

Reduce Traffic Congestion

Keep Highway Traffic on the Highways — Keep Burlington Moving

Traffic congestion has become one of the most frustrating quality-of-life issues facing Burlington residents.

Part of the problem is local traffic. But a significant part is something Burlington cannot solve simply by widening local roads.

Our city sits at one of the most important transportation bottlenecks in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

The QEW, Highway 403 and Highway 407 converge through Burlington, while traffic travelling around the western end of Lake Ontario is ultimately constrained by highway capacity approaching and crossing Burlington Bay.

When those highways slow down, navigation systems increasingly redirect motorists onto Burlington streets.

The result is **highway cut-through traffic using our community as an alternative highway network.**

Residents experience the consequences on streets such as Guelph Line, Appleby Line, Walkers Line, New Street, Lakeshore Road and numerous connecting and residential streets.

My objective is straightforward:

Keep regional and interregional traffic moving on the highway system where it belongs, manage Burlington's major roads much more intelligently, provide better transportation alternatives and discourage inappropriate shortcuts through residential neighbourhoods.

There is no single solution. We need to work on all of them.

The Highway Bottleneck

Burlington occupies a unique position in Ontario's highway network.

Traffic moving between Toronto and Hamilton, Niagara and southwestern Ontario converges through the QEW/Highway 403 corridor and ultimately toward the highway bridges across Burlington Bay.

That creates a fundamental capacity challenge.

When traffic on the QEW is flowing, Burlington's local road system generally functions much better.

When the highway stops, Burlington increasingly becomes the detour.

That is why solving Burlington's congestion problem requires us to look beyond Burlington's municipal boundaries.

The Province Is Beginning to Address Highway Capacity

The Province of Ontario has already begun planning and undertaking improvements to the QEW and its interchanges through Burlington.

That is important.

The highway system through the area between Guelph Line, Highway 403, the Freeman Interchange and the approaches toward Burlington Bay needs sufficient capacity to keep provincial highway traffic moving rather than spilling onto Burlington streets.

I support those improvements and will continue advocating for the Province to address this corridor as an integrated transportation system rather than as a series of individual intersections and highway segments.

Every vehicle that can remain moving efficiently on the provincial highway network is one less vehicle looking for an alternative route through Burlington.

Burlington Bay Is the Bigger Long-Term Question

There is also a much larger issue that Ontario eventually has to confront.

How much traffic can we continue funnelling through the existing highway crossings at Burlington Bay?

I have been advocating for years—and will continue advocating—for the Province to examine increased highway crossing capacity at Burlington Bay.

That could ultimately mean additional bridge capacity or consideration of a **tunnel beneath the Burlington Bay entrance to Lake Ontario.**

Those are obviously major provincial infrastructure decisions. They require engineering, environmental assessment, extensive planning and substantial investment.

They are not projects Burlington can undertake itself.

But the fact that a solution is difficult or expensive does not mean governments should avoid examining it.

Transportation infrastructure has to be planned decades ahead.

The Greater Golden Horseshoe will continue to depend upon this corridor for the movement of people and goods. We need to understand now what capacity will be required 20, 30 and 50 years from today.

I will continue pressing the Province to undertake that long-term work.

Keep Highway Cut-Through Traffic Out of Neighbourhoods

Increasing highway capacity is only part of the solution.

We also have to address what happens when highways become congested.

Navigation technology has fundamentally changed traffic behaviour.

A driver unfamiliar with Burlington can now be automatically directed off the QEW, through a residential neighbourhood and back onto the highway if an algorithm calculates that doing so will save several minutes.

One driver's shortcut may seem insignificant.

Thousands of drivers making the same decision can fundamentally change a neighbourhood.

Residential streets were never intended to operate as extensions of the provincial highway network.

The answer is not simply to close streets or make it impossible for residents to move conveniently through their own neighbourhoods.

We need targeted, evidence-based solutions.

