

The construction of a new four-lane Highway 69 between Toronto and Sudbury is of major significance to the resource, tourism, commercial and recreational components of Northern Ontario's economy. The approximately 68 km section of Highway 69 which is the subject of this study is a major component of this important economic transportation corridor. The greatest potential beneficiaries of improvements within this corridor are businesses that rely on goods movement through this area, local residents and business owners, visitors to the area, and motorists travelling through the area.

This Route Planning study includes:

- Identification and assessment of existing geometric and alignment conditions, intersections, entrances;
- Assessment of existing operational conditions including turning lanes and passing lanes;
- Reviews of existing traffic volumes and travel patterns, and forecasts of future volumes;
- Identification of capacity and operational deficiencies, both in the short and longer terms;
- Identification of existing environmental conditions and sensitivities (natural, social, economic and cultural environments);
- Development, analysis and evaluation of alternative solutions to the identified transportation problems and opportunities, with consideration of benefits and impacts to communities, travelers and the environment;
- Selection of the preferred alternative;
- Consultation with external agencies including railways, municipalities, First Nations, residents, business owners, interest groups and the public at key decision milestones, including incorporating or resolving any comments received;
- Preliminary design of the preferred alternative ; and
- Preparation of Route Planning, Preliminary Design and Environmental Assessment Report. Per the requirements of the Class EA planning process, this report has been made available for public and external agency review.



In light of the problems and opportunities present in the study area, the objectives of the current study were:

- to identify a Preferred Route for a four-lane Highway 69 to address the transportation problems and opportunities identified in Section 1.2.1, and that has acceptable / mitigable effects on the natural / social / economic / cultural environment which can be implemented at an acceptable cost;
- to develop a transportation plan which will assist the local municipalities and First Nations in planning future land use;
- to conduct the study so as to incorporate consultation with the public and with any interested or affected agencies/organizations; and
- to prepare a preliminary design for any transportation improvements that are associated with the preferred alternative which fall within the study limits.

1.2.3 Definition of the Study Area

The study was divided into a South Section (north of Nobel to north of Harris Lake Road) and a North Section (north of Harris Lake Road to north of Highway 522 near the Key River). As previously noted, the Route Planning and Environmental Assessment Report for the South Section has been completed and was approved subject to addressing commitments in Detail Design. For the purposes of the needs assessment, the North Section study area extends from north of Harris Lake Road to north of Highway 522 at Grundy Lake Provincial Park. North of the Grundy Lake Provincial Park, two separate Highway 69 planning studies have been completed, extending to Estaire (GWP 5378-02-00 and 5379-02-00).

The study area also includes all roads and entrances intersecting Highway 69 within these limits.

1.3 Strategic Highway Planning Direction

A number of recent provincial government initiatives provide the framework for the Highway 69 four-laning program from Parry Sound to Sudbury. The documents discussed below assist in providing an overall plan for improvements to the Highway 69 corridor and indicate how the various project sections combine together to achieve this plan.

1.3.1 Highway 69 Four-Laning Program

Since the mid-1960's, MTO has carried out several studies to assess traffic volumes, operations and safety along the Highway 69 corridor between Port Severn and Sudbury. Projected growth in the volume of traffic travelling through this area, combined with growth in the year-round population of the eastern Georgian Bay Region and the growing popularity of this area as an all-

season recreational/tourist destination resulted in the decision to proceed with upgrading of Highway 69 from two lanes to a four-lane divided, controlled access highway. Four-laning of 34 km of Highway 69 as far as the Musquash River (and renaming of this roadway as Highway 400) has occurred over the past number of years. A further extension of the four-laning program from the Musquash River to MacTier is currently under construction. Construction is also currently underway for the sections between Mill Lake and Nobel and between Sudbury and Estaire. Engineering is currently underway for the section between Estaire and north of Highway 522.

This is based on input on Route Planning Studies that have recently been completed for the following two projects:

- Highway 522 to Highway 64 (21.5 km) (GWP 5378-02-00); and
- Highway 64 to Estaire (24.7 km) (GWP 5379-02-00).

