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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT IMPROVEMENTS WILL PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT; SAVE TIME AND MONEY

Balanced And Innovative Changes In Everyone's Best Interest

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is proposing changes to the environmental assessment (EA) process that will make it easier to navigate and enable major infrastructure projects that are well planned environmentally to proceed more quickly, Environment Minister Laurel Broten announced today.

“A more effective and efficient environmental assessment process will serve everyone better; it will protect the environment while saving time and money in the planning of energy, transit and waste initiatives,” Broten said. “Our proposals will mean a faster yes or a faster no for applicants while completely protecting the environment.”

The EA process promotes good environmental planning by determining the potential effects of infrastructure projects before they begin. The ministry is proposing a number of changes to both shorten the government decision-making process and ensure sound environmental planning and will work with EA practitioners, environmental and community groups, as well as the public to:

- Streamline the approvals process for transit projects
- Develop a new waste regulation that standardizes the process based on type, size and impact of project
- Integrate the EA process with planning processes under other provincial legislation to reduce duplication especially for energy, transit and waste initiatives
- Ensure projects receive a level of review appropriate to their potential environmental impact
- Improve education and guidance to eliminate confusion and false starts.

The proposed improvements would result in a process that uses the best available science, and give proponents the tools to get projects through the EA process faster without sacrificing environmental protection. Time and costs savings will depend on the size and complexity of the project.

“With these improvements, we are ensuring that environmental protection remains a priority in the planning process,” Broten said. “An improved EA process means Ontarians will benefit more quickly from much-needed infrastructure in Ontario.”

In June 2004, the government created an advisory panel, comprised of experts from academia, industry, the legal profession and municipalities to provide recommendations on improving the EA process, with a focus on three sectors – energy, waste and transit/transportation. Their proposals, along with recommendations from other stakeholders, provided valuable guidance.

Today's announcement is just one way the McGuinty government is helping Ontario communities and industries and protecting the environment. Other initiatives include:

- A \$1.2 billion investment in new or improved transit, municipal roads and bridges.
- Dedicating \$838 million in 2006 to expand and modernize public transit in the GTA.
- Establishing a target to produce five per cent of Ontario's electricity from renewable sources by 2007 and 10 per cent by 2010.
- A plan to include five per cent ethanol in gasoline that kicks in January 1, 2007, which will make Ontario gasoline among the cleanest in North America.

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