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EROSION ON THE PARKWAY BELT?

BY

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Greenbelts, such as the greenbelt in Ottawa, are continuous strips of green open space preserved in or on the periphery of urban areas in order to provide clearly noticeable boundaries for urban areas. The urban area with a greenbelt may not continue to grow and sprawl indefinitely since eventually development comes up against the greenbelt and is effectively halted. Aside from performing this demarcation function, a greenbelt also may offer recreation opportunities to urban area residents on a continuous length of land which may stretch out several miles.

This greenbelt idea was apparently behind the thrust of the province's June 4, 1973 announcement of the extraordinary policy known as the parkway belt. The parkway belt, which has undergone some changes since its original formulation, has the potential of playing a vital part in shaping the region. It will eventually form an east-west corridor of land between Hamilton and Bowmanville paralleling the Lakeshore several miles north of it. It will follow east-west routes along future major transportation corridors such as Highway 403 and Highway 407. North-south "mini-belt" extensions of the belt will provide perceived east-west boundaries for lakeshore urbanized communities. Between Toronto and Hamilton, it will lie at a distance north of the Lake approximately halfway between the Lake and Highway 401 in Oakville, will follow future Highway 407 around Metro, and will continue an east-west course to the east of Metro at approximately the same distance north of the Lake as to the west of Metro¹. A map of the western portion of the belt is attached at the end of the Comment.

Since the belt is an extremely important policy, it deserves

¹ The eastern portion of the belt is in the process of being delineated. The June 4, 1973 Parkway Belt: West Report dealt only with the western and northern portions.

a careful review process. To contribute to the careful review process, the Bureau will in this COMMENT describe the changes the belt has undergone through a series of provincial reports since its original formulation in the 1967 MTARTS Report.² Emphasis will be on changes which have taken place in the belt's size, functions and functional emphasis.

Original MTARTS Framing

Choices for a Growing Region, a separate 1967 report in the major regional transportation study called the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Transportation Study, or MTARTS, introduced the parkway belt idea. The Report compared "alternative futures" for the Hamilton to Bowmanville corridor with a straight projection of urban sprawl trends; the parkway belt idea was a central element in 3 out of 4 alternative patterns. The MTARTS version of the belt was given this size and these functions:

1. Size. Since the belt would be such an important regional element, MTARTS assigned it a width of "approximately one mile."³
2. Functions. The belt was to perform these functions:
 - 1) Regional strategy:
 - a) to provide a transportation corridor for a major highway to relieve the QEW and the 401
 - b) to provide space for future transportation facilities
 - c) to provide space for roadside services and low-intensity uses such as scientific research stations, museums, cultural centres
 - 2) Regional recreation:
 - a) to provide highly accessible open space
 - b) to provide a continuous link between regional conservation areas, ravines, etc.
 - c) in north-south sections ("mini-belts" in the recent announcement) along major creeks, to serve as "boundaries" between communities as well as recreation spots
 - d) to provide links also with private and other open space
 - 3) Regional Form:

"to define and give tangible expression to the form of the regional city." (not to be confused with sprawl control, the report says).⁴

2. A 1967 major regional transportation study which included options for the future development pattern of the Toronto region.

3.

Department of Municipal Affairs, MTARTS Report 2, Choices for a Growing Region (Toronto: Queen's Printer, Nov. 1967), p.41.

4.

Ibid. The list is paraphrased, except where quotations are indicated.