This project addresses the remaining section from Highway 559 (Nobel) to Highway 522 (approximately 68 km). This report addresses the North Section of this study from north of Harris Lake Road to north of Highway 522.

1.3.2 Northern Ontario Strategic Transportation Directions and Smart Growth

In January 2002, MTO and the Ontario SuperBuild Corporation issued the draft Strategic Transportation Directions Report for Northern Ontario. The purpose of the study, as outlined in the report, is to:

- Provide an overview of the transportation network in the region;
- Examine the contribution of different transportation modes to the region's overall transportation system;
- Identify social and economic factors in the region that affect transportation;
- Identify growth patterns and their effect on future transportation needs;
- Identify strategic directions for the development of the Provincial transportation system; and
- Set out strategies MTO may pursue in relation to the region's overall transportation network.

The study was undertaken in support of the Province's Smart Growth commitments to "...build a stronger economy, stronger communities and a healthy environment." The key objectives of transportation planning to address Smart Growth are:

- promoting choices for travel within and between communities;

Introduction

- continuing to be able to move people and goods efficiently;
- reducing gridlock in parts of the province experiencing high population and employment growth; and
- developing integrated transportation networks that promote access and economic activities.

The *Northern Ontario Strategic Transportation Directions* study (2002), while focused on the overall Northern Ontario Region (which essentially consists of MTO's Northeastern and Northwestern administrative regions), did examine transportation, social and economic conditions within the region crossed by Highway 69 within this study area. Where relevant, information about existing and expected future conditions has been incorporated into the needs assessment analysis, and is described in the later sections of this report.

The conclusions and recommendations from the *Northern Ontario Strategic Transportation Directions* study are wide-ranging and relate both to the broader transportation system in Northern Ontario and local key transportation links. The importance of the Highway 400/Highway 69 and Highway 11 corridors to the economy of Northern Ontario by providing a linkage to Southern Ontario is noted as a key consideration. Included among the recommendations is the initiation of planning work to evaluate the potential for four-laning the Highway 69 corridor from Parry Sound to Estaire.

1.3.3 Highway 69 Action Plan

In June 2005, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) and the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal issued the *Highway 69 Action Plan*. The report released the details of a plan for the four-laning of Highway 69 between Sudbury and Parry Sound.

The *Highway 69 Action Plan* outlines a long-term strategy for completing the four-laning of the Highway 69 corridor in 12 years.

The *Highway 69 Action Plan* identifies the major projects and activities that are required to bring about the expansion of the highway south of Sudbury to Parry Sound. A number of those projects and activities are already underway.

- Safety improvements on the existing two-lane highway between Sudbury and Parry Sound, including the extension of existing passing lanes, the addition of new passing lanes, paved shoulders and rumble strips were completed in 2005.

The following activities were planned over the next five years:

- Twenty kilometers of new four-lane highway from Sudbury south to Estaire is planned for completion in 2009; and

- Seventeen kilometres of new four-lane construction from Parry Sound north to Highway 559 is planned for completion in 2010.

Provided all necessary environmental approvals and property acquisition is completed, construction along the remaining 115-kilometre corridor could begin by 2010.

Over the balance of this plan, the following priorities and target completion dates have been identified:

- Construction of four lanes between Highway 64 and Estaire by 2012;
- Construction of four lanes from Highway 522 to Highway 64 by 2014; and
- Construction of four lanes from Highway 559 to Highway 522 by 2016 (this project).

1.4 Environmental Assessment Process

The work on a planning study of this type must be carried out in accordance with the applicable environmental legislation and the current government policies and procedures. These are described below.

1.4.1 Ontario Environmental Assessment Act

The Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act* (EAA) governs the conduct of planning studies in the province of Ontario. The purpose of the EAA is to ensure that:

- A reasonable and traceable planning process is followed;
- The need for the project is demonstrated;
- The public has input into the process and investigations;
- The study includes a review of a full range of alternatives; and
- The selected alternative minimizes any environmental impacts or provides mitigation strategies resulting from the improvements.

