Highway 3 Planning Study from St. Thomas to Aylmer
Public Information Centre # 1

Planning, Preliminary Design and Class Environmental Assessment Study

GWP 3039-24-00

highway3elgineast.ca

Ontario Stantec

Welcome to

Public Information Centre 1

The purpose of this Public Information Centre is to present and gather your feedback on:

- Project background and the process being followed
- Existing study area conditions
- Transportation needs and opportunities in the study area
- Alternatives to the undertaking (this study)
- Preliminary traffic modelling results
- Corridor alternatives
- Proposed evaluation criteria

Information related to this PIC is available on the project website www.highway3elgineast.ca

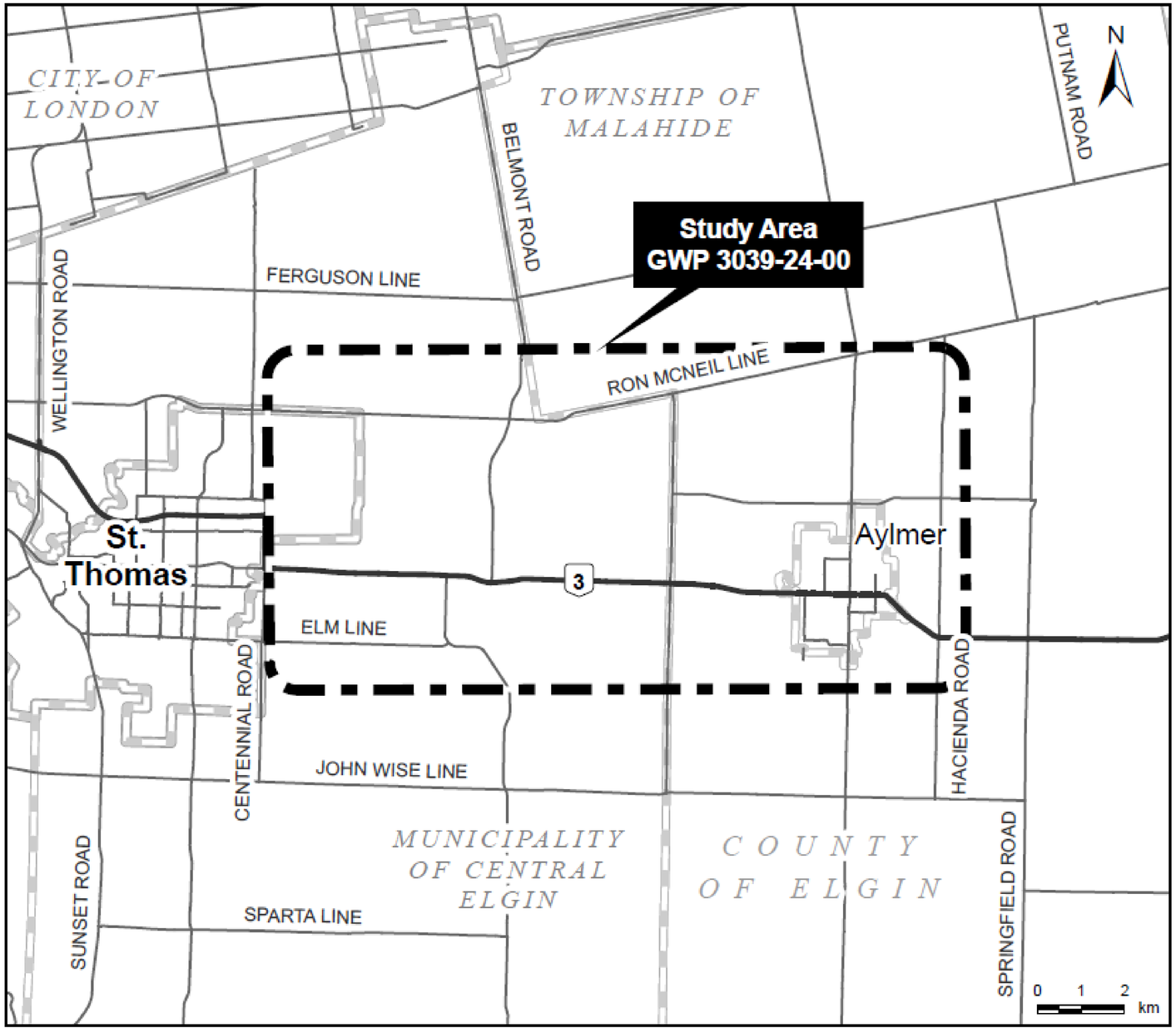
About the Project

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has retained Stantec Consulting Ltd. to undertake a Planning, Preliminary Design, and Class Environmental Assessment (EA) Study for Highway 3 from St. Thomas to Aylmer, in Elgin County.

This study will include reviewing existing conditions, transportation modelling, developing and evaluating potential new route alternatives and short-term improvements, and developing environmental protection and mitigation measures.

A Recommended Plan will be confirmed at the completion of the study. The preferred alignment will be designated following the study completion.

This study is a “Group A” project under the Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities and Municipal Expressways (2024), which is approved under the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act for provincial transportation projects of a defined scope and magnitude.



Study Area

Past Studies

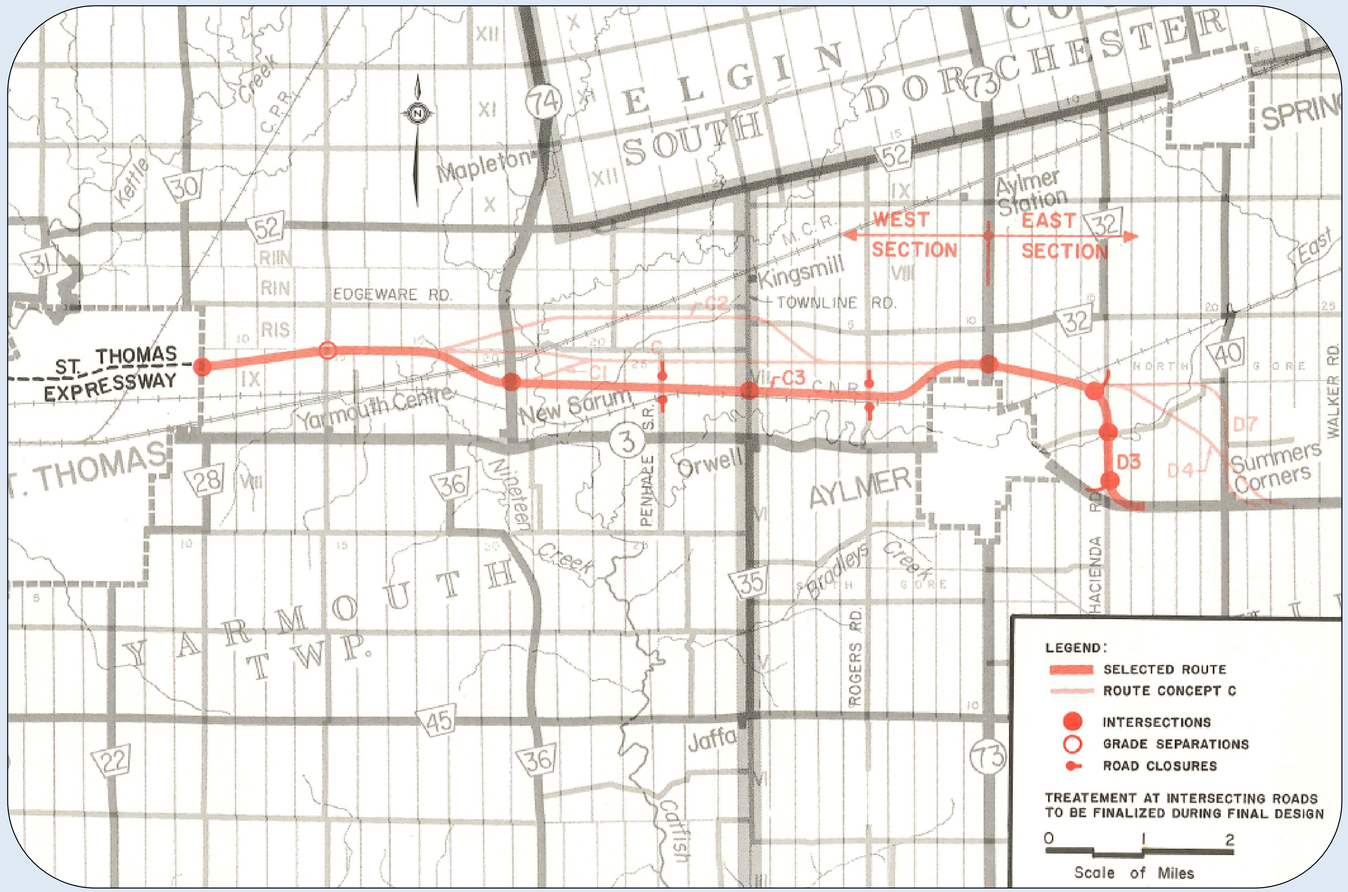
The Highway 3 transportation corridor has been extensively studied by MTO since approximately 1975.

