

Oxtongue Lake Ratepayers Association

July 10, 2008

To the Ministry of Transportation, Ontario

Re: Replacement of the Oxtongue Lake Narrows Bridge (GWP 93-89-00) and Oxtongue River Bridge (GWP 5550-04-00), Township of Algonquin Highlands, County of Haliburton

The Oxtongue Lake Ratepayers Association, on behalf of all the property and business owners on Oxtongue Lake, is formally submitting the following comments and concerns regarding the replacement of the Hwy 60 bridge over the Oxtongue Lake Narrows (GWP 93-89-00) and replacement of the Hwy 60 bridge over the Oxtongue River (GWP 5550-04-00) in the township of Algonquin Highlands, county of Haliburton including any highway reconstruction in conjunction with the replacement of these two bridges.

While we understand and support the need to repair, redesign, and rebuild the affected stretch of highway and the bridges, we want to emphasize that this construction activity will clearly have a short term and potentially a profound long-term impact on the environment and quality-of-life of the full- and part-time residents of Oxtongue, including a potentially devastating effect on the resorts that have been catering to a loyal clientele year after year, in many cases for generations. The economy of Oxtongue is driven 100% by tourism, the success of which is made possible by the reliable old-town charm of Oxtongue, its rustic beauty, and the relaxed pace of day-to-day-life on this tranquil lake. Truly, these are the qualities that exemplify who we are, yet these attributes may be most at risk as a result of the proposed construction.

The extent of change made to the appearance and topography of the area is of grave concern. For example, while straightening out the highway may seem to be the most efficient course of action for the MTO given the current challenge, it will not be in the best interests of our community and its businesses if meeting that challenge requires blasting through scenic rock cliffs, cutting down hundreds of mature trees, and rerouting the trajectory of Hwy 60 through existing resorts, businesses and private property. We hope and trust that the architects and engineers will do their utmost to plan a path for the redesigned stretch of Hwy 60 that will have the lowest possible impact on the environment and the adjacent properties; to design the re-routed Hwy 60 in an aesthetic context appropriate to its current character; and to guarantee an immediate post-construction landscape that will closely emulate the one we have now. Oxtongue's appearance is crucial to its identity, its economy, and its very survival.

The implications of a potential increase in speed limit on the redesigned stretch of highway leading from the east to the Oxtongue Narrows bridge and into the hamlet of Oxtongue raises significant safety concerns. Currently, the posted limit is 80 kph. To parents with children and to homeowners with pets, not to mention to swimmers and pedestrians crossing the bridges or highway and to visitors/families out for a stroll, this speed seems too high as it is. Consequently, we respectfully ask that a lower speed limit be considered for the stretch of Hwy 60 leading into, through and out of the Oxtongue community.

It is common knowledge that a posted speed limit is rarely obeyed, even in the best of circumstances. Straightening out the road such that there is a clear straightaway onto and off the narrows bridge will only serve to encourage drivers of all types of vehicles to speed into (or out of) town faster than they already do. The most effective means of keeping speeds down and ensuring our community's safety would be to retain the characteristic curves approaching and leaving the narrows bridge.

A final concern is the immediate impact that the construction process itself will have on the entire Oxtongue Lake community. Any construction slated for the summer months, of course, will carry the most negative of consequences for everyone. There is no need here to list the significant and nightmarish complications caused by highway and bridge construction in a community as small as ours. We urge those who will be scheduling the proposed construction to restrict the loudest and most disruptive construction work on the Oxtongue Narrows bridge to the non-summer months, when there is less traffic and when there are fewer vacationers and pedestrians. This is not merely a matter of safety and convenience to landowners and cottagers, it is a matter of survival for several resorts and businesses. More specifically, if the construction of the highway and bridges significantly disrupts three of the most popular resorts/businesses on the lake—Algonquin Inn, Blue Spruce and Algonquin Outfitters—the Oxtongue economy may never recover.

It is hoped that the points raised in this letter will be considered very seriously. We trust that as research and plans progress, the MTO will keep us closely informed as to the architectural and design options being considered for Hwy 60 and the bridges and how the concerns raised in this letter are being mitigated, including the planned post-construction landscaping and the scheduling of construction.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Oxtongue Lake Community by the Oxtongue Lake Ratepayers Association,

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