This project complies with the requirements of the *Ministry of Transportation's Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) for Provincial Highway Projects*. This Highway 69 Route Planning Study followed the Class EA process for Group 'A' projects. The Class EA process is for projects of a defined scope and magnitude, where the impact can effectively be determined and mitigated.

At the end of the 30-day review period, the project is considered to have met the requirements of the EAA, and MTO may proceed to tender for construction. Any commitments documented in this report during the Detail Design phase and any other outstanding environmental approvals should be resolved and addressed prior to construction.

1.4.2 Canadian Environmental Assessment Act

The *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA) may be “triggered” by:

- Need for Federal funding
- Need for Federal lands (including First Nation lands)
- Issuance of a Federal approval identified on the Law List

This project is not currently eligible for Federal funding, therefore, the first “trigger” does not apply.

Lands required for this project include First Nations land within the Shawanaga First Nation, therefore this “trigger” applies.

For the third “trigger”, there are three potential federal approvals that are anticipated to be required. In accordance with the Ministry of Natural Resources / Ministry of Transportation Fisheries Protocol, Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Authorization under the Section 35(2) of the Federal *Fisheries Act* is anticipated for new watercourse crossings at several locations. In addition, Transport Canada has confirmed navigable waters will be crossed at several locations within the study area, thereby requiring approvals under the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*.

The third possible trigger may result from a requirement to obtain approval from the Canadian Transportation Agency for authority to build railway crossings. Approval from the Canadian Transportation Agency will only be required if an agreement cannot be reached with Canadian Pacific or Canadian National Railways.

Based on the triggers outlined above, approvals under CEAA are currently anticipated for this project. A copy of the CEAA Scoping Document for this project is provided in Appendix V.

1.4.3 Other Approval Requirements

Undertaking an Environmental Assessment also requires consideration of other approvals and review agencies. These include:

- Federal Review Requirements and Approvals;
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) for fisheries habitat;
- Transport Canada for navigable water crossings;
- Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National Railway or Canadian Transportation Agency for approval/authority to build railway crossings and in the case of CNR, relocate rail tracks and infrastructure;

- MOE for Permits To Take Water;
- Provincial Review/Policy Requirements;
- The Environmental Protection Act;
- Ontario Wetlands Policy/Ontario Fisheries Protocol/Noise Protocol/Archaeological Protocol;
- Ontario Municipal Board Road Closing Orders; and
- Controlled Access Designation.

Although MTO is not subject to municipal approval requirements, consideration is given to municipal governments’ responsibilities in the development of the route planning process as follows:

- Municipal Policy;
- Development control, Official and Secondary Plans;
- Zoning Bylaws; and
- Transportation planning policy.

1.4.4 Purpose of the Route Planning and Environmental Assessment Report

This Route Planning and Environmental Assessment Report documents the process followed for the selection of a Preferred Route and interchanges for four-laning Highway 69 including documentation of the consultation process. It includes: a description of the project and its purpose; the existing natural, social/health, economic and cultural environmental factors; transportation needs assessment, corridor and route alternatives considered, and the process followed to analyze and evaluate alternatives; details of the Recommended Plan; anticipated environmental effects and proposed mitigation measures; and commitments for further work, consultation, and monitoring associated with the implementation of the project.

Additional information about the Environmental Assessment process for Ministry of Transportation infrastructure projects is contained in *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities* (2000). In addition, other related studies have been carried out in this area, and a number of background studies and reports contain additional information that may be of interest to the reader. These are included in the Appendices of this report.

1.5 Study Approach

The study approach for the Highway 69 Route Planning Study and Environmental Assessment was to:

- Examine the study area in progressively refined stages from corridors, to routes, to the preferred alternative;
- Work with the travelling public, stakeholders and the residents of the study area to gain input regarding the future needs of the area;
- Define the need for transportation improvements in the corridor;
- Identify and evaluate a full range of alternative transportation improvements to meet future needs;
- Select a preferred alternative that addresses the future needs in an efficient, cost effective and environmentally sensitive manner;
- Identify the benefits of the proposed improvements and avoid or mitigate adverse environmental effects;
- Identify alignment alternatives and property needs; and
- Document the study process and recommendations.