A list of past studies completed by MTO is provided below:

- Highway 3 Route Planning Study 1975 – Previously Designated Route
- Highway 3 Role and Function Study from St. Thomas to Fort Erie 2002
- Highway 3 Transportation Needs Assessment Study 2015
- Highway 3 Feasibility Study 2021

The 2021 feasibility study recommended that MTO retain the existing Highway 3 East Bypass designation from Centennial Avenue to Springwater Road, and revisit both the designation and alignment through a future EA to identify the preferred corridor. Building on these recommendations led to the initiation of this Planning, Preliminary Design, and Class EA Study.

Together, these studies confirm the need to improve the connection between St. Thomas and Aylmer.



Designated Route from 1975 study

Adjacent Studies

In recent years, MTO and local municipalities have undertaken studies to improve the Highway 3 transportation corridor to identify needs and accommodate growth. Some of the major improvements have been listed below.

MTO Projects

Highway 3 Twinning (City of St. Thomas, Municipality of Central Elgin, and Township of Southwold) (https://highway3elgin.ca/)
- Construction of two additional lanes (i.e., twinning) along Highway 3 from Ron McNeil Line to Centennial Avenue (approximately 9.4 km).

Talbotville Bypass (Township of Southwold) (https://highway3elgin.ca/) **(construction underway)**
- Construction of a new Talbotville Bypass from Highway 4 to Highway 3 at Ron McNeil Line.
- Widening of Highway 4 from two (2) to four (4) lanes from Clinton Line to the new Talbotville Bypass (approximately 2.4 km).

Highway 3 Rehabilitation from Edward Street to Holland Avenue (St. Thomas to Aylmer) (construction scheduled August 2026)
- Pavement rehabilitation, sign replacements, and roadside safety improvements.

City of St. Thomas Projects

Construction of Technology Trail (https://www.stthomas.ca/) **(construction underway)**
- Extension of the St. Thomas Expressway (Highway 3) alignment to the east. Construction of Technology Trail, to MTO standards, easterly to Yarmouth Centre Road in 2 phases.

Centennial Avenue Realignment to Highbury Avenue & Highbury Avenue Widening (Highbury Widening - City of St. Thomas) **(construction complete)**
- New roundabouts at Highway 3 and at South Edgeware Road.
- Widening of Highbury Avenue.

Class Environmental Assessment Process

Group 'A' Project

Planning
Ongoing Transportation Needs Assessment

Preliminary Design

Data Collection:
Review available background information and conduct field investigations as required to identify existing conditions in the study area.

Generate and Assess:
Develop and assess Route Planning Alternatives and identify potential high-level impacts to existing natural, social and cultural environments to identify a preferred route planning alternative.

Generate and Evaluate:
Develop preliminary design alternatives and consider potential impacts to the existing natural, social and cultural environment to identify a Preferred Plan.

Select:
Identify the Preferred Plan. Identify mitigation measures to address potential impacts.

Finalize:
Complete Preliminary Design of the Preferred Plan including a potential implementation strategy.

Report:
Document the process leading to the Preferred Plan.

Clearance:
The Class EA requirements are met, and the project is cleared to proceed to Detail Design.

Notice of Study Commencement
February 2026

Public Information Centre #1
August 2026
We are here

Public Information Centre #2
Spring 2027

Study Design Report (30-Day Comment Period)
Spring 2027

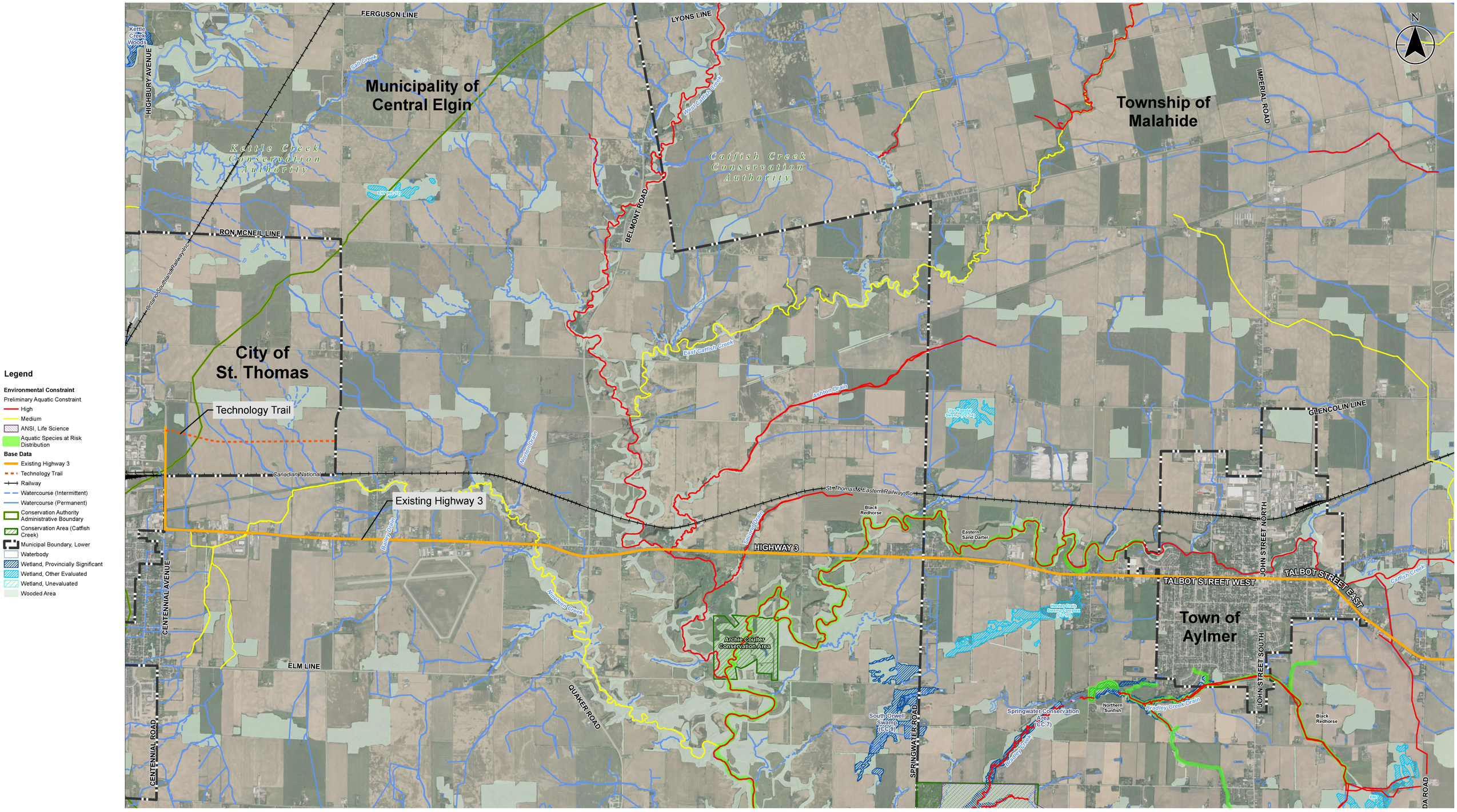
Public Information Centre #3
Fall 2027

Transportation Environmental Study Report (30-Day Comment Period)
Spring 2028

Consultation will continue throughout the Class EA process.