The only width figure mentioned was a mile. Since it was to be so wide, the belt would be able to accommodate all of these functions and would theoretically be able to perform them well. 1) perform transportations links, 2) in itself provide open space as well as linking regional recreation facilities, and 3) provide physical expression of the regional plan. It is worthwhile noting that MTARTS did not assign a service or utility corridor role to the parkway belt, whereas later reports heavily emphasized a service corridor role for the belt. Although its large open spaces would also define regional form, the belt's functional emphasis was clearly on recreation. Only a small portion of its mile width would be occupied by transportation facilities.⁵

The Toronto-Centred Region (TCR Design for Development 1970)

That the prospects for the region projected in the MTARTS unrestricted change "trends plan" were unpalatable to the Province may be inferred from the fact that the Province soon began working on a regional plan. Using Goals Plan II of MTARTS as a guide, the Province formulated a basic idea for a regional plan covering an arc area within 90 miles of Toronto and presented it in this 1970 Report. The parkway belt was part of the idea. The TCR Report altered the MTARTS belt formulation, as may be gathered from a comparison of the size and function of the belt in the TCR and MTARTS Reports.

1. Size. No width was specified for the parkway belt; but the Plate 5 map showing the lakeshore zone seems to indicate a width of approximately one mile.

2. Functions. Although the TCR Report did not specifically change any of the MTARTS belt functions, it did considerably change the belt's functional emphasis.

In the MTARTS view, the belt's predominant role was recreational. In the TCR Report, the belt

is a multi-purpose service system which would incorporate many kinds of transportation, pipelines and electrical power lines, water and sewer lines, where applicable, with open space added.⁶

The open space function of the parkway belt has apparently become subordinate to the provision of service corridors. Open space would

5.

e.g. 300-500 feet for Highway 403, as estimated by the Parkway Belt Task Force and 100 feet for rapid transit as quoted in the provincial Parkway Belt report.

6.

Department of Treasury and Economics, Design for Development, The Toronto Centred Region (Toronto: Queen's Printer, May 5, 1970), p.19 (underlining added)

be provided, but

.... the essentials are that it would include as many parallel transportation facilities, servicing and energy facilities (pipelines as well as electrical) as possible, and at the same time provide the greatest degree of flexibility for the future.

Thus the TCR, as mentioned above, apparently maintained the belt at MTARTS width, did not specifically delete any MTARTS belt functions, but did shift the functional emphasis of the parkway belt from recreation to that of service corridor.

The TCR Status Report (August 1971)

In the Status Report of August 1971, the Province described the progress it had made to date in "refining", or making more specific, the TCR proposals.

1. Size. For the first time it was acknowledged that the width of the belt would fluctuate, "depending on the function that it is planned to perform in each area."⁸ The only parkway belt width mentioned was 2000 feet in Burlington, less than half the estimated original width of 5280 feet, which might give lead to the inference that if the belt were to fluctuate in width, it would fluctuate to less than the originally anticipated width.

2. Functions. Previously, the position taken had been that the corridor would be multi-purpose in all areas; in the Status Report, the functions performed by the belt were to be "one or more" or service-utility corridor, urban separator, environmental buffer, and low intensity uses.⁹ It was specified in this Report that locating the projected 500,000 KV Hydro corridor in the belt, had been considered but was rejected. (See the final section of this Comment for further discussion of this idea, which has again been recommended recently in the Howlett Report to the Solandt Commission.¹⁰)

7.

Ibid.

8.

Department of Treasury and Economics, Design for Development: A Status Report on the Toronto-Centred Region (Toronto: Queen's Printer, August 1971), p.7

9.

Ibid.

10.

Bruce Howlett Institute, An Environmental Study to Select Hydro Transmission Corridors for the Solandt Commission (Abstract) (Toronto: Solandt Commission, 1973).

The Parkway Belt: West

The Province's June 4 statement, accompanied by legislation providing for a zoning freeze on needed lands in the agricultural category, transformed the parkway belt from guiding concept into a concrete policy proposal. Two differing designations of the belt's location exist as a result of this announcement.¹¹ In this COMMENT, the Province's map will be used as the frame for public policy comment.

1. Size. The width of the east-west belt¹² is generally less than half the size of and thus much smaller than the original mile-wide belt as described by MTARTS. Only in two of the east-west portions of the belt as announced is the MTARTS width equalled or exceeded - in West Burlington, where the belt is 6900 feet wide and in part of the area above Metro between the Don and Rouge River where the belt is 8,000 feet wide.