The study approach vetted to the public, agencies and the Highway 69 Project Team was documented in the *Study Design* (August 2003). The report, as contained in Appendix B, describes the study approach and process.

1.6 Study Process

The Environmental Assessment process requires a comprehensive planning procedure to identify alternatives, the associated environmental effects and a plan for a solution that has minimal adverse environmental effects, while addressing the project needs. This is undertaken in a five-stage planning process. The stages of the planning process are illustrated in Exhibit 1-2. This flow chart illustrates the relationship of the project stages with the activities, recommendations and opportunities for public input. A brief outline of the five study stages is provided below - full details are described in the *Study Design* (see Appendix B).

Stage 1 – Project Initiation (see Section 3.0)

The need for the undertaking was assessed and the different ways of meeting the need were studied. Alternative transportation options, including “do nothing” were evaluated and screened out or carried forward.

Stage 2 – Development and Evaluation of Highway Corridor Alternatives (see Section 4.0)

The environment within the study area was reviewed on a regional scale (Section 2.0) and reasonable transportation alternatives were identified (Section 4.0).

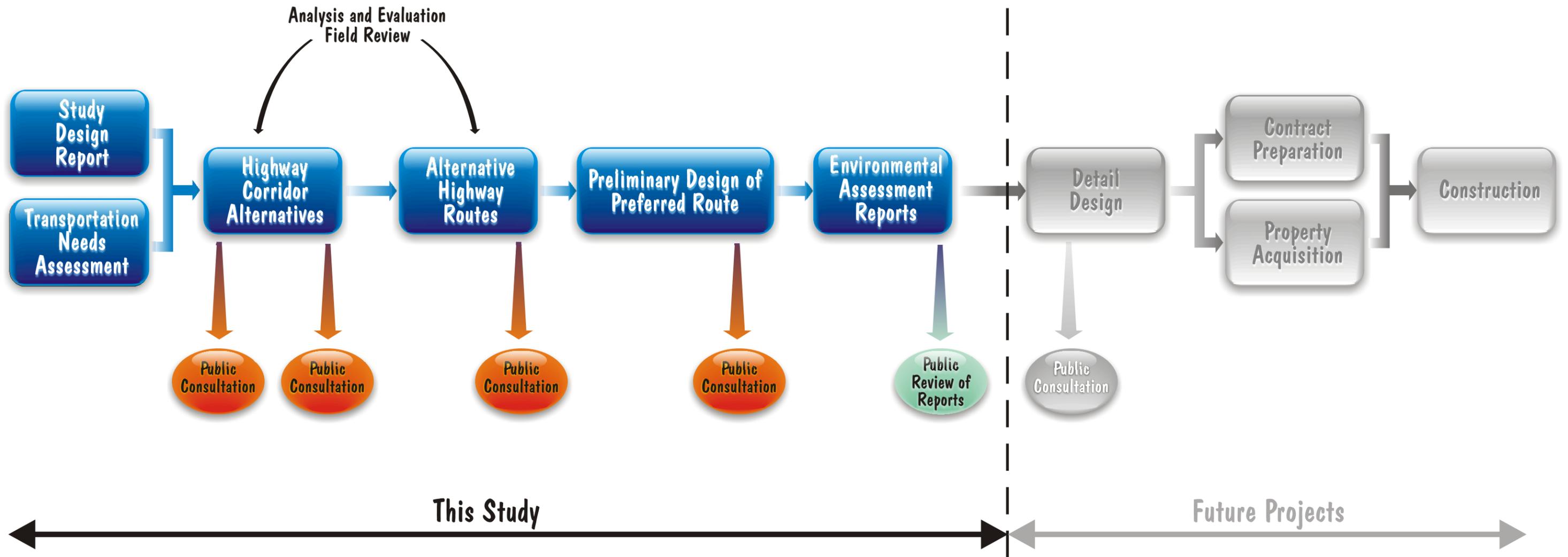
Highway corridor alternatives were generated for an evaluation process. Some were screened out early in the process and not carried forward for further consideration because the environmental effects were too severe or they were not practical solutions to the problem.