Dates are approximate and subject to change

Existing Conditions - Environmental



Source:
Data obtained from GeoHub: https://geohub.lio.gov.on.ca/, Contains information licensed under the Open Government License – data accessed 2026.

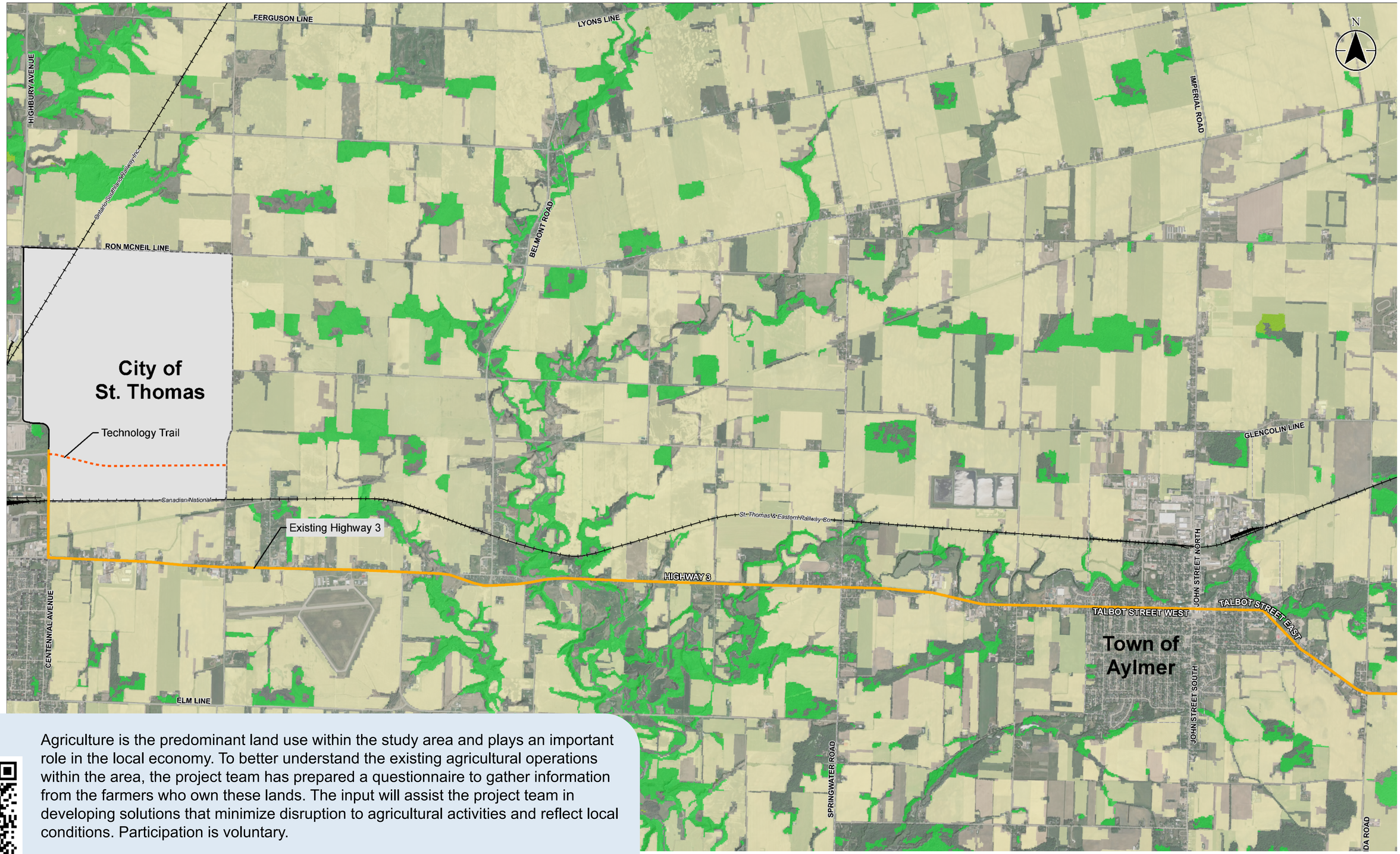
Existing Conditions – Agricultural Lands

Legend

SOLRIS - Agricultural Data
- Forest
- Coniferous Forest
- Mixed Forest
- Deciduous Forest
- Active Agricultural Land
- Developed Industrial Area

Base Data
- Existing Highway 3
- Technology Trail
- Railway
- Municipal Boundary, Upper
- Municipal Boundary, Lower

Source:
Data obtained from Southern Ontario Land Resource Information:
https://geohub.lio.gov.on.ca/documents/0279f65b82314121b5b5ec93d76bc6ba/about
and
https://geohub.lio.gov.on.ca/datasets/ontarioca11::soil-survey-complex/about



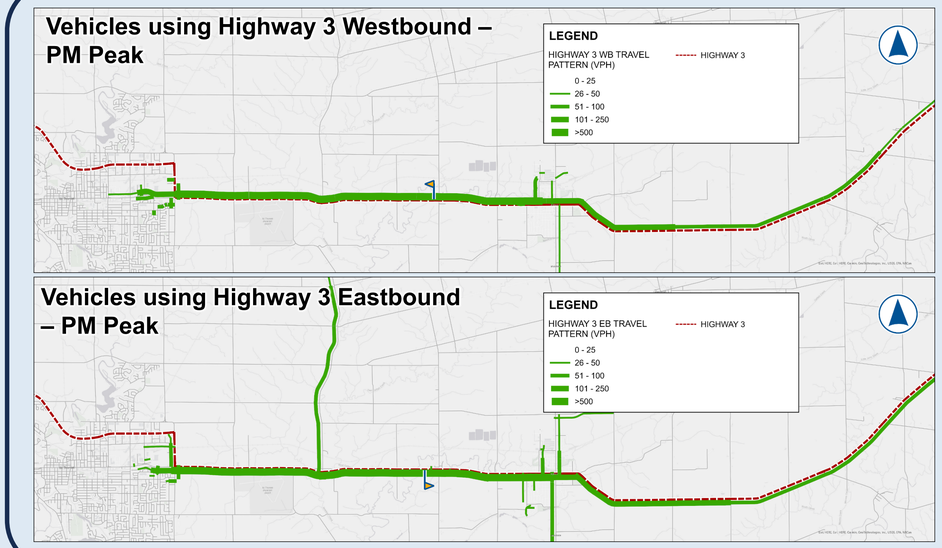
Agriculture is the predominant land use within the study area and plays an important role in the local economy. To better understand the existing agricultural operations within the area, the project team has prepared a questionnaire to gather information from the farmers who own these lands. The input will assist the project team in developing solutions that minimize disruption to agricultural activities and reflect local conditions. Participation is voluntary.

Comment forms are available at the sign-in table and on the project website. Please leave your completed comment form in the drop box provided or submit to comments@highway3elgineast.ca.

Transportation Modelling
Existing Traffic Conditions

How is Highway 3 used today?

