



Feedback on proposed Oak Park Road extension to Colborne Street West

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Dear Mr. Mayor and City Councillors,

As a long time resident of Brantford and avid user of our bicycle trail network, I am writing to express my concern at the proposed Oak Park Road Extension as described in the July 2019 Feasibility Study by Parsons Inc. There are at least four areas where I believe there are serious risks with this proposed project:

1. Recreation

From a recreational standpoint, this area is an important part of our trail network allowing for easy pedestrian/cycling crossing of the Grand River and access to Brant Park and the Southern rail trails that run down to Port Dover. The "preferred" Alternative 2B in the Feasibility Report which involves demolishing the existing trail bridge and replacing it with pathways alongside what will inevitably be a busy roadway will degrade the quality and safety of the trail network. The proposed separation between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicular traffic (which will inevitably include many large trucks) appears inadequate to ensure pedestrian/cyclist safety - especially for the many older and younger riders in the area. The rail trail network is not only important for exercise and recreation for citizens of Brantford, but it is also an important tourism resource and means to attract new residents.

2. Environment

Building a major four lane thoroughfare through what is identified by Parsons as an environmentally sensitive area with several endangered species and wetlands represents a major risk to degradation of the Grand River and its surroundings. The Grand is a designated Canadian Heritage River which gives us all a special responsibility to preserve it in its natural state. The building process and the bridge/roadway itself will increase the risk of toxic spills into the river (through accidents or runoff from the roadway) which will impact communities downstream of us. Hopefully the full Environmental Assessment will make clear how risky this will be.

2. Oakhill Cemetery

Many people have interred their loved ones at the Oakhill cemetery as a peaceful and pleasant spot near the river. That serenity would be destroyed by cutting the property in half and subjecting the area to years worth of heavy construction followed by unending traffic. This could present a risk of a class action lawsuit by families who have relatives at Oakhill. More engagement with those who have relatives buried at the Oakhill Cemetery is urgently needed.

3. Six Nations/Mohawk land claims

Finally, the Feasibility Report is completely silent on the issue of where this area stands with regards to potential land claims. I am not an expert on these highly complex issues, but the area is clearly within the Haldimand Tract and I can find no published reports of consultation on this aspect of the project (beyond the city giving up on the BSAR extension) or historical record of the area's status. This is very troubling and could involve the city in further controversy rather than contributing to reconciliation with The Six Nations and Mohawk peoples. At very least, there are potential First Nations archaeological remains in the area that could significantly delay the project and drive up costs.

Based on all this, I strongly recommend that council reconsider the current plan as presented in the Feasibility Study and look at other alternatives. The study itself says "Based on the **2041** capacity analysis, it has found that Rest Acres Road and Paris Road/Brant Avenue would be over capacity if the Oak Park Road extension is not constructed." This is a very long time horizon and there are other ways to reduce or reroute traffic over the next two decades - such as

better transit and cycling links - rather than just falling back onto the usual "build more roads" approach. Clearly, there are major developments going on off Hardy Road North of the River and the area south of Colborne could be developed further all of which will return development fees and taxes to the city. However, damage to the natural beauty of the Grand River will be permanent and will discourage new residents and businesses from moving here thus defeating the purpose of the development.

Council already has two major issues to deal with in the Arrowdale redevelopment decision and the recovery from the COVID crisis. This seems like enough for this municipal mandate. If this costly plan cannot be killed outright, then at very least, please delay this project so that it can be put clearly on the ballot for the 2022 municipal elections through a referendum. This will also allow more time to explore other alternatives and consult properly with local First Nations people.