Several highway corridor alternatives were carried forward for further study and an evaluation process.

The study included an evaluation of highway corridor alternatives and the selection of a Preferred Corridor. The highway corridors were approximately 300 metres wide – much wider than the actual highway right-of-way requirements, in order to permit detailed data collection. The Preferred Corridor was intended to contain a narrower future highway right-of-way, including service road connections and interchanges, to be developed in Stage 3 of the study.

Stage 3 – Development and Evaluation of Highway Routes and Interchanges (see Section 5.0)

This stage inventoried the existing environment (natural, social/economic, cultural and transportation) within the Preferred Corridor (Section 2.0), followed by the identification of route and interchange alternatives within the Preferred Corridor. An evaluation process was undertaken, leading to the selection of a Preferred Route with interchanges. Alternative routes were identified with the objective of minimizing the overall environmental effects while meeting engineering and operational requirements.



The route and interchange alternatives were evaluated and compared resulting in the selection of a Preferred Route (Section 5.0).

Stage 4 – Preliminary Design of Preferred Route (see Sections 6.0 to 8.0)

This stage involved the preparation of the preliminary design for the Preferred Route and interchanges with more detailed environmental investigations undertaken to refine the design. Specific recommendations are set out to minimize the environmental effects during the construction and operation of the facility (Sections 6.0 and 7.0).

The Preferred Route includes interchanges and service roads that provide access to the future four-lane highway.

Stage 5 – Environmental Assessment Report

This stage involves documenting the previous study stages in a Route Planning and EA Report. The report is available for a formal public review period.

1.7 Project Team

The study was completed under the direction of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), Northeastern Region with the consultant (McCormick Rankin Corporation) providing the project management, engineering, technical and environmental services. Several sub-consultants worked with McCormick Rankin Corporation to provide specialized environmental and engineering services.

The Ministry Project Team included MTO staff that worked on the project on an ongoing basis. The Extended Project Team included the project team members plus senior staff of MTO Northeastern Region. The Internal Team involved other MTO staff from the District Offices and the other support sections at the Ministry. The members of the Project Team are listed in Exhibit 1-3.

The External Agency Team included various government agencies and ministries contacted throughout the study as outlined in Section 1.8.2.

Exhibit 1-3 Project Team

MTO Project Team:

Area Engineer – Planning & Environmental Section	Mike Pearsall / Sheri Graham
Senior Project Engineer – Planning and Environmental Section	Michael Nadeau
Project Engineer – Planning and Environmental Section	Roch Pilon
Project Engineer – Planning and Environmental Section	Chris Kowalewski
Senior Project Engineer – Planning and Environmental Section	Dheera Kantiya
Environmental Planner	Bob Bird

Exhibit 1-3 Project Team

Structural Section	Peter Stuart
Foundations Section	Ken Ahmad
Geotechnical Section	Derek Thompson
Aggregate Supervisor	David Villard
Geomatics Section	Mike Steele / Steve Furrow
Traffic Section	Marcel Pigeon
Traffic Section	Will Larose / Bill South

Extended MTO Project Team:

Head – Planning and Environmental Section	Marlo Johnson
Manager, Engineering	Paul Lecoarer
Area Contracts Engineer – Huntsville	Colleen Conley
Area Contracts Engineer – Sudbury	Bruce Sedgwick / Brad Thom
Contract Control Officer	Gary Noble
Head, Property	David Vail
Property Supervisor	Steve Morris
Senior Foundations Engineer	Tae Kim
Senior Project Engineer – Planning and Design Section	Josee Vallee
Senior Project Engineer – Planning and Design Section	Bonnie Murphy
Project Engineer - Planning and Design Section	Rafael Albino

Consultant Project Team:

Project Manager	Neil Ahmed, MRC
Deputy Project Manager	Denise Morneau, MRC
Deputy Project Manager	François Doyon, MRC
Auditor	Kevin Rodger, MRC
Environmental Planner	J.A. (Sandy) Nairn, Ecoplans Limited
Assistant Environmental Planner	Katie Bright, Ecoplans Limited
Highway Design Engineer	Alex Weihing, MRC
Traffic Engineer	Mick Oliveira, MRC
Structural Engineer	James Sherlock, MRC
Drainage and Hydrology Engineer	Janusz Czuj, MRC
Engineering Survey	Paul Francis, Northway Photomap
Geotechnical & Foundations	Michael Maher, Golder Associates
	Anne Poschmann, Golder Associates
	Paul Dittrich, Golder Associates
	Chad Gilfillan, Golder Associates

Exhibit 1-3 Project Team

Groundwater and Contamination Aquatic & Terrestrial Ecosystems	Robert Scott, Golder Associates Derek Stewart, Ecoplans Limited Anne MacMillan, Ecoplans Limited Geoff Gartshore, Ecoplans Limited Erin Greenaway, Ecoplans Limited Chris Parent, Ecoplans Limited
Landscape Architecture/Aesthetics Archaeological	David Waverman, Ecoplans Limited Luke Dalla Bona, Woodland Heritage Services
Built and Cultural Heritage	Richard Unterman, Unterman McPhail Associates
Acoustics and Vibration	Greg Moore, MRC
Socio-Economic/Agriculture	Jim Dymont, Meridian Planning Consultants
Air Quality	Scott Shayko, RWDI

1.8 Consultation Process

Public input was sought throughout the study process. Details of the consultation program, including input received and responses provided during each stage of the process, are described in the section of the report that describes that stage of the study.

The public consultation process provided an opportunity for the Project Team to discuss the study process or any other issues relating to the project with property owners, First Nation communities, external agencies, municipalities, interested members of the public, and other stakeholders.

The process was used to notify all interested parties of the project and to provide an opportunity for input to the study and decision-making processes. The opportunity for this input is through a communication process. The findings of each stage of work were communicated to the public, and through ongoing discussions with the various government agencies and ministries, non-government interest groups and property owners.

1.8.1 Formal Points of Notification

The public was contacted several times formally throughout the study process and provided with opportunities for input to the Route Planning Study. Input was sought at four rounds of Public Information Centres (PICs) held during the study. For the first, second and third rounds of consultation, Public Information Centres were held in Nobel, Pointe au Baril Station, Britt, and Toronto. For the fourth round of consultation PICs were held in Britt and the Toronto area for the North Section and Nobel,

Pointe au Baril Station and the Toronto area for the South Section. To ensure that all interested members of the public were contacted, an extensive notification process was used. It consisted of:

- Announcements in newspapers at the commencement of the Route Planning Study;
- Mailings to property owners in the study area as well as members of the public that had indicated an interest in the study in previous study phases (i.e. requested to be added to project mailing list);
- Establishment of a Highway 69 project website (www.highway69.ca) that provided continuous updated information on the study;
- Notification of Public Information Centres by contacting the people on the project mailing list (through direct correspondence), through advertisements in the local newspapers (and the Toronto Star) and on the project website; and
- Newspaper advertisements, direct mailings and use of the project Web site to announce the study completion and the start of the public review period for final study documentation.

The consultation program was carried out in accordance with the *French Language Services Act*.

Newspaper notices and notification materials, Project Newsletters, Project Web Site information and Public Information Centre Summary Reports are contained in Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix E and Appendix F, respectively. Summaries of input received and responses provided during each stage of the study are provided in the sections of the report that describe those stages of the planning process. Input received through correspondence is provided in Appendix G.

1.8.2 Government Ministry/Agency Liaison

The Route Planning Study has been coordinated with a full range of government agencies and ministries. The co-ordination occurs with all three levels of government (i.e. Federal, Provincial and municipal). Each government ministry/agency was contacted at the outset of the study to inform them of the study commencement and to discuss the project need, justification, goals and objectives.