- Highway 3 serves a mix of local and long distance auto and truck traffic
- Long distance auto and truck traffic makes up approximately 56% of peak hour traffic:
  - Continuing west using the St. Thomas Expressway (Highway 3) to access Highway 401
  - Continuing east to Tillsonburg
- During peak periods the majority of traffic using Highway 3 is travelling between the communities along the corridor (Tillsonburg, Aylmer, St. Thomas)
- Highway 3 also provides connections to main County Roads (CR) such as:
  - Highbury Avenue (CR 30)
  - Belmont Road (CR 74)
  - Quaker Road (CR36)
  - John Street / Imperial Road (CR 73)

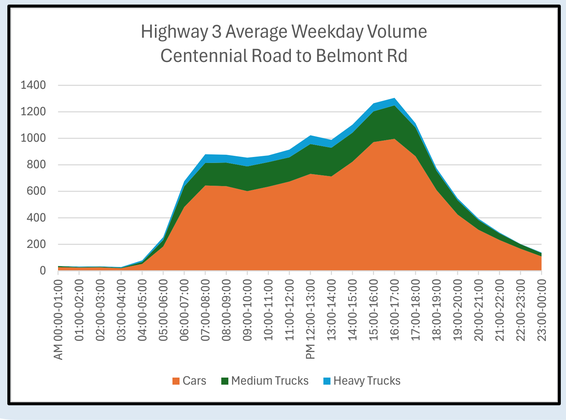


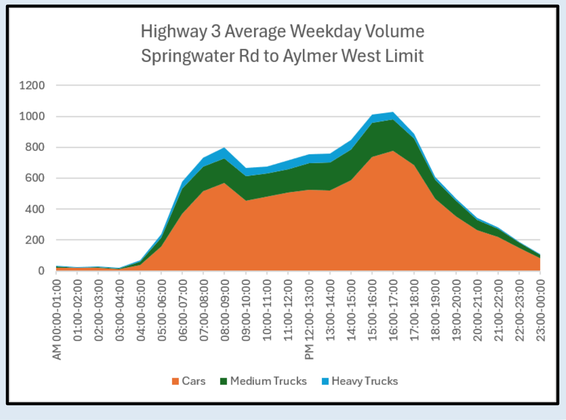
The green lines show the flow of traffic using Highway 3, just west of Springwater Road (the location of the arrow).

The green line shows where the traffic using this section of Highway 3 is coming from and where the traffic is going to and the width of the line shows the volume of traffic.

What type of traffic uses Highway 3?

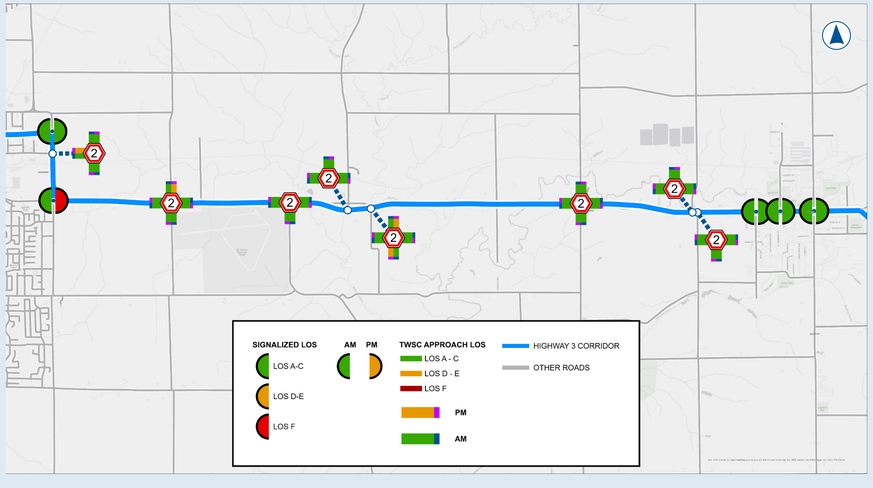
- About 20% of daily traffic are medium trucks
- About 5% of daily traffic are heavy trucks
- Traffic volumes grow steadily through the day and are highest in the afternoon peak
- Summer weekday traffic is 10% higher than the average weekday





How does Highway 3 operate?

- Highway 3 operates well during peak periods with moderate delays at Centennial Road (in the afternoon)
- Most sideroad intersections are unsignalized and experience modest delays entering or crossing the highway

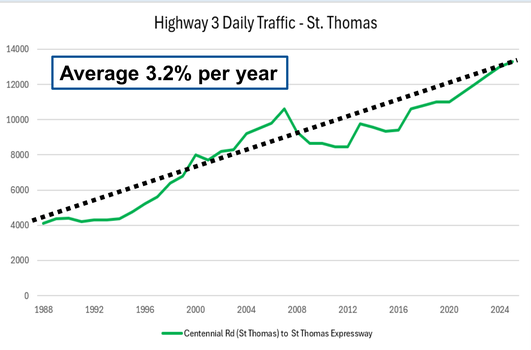


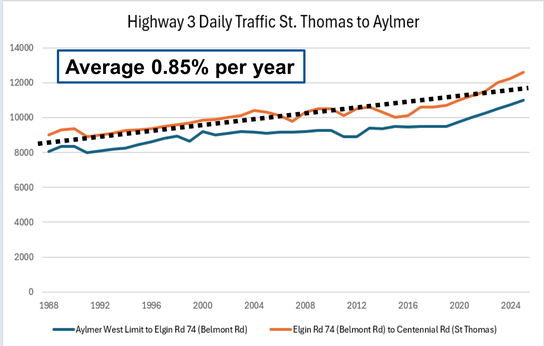
Transportation Modelling
Forecasting Future Growth

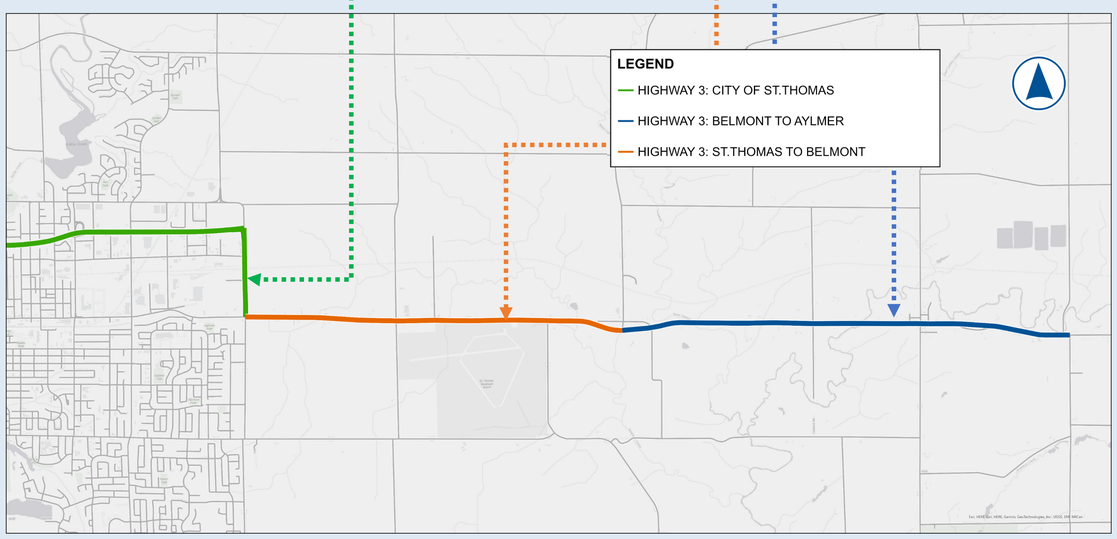
Two growth scenarios considered:

Historical growth in traffic on Highway 3

- Historical growth in traffic on Highway 3 shows rapid growth in the St. Thomas area (3.2 % per year)
- Lower rate of growth between St. Thomas and Aylmer (0.9% per year)