In the entirety of Mississauga, with the exception of pre-existing or previously planned river valley conservation areas, the belt has been labelled a utility corridor, with the southern east-west width ranging between 700 feet and 1100 feet, and the northern east-west portion ranging between 600 feet and 800 feet. At a rough glance, the Mississauga portion comprises one-third of the total announced east-west belt length, making one-third of the total western belt a utility corridor rather than a parkway belt.

Various points on the belt are indicated on the map at the end of the Comment by letters of the alphabet, such as points A, B, C and so on. Width of the belt at point A is 6,900 feet, at B is 3,000 feet, at C is 1900 feet, at D is 600 feet, at E is 1100 feet, at F is 2800 feet, at G is 800 feet and at H is 4,000 feet.¹³

11.

The Province's and the Municipalities'. This difference is due to the fact that the curves of the belt could not be translated into legal terms to communicate the belt's location to municipalities, but had to be described in lot fractions. Thus, the municipalities' maps of the belt show geometric lines and right angles, whereas the Province's show curves.

12.

Focus will be on the east-west part of the belt since it performs the essential work of linkage functions and carries the bulk of the work of delineating communities; even without north-south minibelts, creekbeds and ravines would be able to perform east-west community delineation in most cases.

13.

All widths quoted except the 1900 foot Oakville width (a Bureau estimate from the Provincial map) are estimates by the TCR Parkway Belt Task Force in Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs.

2. Functions. Since the recent Parkway Belt report has been the only report since the MTARTS Report to spell out the belt's goals, its goals will be compared with the MTARTS goals. Surprisingly, for the belt is smaller than the MTARTS belt, the belt is assigned one more major function than was the case in the MTARTS report.

The belt's "four principles" are:

a) A service corridor moving all kinds of vehicles, energy, information. The MTARTS Report specified only transport link, not multi-purpose service links, thus giving over less of the width to non-open-space.

b) Community definition and separation, resultant provision of community identity. Also a MTARTS function. It is extremely dubious that these functions can be performed in those parts of the belt labelled "utility corridor." A narrow strip of highway and services does not negate a sense of urban sprawl on either side of it. And perhaps more than the half-mile width in other parts of the east-west belt may be required to perform this function.

c) Provision of a land reserve for the future. Not a MTARTS function. In some respects, this function, which is being performed in Burlington-Oakville and in Markham, seems to be a compensation for the lack of open space or width else where on the parkway belt. Seen thus, the function is superfluous to basic parkway belt goals.

d) Provision of open space and recreation. One of two primary MTARTS functions depending predominantly on width, since transport and ancillary functions would make up a relatively small part of the belt width. In MTARTS the belt in itself was a regional recreation resource, as well as a regional recreation link. In the Parkway Belt Report, emphasis is less on the belt as recreation resource than as recreational link.

The Parkway Belt Report admits that in some sectors individual functions predominate.¹⁴ In actuality, only the goal of service and transportation corridor was achieved over the entire length of the belt. In practice, therefore, the belt's functional emphasis in this Report is on service and transportation corridor roles.

14.

According to Ministry of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs, The Parkway Belt: West (Toronto: Queen's Printer, June 1973), p.8.

In summary, the east-west belt is generally half the original MTARTS mile width or less. (In comparison it may be noted that the Ottawa portion of the Ottawa-Hull greenbelt averages 2½ miles in width.¹⁵) In Mississauga the width is one-tenth to one-fifth the original width; and the Mississauga portion covers up to one-third of the announced belt. Moreover, the Report indicates that the belt must perform more functions than were included in the MTARTS belt. Because of the small size of the belt, the Report's list of goals could be considered either unrealistic or else a mask for the fact that only the service and transportation function has been performed over the belt's entire east-west length.