The contact list includes:

- Federal ministries/agencies (i.e. CEA Agency, Environment Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Transport Canada, and DFO);
- Provincial ministries/agencies (i.e. Ministries of the Environment, Culture, Natural Resources, Tourism/Recreation, Northern Development and Mines, Agriculture and Food, Ontario Parks, and the Ontario Provincial Police [OPP]);

- Local and district municipalities including the Township of The Archipelago, Carling Township and the Municipality of Killarney;
- Agencies and organizations with an interest in the project (i.e. school boards, hospital and emergency service providers);
- Utility companies and services within the study area including railways, the Hydro authority, telephone and cable companies; and
- Interest groups and associations including cottage associations, snowmobile clubs, businesses tourist associations.

Each government ministry/agency was contacted at the outset of the study to inform them of the study commencement and to discuss the project need, justification, goals and objectives.

Presentations were made to the Township of The Archipelago and Carling Township Councils prior to the first three rounds of Public Information Centres. A presentation was offered to the Municipality of Killarney prior to each round of Public Information Centres; however, a presentation was only requested prior to the third round.

1.8.3 First Nations Liaison

The Route Planning Study has included considerable consultation with First Nation communities in and around the Highway 69 corridor between Parry Sound and Sudbury, as well as First Nation communities within a larger study area. The First Nations contacted included: Henvey Inlet First Nation, Shawanaga First Nation, Magnetawan First Nation and Waabnoong Bemjiwang Association of First Nations. The Magnetawan First Nation and Henvey Inlet First Nation are the only First Nations within the North Section in the study area.

The consultation program included several meetings and written communications with Shawanaga First Nation, Magnetawan First Nation Henvey Inlet First Nation, Union of Ontario Indians (no meetings) and Metis Association (no meetings). Details of consultation with First Nations, throughout the EA process are described in Sections 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0.

The Project Team is aware of federal guidelines regarding Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) and recognizes the value of ATK as a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. The First Nation communities consulted during this study have been very generous in sharing this information with the Project Team, and with the exception of information deemed culturally sensitive; this is included in the environmental existing conditions described in Section 2.0.

1.8.4 Public Contact

The public played a key role in the study process. Public input was received at each of the four rounds of Public Information Centres as well as continuously during the study. As the project progressed, contact was made with a number of groups and organizations that have an interest in the study area. The range of public organizations with an interest in the project included communities, cottage groups, snowmobile clubs and local business owners. Increased effort to directly contact property owners directly impacted by the Preferred Route was undertaken prior to the third and fourth rounds of Public Information Centres.

People interested in the project were requested to express their interest to be added to the project mailing list by contacting a member of the Project Team.

Input received and responses provided from ongoing consultation during the Route Planning Study are summarized in relevant sections of this report.

1.8.5 Project Website

A project website at www.highway69.ca was maintained throughout the study to keep people informed as to the study progress and upcoming events such as Public Information Centres. The site also provided information on the project background, Environmental Assessment process, previous project events, study documentation, displays, frequently asked questions and relevant links. Comments could also be submitted through the project website for response by the Project Team. There have been over 27, 000 hits on the website since June 2003, with peaks in website visits associated with public consultation milestones.

The project website is reproduced in Appendix E.

1.8.6 Future Consultation

Public consultation is an ongoing and continuous process that extends beyond the timeframe of a planning project. Consultation will continue after the Route Planning Study is completed as described in Section 8.2.

1.9 Ecological and Watershed Management Planning

Responsible planning for new facilities such as a four-lane highway should take into consideration the goals of ecological and watershed management planning in the area. The goal of watershed management planning is to provide a framework to protect, maintain and restore a healthy natural watershed system, while balancing environmental, social and economic requirements. It requires consideration of a number of factors at a much broader scale than the study area of a typical highway improvement or Route Planning Study.