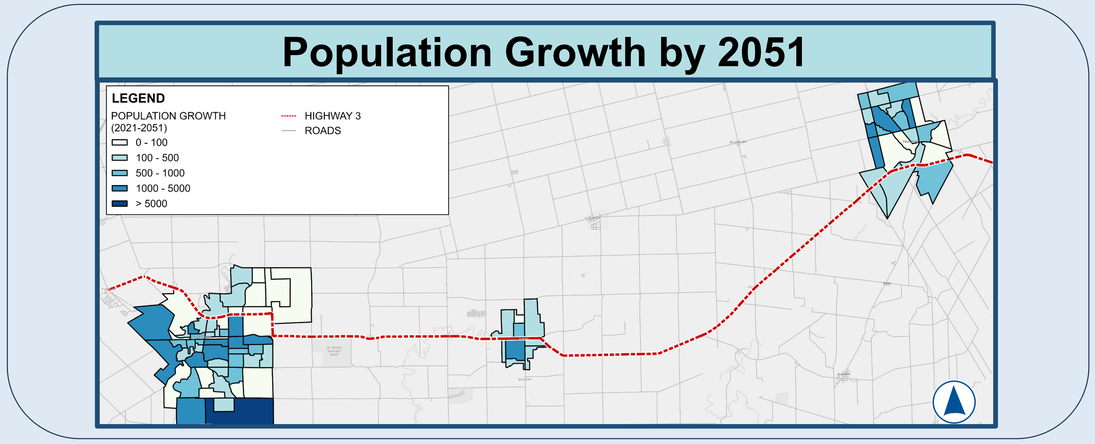


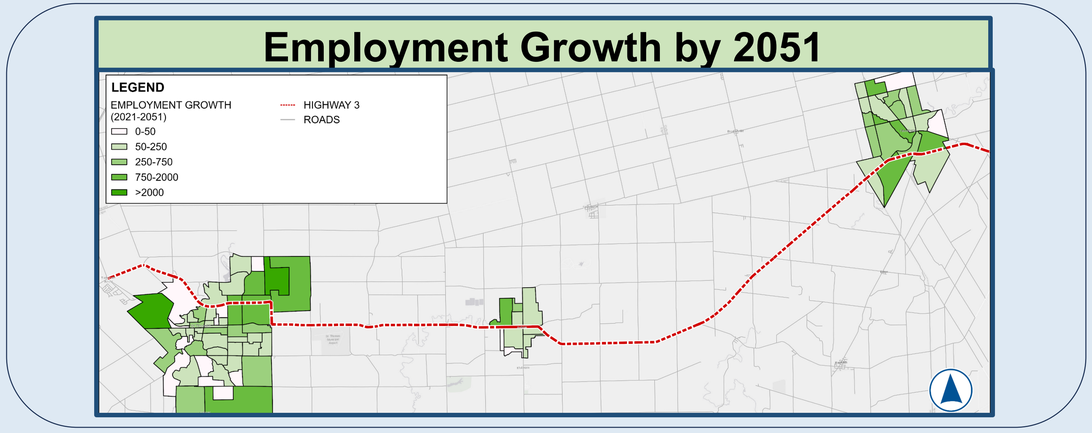




New population and employment in the area will increase travel demand on Highway 3

- Major industrial developments in St. Thomas are driving future population and employment growth in the entire area
- City of St. Thomas, Elgin County and Oxford County have prepared long term growth forecasts. In the Highway 3 corridor area:
  - Population is forecast to grow by 60,100 people by 2051
  - Employment is forecast to grow by 32,250 jobs by 2051
  - The new PowerCo Battery Plant is anticipated to employ 3,000 people when fully operational and is forecast to support up to 14,000 new indirect jobs in the region
- Population growth is anticipated to result in growth in Highway 3 traffic of approximately 2.0 – 2.5% per year





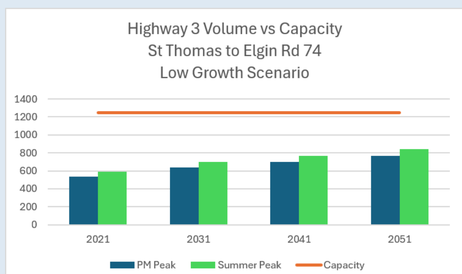
Transportation Modelling
Future Operating Conditions on Highway 3

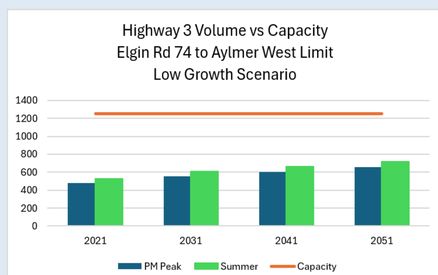
Two growth scenarios considered:

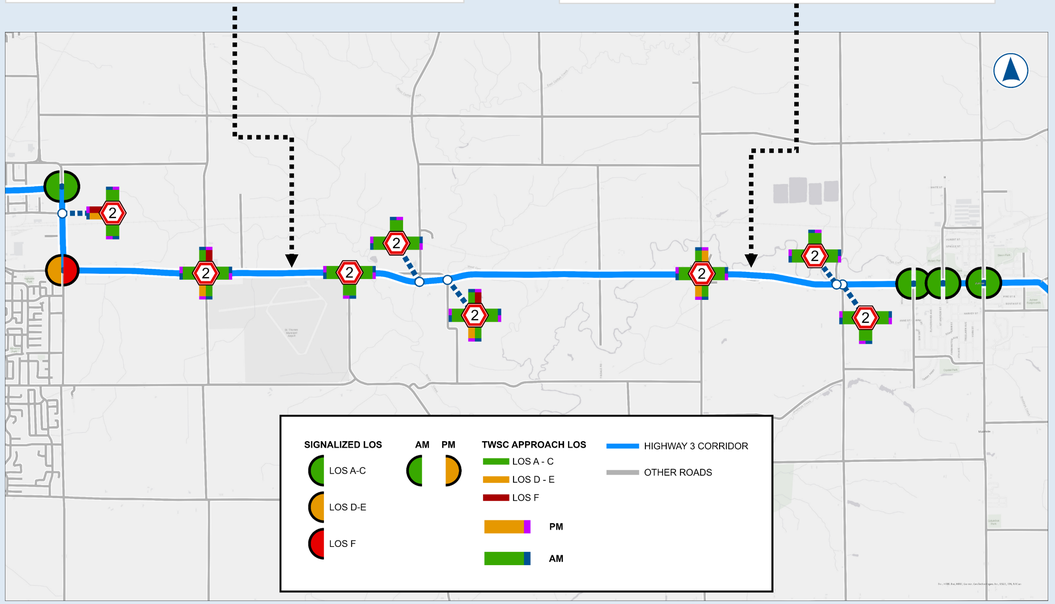
Historical growth in traffic on Highway 3

If traffic on Highway 3 grows the way it has in the past:

- Highway 3 will continue to operate below capacity
- Delays will increase at sideroad intersections
- Centennial Road / Highway 3 intersection will be over capacity in the PM Peak
- Signalized intersections in Aylmer will continue to operate under capacity although the east-west through movements will be approaching capacity