Possible Modifications

The province has shown great foresight and concern for future quality of life in announcing the parkway belt. The Bureau strongly endorses the parkway belt idea, since the belt can provide a strong separator, linkage and recreational element in a regional plan. But the belt has been extensively cut down from the original idea in some sections, whether for reasons of high land costs, or for other reasons, and thus may not be able to perform all its functions well. Hence, the Bureau also offers some suggestions which might allow the belt to approach more closely the complete fulfillment of its goals as originally described in the MTARTS Report over its entire length.

1. De-emphasize the land reserve function. This would possibly enable a shift of monetary resources from the extremely wide north-south minibelt lands in some areas such as Burlington and Oakville to the east-west sectors, and allow a resultant enlargement of east-west sectors. As stated before, east-west portions are the vital portions of the total parkway belt concept. East-west width target should be at least a mile.

2. As was mentioned in the previous section on the TCR Status Report, it has recently been recommended that a huge new Hydro corridor also be included in the parkway belt. The TCR Status Report had rejected the idea of including this huge project in the Parkway Belt. The recent recommendation was made by an environmental consultant, Bruce Howlett, to the Solandt Commission, a provincially-appointed commission inquiring into the Hydro Project. The recommendation was made after many months of public hearings were held on the subject of the corridor.

Adding the new Hydro corridor into the parkway belt will mean adding 400 feet to 550 feet of additional utility space into the belt.

15.

H. A. Hosse, "Ottawa's Greenbelt and its Anticipated Effects," Canadian Geographer, No. 17 (November 1960), p. 35.

If Hydro agrees to put two 230 KV lines underground, the corridor will add 400 feet; if not, it will add up to 550 feet.¹⁶ Hydro so far refuses to put the two 500 KV lines underground because of the expense and underdeveloped technology for doing so.

The Bureau can see only two instances in which the parkway belt might be able to accommodate this Hydro corridor and yet still perform all its intended functions well.

a) if all 4 lines were undergrounded;

b) if the parkway belt were first widened back towards its original width, then land above and beyond this widening in the amount required by Hydro were added on to the belt. In this instance, a heavy shrubbery camouflage would be required. Even if all these steps were taken, this approach might still be inadequate since the lines would still cross important conservation areas such as Kelso, Rattlesnake Point and Clairville.

3. In Mississauga, the presently outlined belt really is not the parkway belt. It should not be indicated as part of the belt on maps since it is extremely narrow. Leaving this portion of the belt as a narrow strip will have grave consequences for the belt, for the essence of a greenbelt is its continuity over some distance. Otherwise, there are two options for this part of the belt:

a) increase its southern link width of 1100 feet or less by three or four times, or b) if this is impossible due to "development pressure,"¹⁷ then the northern link width should be vastly increased. Since urban development is presently removed from much of this area except for the Brampton-Bramalea section, this might be feasible. Somewhere in or near Mississauga there should be a width sufficient to label the belt a "parkway belt" rather than a "utility corridor", whether this is in the middle or northern part of the town. It should be noted that a shift of the parkway belt to the northern portion would make the Mississauga portion of the parkway belt more like the MTARTS Goals I Plan than the Goals II Plan, but it would at least ensure a viable parkway belt in that area. The services and transportation routes could be kept in the presently outlined positions, but the "parkway" part concentrated in northern Mississauga.

4. If at all possible in the area north of Metro in Vaughan, the belt width should be extended to that in the Woodbridge area--the entire distance from CNR lines up to Highway 7.

¹⁶ See the Howlett Abstract, pp. 6,27 and 28.