Introduction

Watershed management planning is a cooperative effort by stakeholders, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Parks, municipalities and other government agencies to create a long-term management plan for resources within the watershed. Although a formal watershed management plan does not exist for the Parry Sound or Sudbury areas, the concept of ecological and watershed planning is important and was considered in this Route Planning Study. An inventory of the existing environment, including ecological and watershed resources within the study area are summarized in Section 2.0; and described in greater detail in the *Natural Environment Existing Conditions Report* contained in Appendix H.

The integration of MTO planning of transportation infrastructure with ecological and watershed management planning is recognized as an important element in infrastructure development. These environmental standards follow the Ministry's Statement of Environmental Values (SEV), a document of environmental commitments set forth by MTO. The Ministry has recently developed environmental standards which have assisted in this integration as part of their Environmental Standards Project. The Environmental Standards Project (ESP):

- provides an interpretation of federal and provincial environmental requirements as applied to transportation planning, and highway design, construction, operation and maintenance; and
- updates and standardizes the environmental considerations and practices for highway design and construction.

Application of these standards will result in several benefits to environmental regulatory agencies including:

- More comprehensive approach to environmental protection;
- More clarity regarding how agency concerns will get addressed; and
- Better understanding of the relationship of predicted to actual environmental effects.

Benefits to the public include:

- A healthier environment;
- Greater certainty that environmental issues are being addressed;
- More opportunities to view and comment on environmental standards;
- Greater transparency to the transportation planning and highway design and construction processes; and
- Improved clarity on environmental commitments on highway projects.

Ecoplans has been closely involved assisting the MTO with the ESP since 2002 and has considered various elements of the ESP and its applicability to this project for issues such as wildlife mitigation.

Opportunities for further integration of the ESP during the subsequent Detail Design will further assist in mitigating environmental effects.

The methods by which ecological and watershed management planning were taken into consideration during specific stages of this Route Planning Study are described throughout the report. For example, ecological and watershed management goals played an important role in the selection of a Preferred Corridor for the future four-lane Highway 69 (as described in Section 4.0) because it led to the selection of a corridor that is largely located within the existing highway corridor and minimizes change to the already established relationship between the existing highway and the watershed or ecological resources in the area.

The goals of ecological planning also played a significant role in the selection of a Preferred Route (as described in Section 5.0) and the Recommended Plan (as described in Section 6.0) because it led to the selection of routes within the corridor and structure types that could maintain wildlife corridors and continuous natural areas wherever feasible.

Considerable input on the significance of ecological and watershed planning was provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), Ontario Parks, First Nation communities and the general public throughout this study. For example, the MNR and the First Nations emphasized that the movement of wildlife (i.e. moose, deer etc.) across Highway 69 (in an east-west direction) is an important and unique feature of this study area. The Project Team created a wildlife mitigation strategy that employs a range of mitigation measures (various-size structures and spacing) to maximize highway permeability for wildlife, and reduce the risk of vehicle/wildlife collisions. This approach reflects the evolving consensus in the scientific community as detailed further in the *Environmental Guide for Wildlife in the Oak Ridges Moraine* (MTO, October 2006) prepared by MTO.

Although a watershed or ecosystem may encompass several political jurisdictions, the watershed areas provide the natural boundary for managing human uses of rivers, connected wetlands, woodlands, valley lands and floodplains and associated ecological functions.

By understanding the watershed before change occurs, potential impacts on the system can be identified so that prevention, remediation or improvements can be incorporated into future plans.

Effective watershed planning and management can prevent changes in water levels, water quality, flooding and erosion. Potential environmental impacts of the four-lane Highway 69 and mitigation measures that address the impacts are described in Section 7.0

1.10 Proposed Phasing

With the completion of the Route Planning Study, the MTO will be in a position to:

- Designate the corridor and protect a right-of-way for the future implementation of the study recommendations;
- Carry out interim operational improvements to extend the life of the existing highway facility;
- Acquire property consistent with the project needs;
- Proceed with pre-design and final design/contract preparation for the four-laning; and
- Construct the improvements in a staged manner.

The details of the proposed construction staging are discussed in Section 6.10.