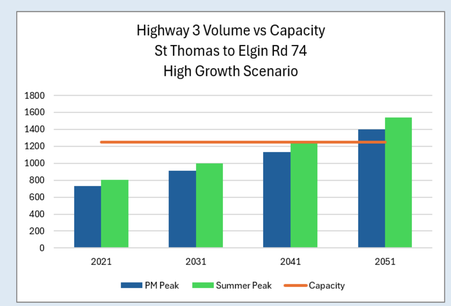


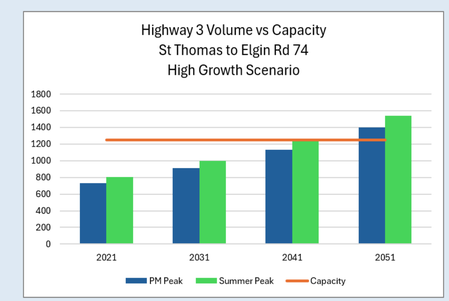


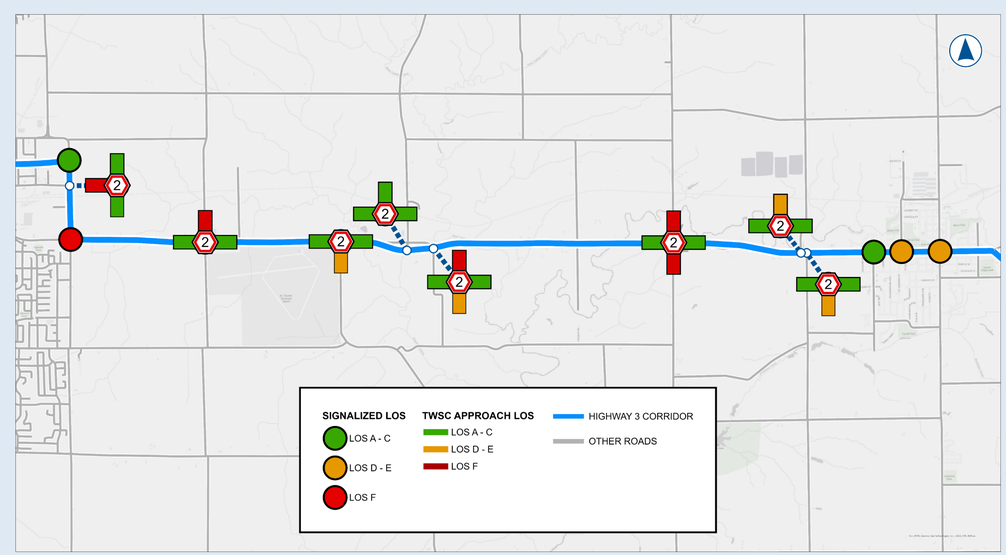
New population and employment in the area will increase travel demand on Highway 3

With additional population and employment growth in the study area:

- Highway 3 will be over capacity by 2051
- Centennial Road / Highway 3 intersection will be over capacity in both AM and PM Peak periods
- Traffic Signals will be required to provide gaps for sideroad traffic to enter or cross Highway 3 (Yarmouth Centre Road and Springwater Road)
- Signalized intersections in Aylmer will be over capacity during peak periods
- Highway 3 traffic will likely shift to other municipal roads







Transportation Needs Assessment

As part of the Class EA, Transportation Needs Assessment (TNA) is undertaken throughout the Planning phase of the process. This includes the collection of different programs, studies, etc., that are part of the ongoing management and administration of the transportation system. TNA involves the following key steps:

1. Identifying transportation problems and opportunities
2. Evaluating and selecting reasonable alternatives
3. Developing study objectives and the purpose of the undertaking
4. Initiating the study process

The purpose of the study is to identify transportation improvements to Highway 3, including a new arterial road connecting to the St. Thomas Expressway extension, known as Technology Trail, to improve transportation connections between St.Thomas, including Yarmouth Yards, and communities to the east.

Problems & Opportunities

Problems

- Traffic on Highway 3 will continue to increase as recent and future industrial, commercial and residential growth occurs, which will impact traffic operations and safety in the community
- Highway 3 is a two-lane undivided highway with at-grade intersections, and portions of it may not be suitable for the anticipated traffic growth in the study area
- Proposed and planned municipal roadway infrastructure improvements may not fully address potential future traffic capacity and traffic growth on Highway 3

Opportunities

- Improve east-west connectivity between St. Thomas and existing communities east of St. Thomas
- Provide additional east-west traffic capacity to accommodate the growth in east-west travel demand and anticipated changes in travel patterns east of St. Thomas
- Mitigate traffic impacts on local roads to the east of St. Thomas and Highway 3 to Aylmer to maintain the safety and operations of Highway 3 and the municipal road network in the study area

Alternatives to the Undertaking

The Class EA requires that 'reasonable alternatives' be considered to address identified challenges and opportunities. This involves two levels of analysis. The Alternatives to the Undertaking considers a broad range of alternatives that could address the project needs. Once the best alternative is selected, the Alternative Methods of Carrying out the Undertaking can be studied. A summary of the Alternatives to the Undertaking screened for this study are provided below:

Do Nothing Area transportation system would be limited to maintenance of current transportation infrastructure and the implementation of approved provincial and municipal initiatives	**Does not** address the problems and opportunities for the study area. **Do not carry forward.**
Optimize the Existing Area Transportation System Optimize the existing area transportation system by Travel Demand Management (TDM) and Transportation Systems Management (TSM). TDM will improve the operation of transportation by managing travel demand during peak hours. TSM will improve the transportation system through strategies and technology policy initiatives.	**Does not** address the problems and opportunities for the study area. **Do not carry forward.**
Expanded / New Non-Road Infrastructure Initiatives including new or improved local transit service for public transportation, increased freight rail services for goods movement, provide inter-regional transit and passenger rail and/or provincial transitways through new/increased services.	**Does not** fully address the problems for the study area. Opportunities for improving local transit service (bus) will be reviewed with the municipalities.
Widen / Enhance Existing Road Network Widen/enhance existing roads to improve capacity and operations and provide congestion relief on existing facilities through additional lanes to increase the performance of the transportation network.	**Does not** fully address the problems for the study area. Opportunities to enhance existing Municipal Roads and Highway 3 will be considered.
New Highway 3 Corridor New Highway 3 corridor to improve connectivity, increase capacity, and enhance safety and operational efficiency	**Addresses** the problems and opportunities for the study area. **Carry forward.**

Investigations

In accordance with the MTO Class Environmental Assessment process, this study includes engineering and environmental specialists who are carrying out background studies and site-specific investigations to support the development and the evaluation of alternatives, and to identify potential impacts and mitigation measures. The investigations for this study include, but are not limited to, the following:

Engineering Investigations

- Highway
- Traffic and Safety
- Bridge
- Drainage and Hydrology
- Geotechnical
- Foundations
- Electrical