¹⁷ The Parkway Belt: West, p.17

Parkway Belt



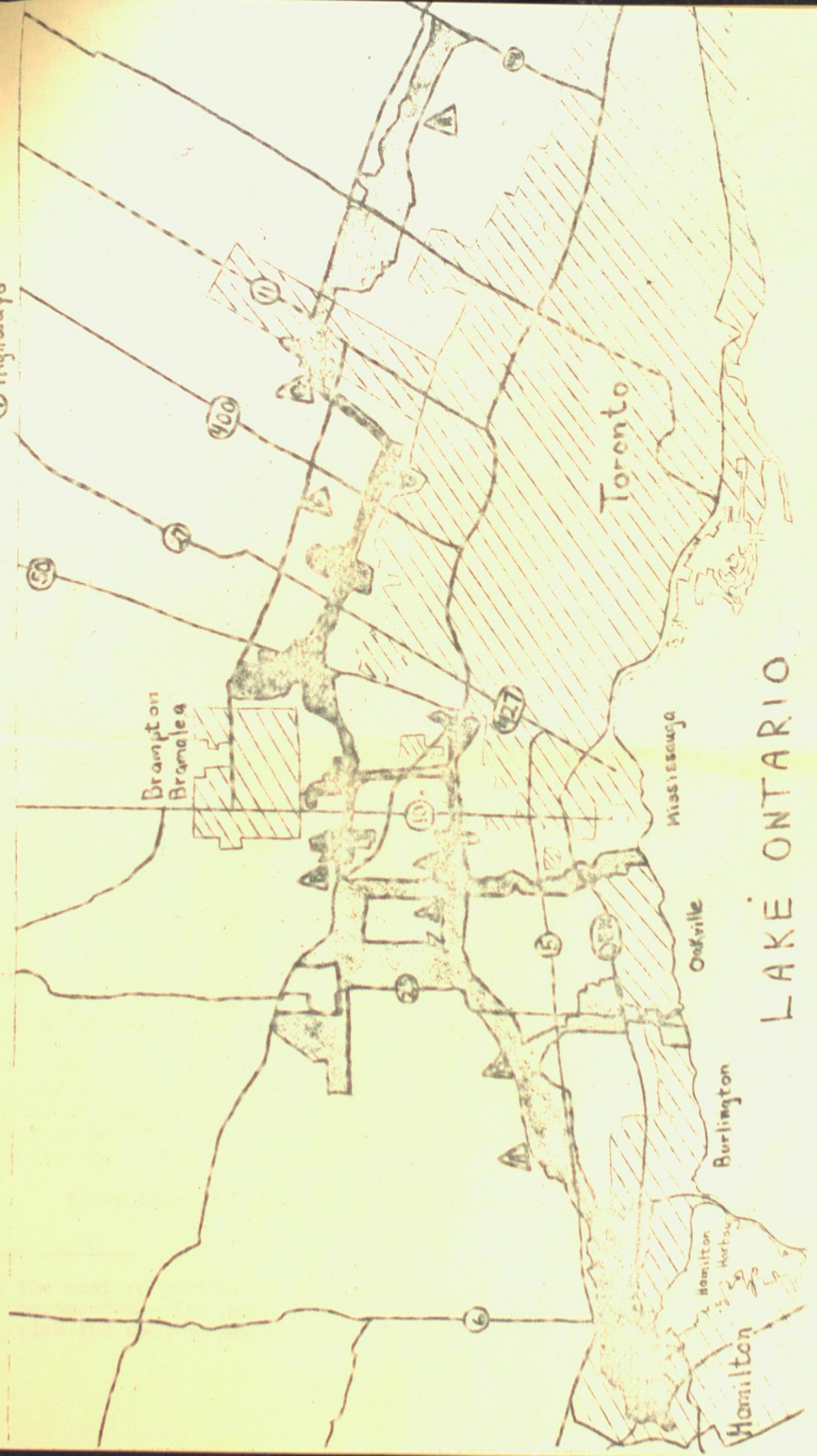
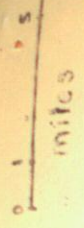
Present Build up Areas



Parkway Belt - West

▲ Reference points

⑦ Highways



LAKE ONTARIO