Natural Environment Investigations

- Terrestrial
- Fish and Fish Habitat
- Species at Risk

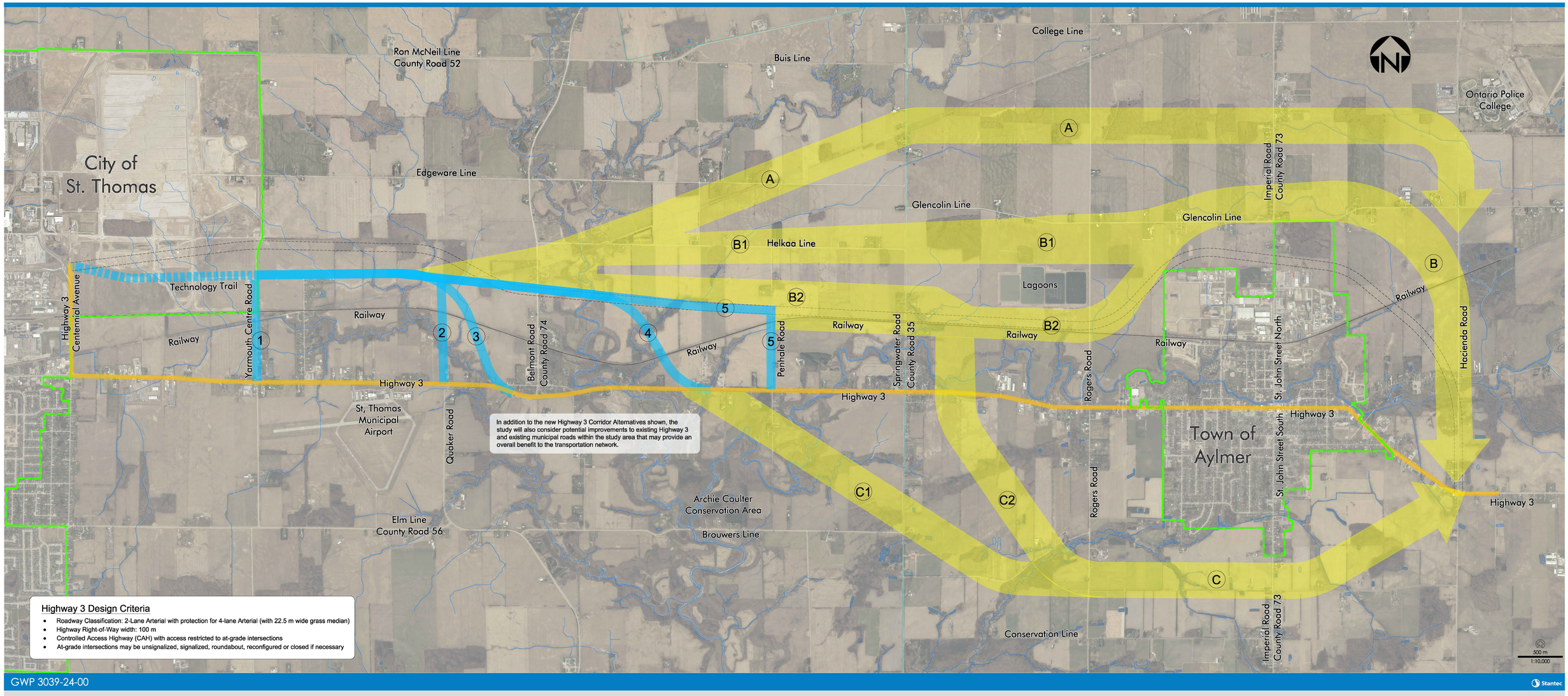
Socio-Economic Investigations

- Heritage
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Groundwater
- Archaeology
- Contamination
- Land Use

Corridor Alternatives

Highway 3 Corridor Alternatives

From St. Thomas to Aylmer



A high-resolution version of the Highway 3 Corridor Alternatives figure is available on the project website and at the following link: [Highway 3 Corridor Alternatives]

Evaluation Process

Step 1 – Identify Evaluation Factors & Criteria

Evaluation criteria are established through:

- Provincial guidelines
- Existing conditions
- Similar projects
- Public input

Please see the next board for the draft evaluation criteria.

Step 2 - Screen Alternatives

Several alternatives will be identified and screened based on their ability to satisfy the problems and opportunities. Feasible alternatives will be carried forward for more detailed evaluation against the evaluation criteria.

Step 3 - Evaluate Alternatives

The evaluation process will consider a range of engineering and environmental (natural, socio-economic and cultural) factors in the study area. Alternatives will be evaluated using a comparative analysis based on the evaluation criteria and consideration of the benefits and impacts of each alternative. The evaluation process will provide an objective approach to the analysis and evaluation of each alternative.

Step 4 - Rank Alternatives

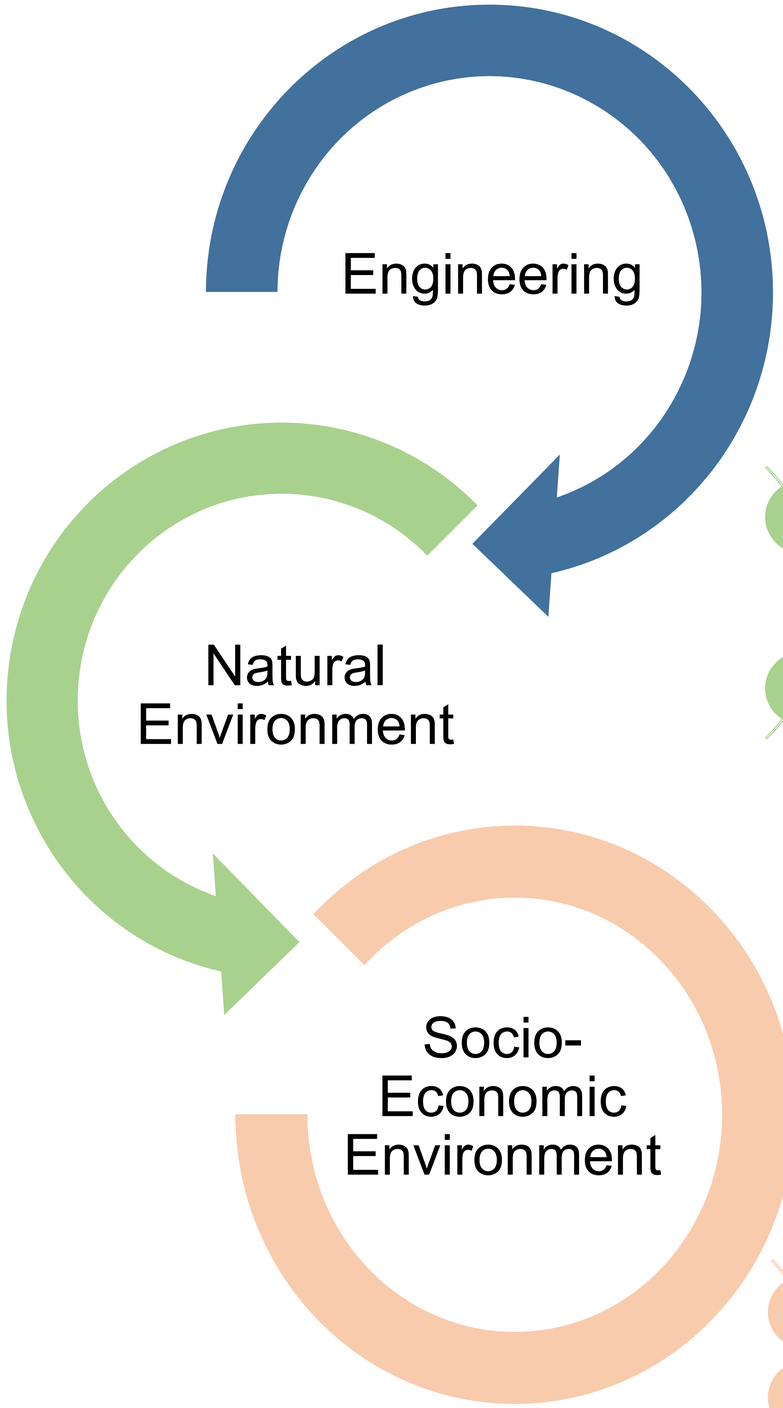
Each alternative will be ranked to provide an overall recommendation (Most Preferred, Moderately Preferred, Least Preferred). This is the basis for identifying the Preferred Plan.

Step 5 – Preferred Plan

The Preferred Plan will be selected and presented to the public, stakeholders and external agencies at the second PIC.

Preliminary Evaluation Criteria

The following factors and criteria will be used to evaluate the alternatives carried forward:



- Traffic Forecasting & Operations
- Geometrics & Safety
- Constructability
- Utilities and Railway
- Connectivity with Local Road Network
- Construction Cost
- Terrestrial Ecosystem
- Species of Conservation Concern, Species at Risk
- Fish & Fish Habitat
- Property
- Agriculture
- Noise
- Air Quality
- Contamination
- Stormwater and Drainage
- Cultural Heritage Resources
- Archaeological Resources

The Preferred Plan…

EVALUATION FACTOR

Engineering

- Will improve east-west connectivity between the St. Thomas Expressway/Technology Trail and existing Highway 3 east of St. Thomas
- Provides additional east-west capacity to accommodate the growth in east-west travel demand and anticipated changes in travel patterns east of St. Thomas
- Mitigates traffic impacts on local roads to the east of St. Thomas and Highway 3 to maintain the safety and operations of Highway 3 and the municipal road network in the study area
- Uses conventional construction techniques that have long-term stability
- Has favourable geotechnical and foundation conditions
- Minimizes impacts to rail, watercourse and utility crossings
- Minimizes the total cost, including construction, utility relocation, maintenance and property

Natural Environment

- Avoids/minimizes impacts to Species-at-Risk and associated habitat
- Avoids/minimizes impacts to fish resources and fish habitat Terrestrial Ecosystems
- Has the least impact to terrestrial resources including wetlands, watercourses, wildlife habitat
- Minimizes impacts to ground and surface water quality and quantity, groundwater protection areas
- Avoids impacts to provincially significant wetlands and conservation areas

Socio-Economic Environment

- Has the least impacts to existing businesses
- Minimizes impacts to private property
- Avoids/minimizes impacts to active agricultural land and operations
- Avoids/minimizes impacts to potential area of Contamination Concern
- Avoids/minimizes impacts to potential Cultural Heritage Resources
- Avoids/minimizes impacts to potential Archaeological Resources

Property Acquisition Process

Impacts to private property are anticipated as part of this study. MTO is committed to working with property owners to make sure they understand the property acquisition process and their rights. Property owners are entitled to fair compensation and will be treated in a consistent manner. As the design progresses, property owners will be notified if their property will be impacted by construction.

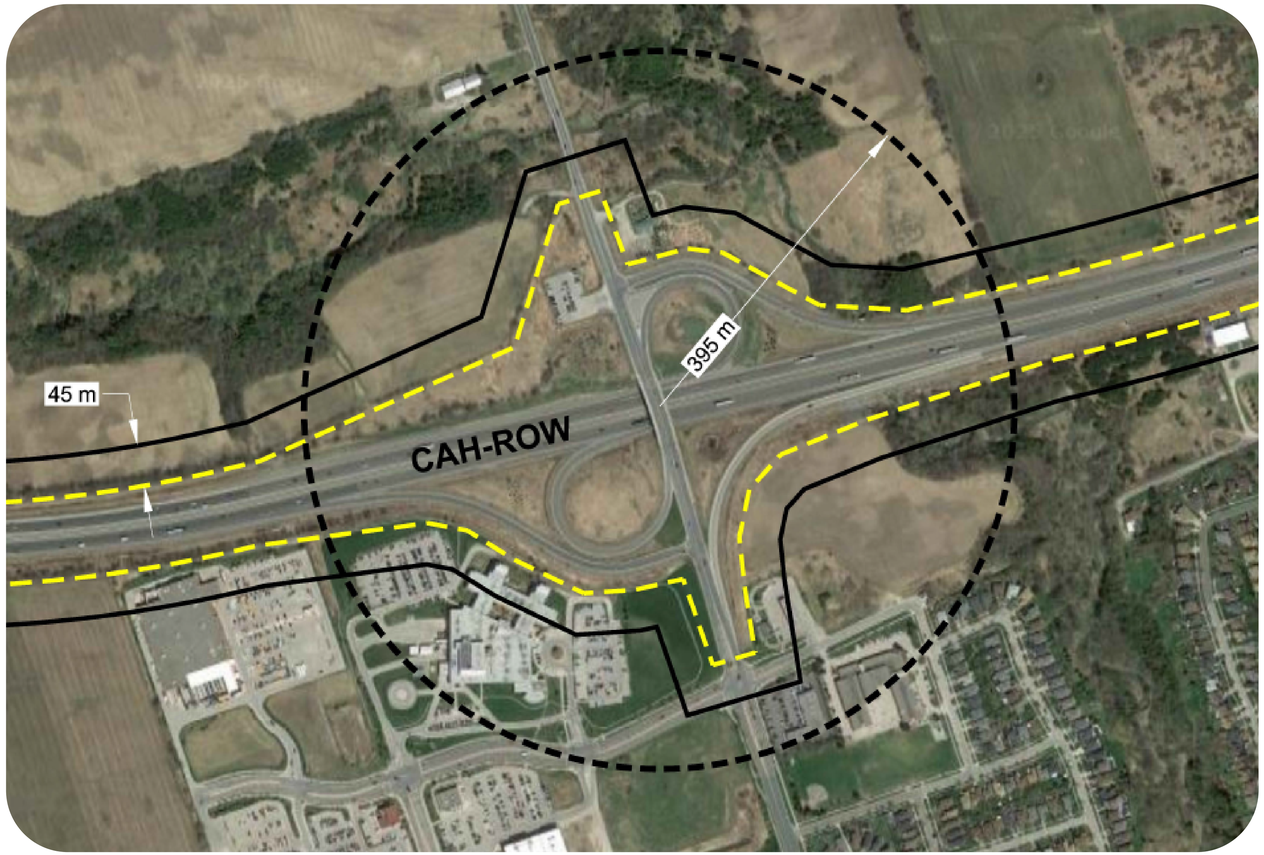
MTO will contact all affected property owners and make offers to purchase based on an independent market appraisal. An MTO Real Estate Officer will meet with you one-on-one, discuss property value and compensation, answer your questions and listen to your concerns.

For more information on the property acquisition process, please reference the Property Brochure available in-person at PIC 1, and available for download on the project website at www.highway3elgineast.ca. Alternatively, you may contact the MTO Property Supervisor below:

Cindy Brooks
Property Supervisor
Ministry of Transportation
659 Exeter Road
London, Ontario N6E 1L3
Tel: 519-854-8652
Email: Cindy.Brooks@ontario.ca

Designation and MTO Permit Control Areas

Once a Technically Preferred Alternative has been identified, MTO may designate lands as highway and acquire property prior to EA process completion. A designation enables MTO to provide route/corridor protection through the application of development control measures along the corridor and in the vicinity of the designated lands. For more information about highway corridor management, please visit: https://www.ontario.ca/page/highway-corridormanagement.



Note: Limit of the MTO right-of-way shown on the figure is for illustrative purposes only.

Any work on private property that is within 45 metres of the highway property or 395 meters from the centrepoint of an intersection or interchange requires approval from the MTO.

Any work on private property that is within 800 metres of the highway property and that may have a large impact on traffic, is also subject to approval from MTO.

For more details on requirements for permits, please visit: https://www.Ontario.ca/page/highway-corridormanagement or make an inquiry regarding a specific property: https://www.hcms.mto.gov.on.ca/

Consultation Opportunities

There will be future consultation opportunities throughout this study to learn more about the project and to provide your feedback. These opportunities include the following:

- Agricultural Survey
- Public Information Centre 2 (PIC 2)
- Study Design Report (SDR)
- Public Information Centre 3 (PIC 3)
- Transportation Environmental Study Report (TESR)

Study Design Report

The SDR is a requirement for Group 'A' projects following the Class EA process, and will be made available for 30-day public comment period following PIC 2. The purpose of the SDR is to summarize the study process that will be followed, document the planning decisions that have been made with respect to the assessment and selection of the Preferred Alternative to the Undertaking. The Project Team will follow the plans and decisions outlined in the SDR unless modifications are made as a result of the comment period, or new and directly applicable information is obtained during the study.

Transportation Environmental Study Report

The Planning, Preliminary Design and Class EA process will be summarized in a final TESR. The purpose of the TESR is to describe the project, document input received from the public, external ministries, relevant stakeholders, agencies and municipalities, provide an overview of the alternatives considered during the study, document the evaluation of the alternatives, the Preferred Plan, and impacts and mitigation measures. The TESR will be made available for a 30-day public comment period.

Next Steps in the Process

The steps below will be completed following this PIC:

- Review, consider and respond to the comments received
- Refine and assess corridor alternatives
- PIC 2 to present and gather feedback on the evaluation of corridor alternatives and present preliminary design alternatives
- Study Design Report 30-day public comment period
- Confirm Preferred Plan and identify impacts and mitigation measures
- PIC 3 to present and gather feedback on the Preferred Plan
- Prepare Transportation Environmental Study Report for 30-day public comment period

Discussion and Ways to Provide Your Feedback

Visit the Study website:
http://www.highway3elgineast.ca/

Email comments@highway3elgineast.ca

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All media inquiries shall be directed to MTO's Communications Branch at (416) 327-1158 or mto.media@ontario.ca.

We would appreciate receiving your comments by September 25, 2026.
Thank you for your interest in this study!

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
Comments and information regarding this study are being collected to satisfy the requirements of the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act, and in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act. With the exception of personal information, all comments will become part of the public record.