That can include traffic-calming measures, turn restrictions where warranted, signal-management strategies, intersection design, signage and other practical measures that make inappropriate neighbourhood shortcuts less attractive while maintaining reasonable access for residents.

The principle should be:

Move traffic efficiently on the roads designed to carry it—and protect residential streets from traffic that doesn't need to be there.

Smarter Traffic Management

Technology also gives us an opportunity to make much better use of the road capacity Burlington already has.

Halton Region is implementing an **Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS)** across the Regional road network.

This is an important change.

Traditional traffic signals generally operate according to timing plans developed from historical traffic patterns.

But traffic doesn't always behave according to a predetermined schedule.

A highway collision, severe weather, construction or an unusual surge in traffic can change conditions within minutes.

Advanced traffic management allows the road network to become much more responsive.

Halton's system is being implemented in three stages.

Tier One connects traffic signals to the Region's Traffic Monitoring Centre, allowing centralized real-time monitoring of signal operations.

Tier Two adds connectivity to video-detection cameras, providing greater visibility into actual road conditions.

Tier Three introduces more advanced capabilities, including CCTV integration, adaptive traffic-signal control and transit-signal priority.

Burlington's Regional traffic signals are being brought into the system during 2026.

That creates an important foundation for smarter traffic management.

Signals That Respond to Traffic

The most exciting opportunity is **adaptive traffic-signal control**.

Instead of relying exclusively on preset timing, adaptive signals use real-time traffic information to continually adjust signal timing according to actual demand.

Halton Region began testing this technology on Trafalgar Road in Oakville in 2025.

The Region reports that early results demonstrated measurable improvements in travel times and traffic flow, including a significant reduction in afternoon congestion and queueing at a previously problematic intersection.

That is exactly the kind of technology I want us to apply to Burlington's busiest corridors where the evidence demonstrates that it will help.

Our traffic lights should increasingly respond to the traffic that is actually on the road—not simply the traffic pattern that engineers predicted when the timing plan was created.

Coordinate With the QEW

The next opportunity is even more important.

Burlington's traffic-management system should not operate as though the QEW doesn't exist.

Highway conditions directly affect Burlington streets.

Halton Region already coordinates transportation monitoring with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation and neighbouring municipalities.

I want that cooperation to continue developing.

If there is a major slowdown on the QEW, our traffic-management systems should be capable of recognizing the resulting pressure on Burlington's road network and responding as intelligently as possible.

Ultimately, transportation should increasingly be managed as an interconnected network rather than as separate City, Regional and Provincial systems.

Modernizing Transit Is Part of the Traffic Solution

We also need to give residents practical alternatives to driving.

That is why my proposal to **Modernize Burlington Transit** is directly connected to reducing congestion.

I am advocating greater use of smaller, electric, on-demand vehicles that can take residents much closer to where they want to go, when they want to go.

The objective is to attract thousands of residents who rarely or never use conventional transit today.

Three groups present particularly significant opportunities:

Seniors and older adults, who need convenient local mobility.

Young people, who cannot yet drive and currently depend heavily on parents.

Last-mile commuters, who could use convenient on-demand transportation between their homes, GO stations and workplaces.

Every trip shifted from a private automobile to an attractive shared transportation service is potentially one fewer vehicle contributing to congestion.

We won't reduce traffic by telling residents not to drive.

We reduce traffic by providing alternatives good enough that people voluntarily choose to use them.

Don't Simply Widen Every Burlington Road

I don't believe the answer to congestion is automatically to widen every road.

Burlington is a mature city.

Road widening can be enormously expensive, require additional land, affect homes and businesses, reduce trees and green space and sometimes simply move a bottleneck farther down the road.

There will be locations where additional road or intersection capacity is justified.

But before spending millions of dollars adding pavement, we should ask whether better signal coordination, intersection improvements, traffic management, transit or other operational changes can produce a better result.

Our objective should be to **maximize the capacity and performance of the infrastructure we already own before automatically building more of it.**

Safety and Mobility Must Work Together

Keeping traffic moving does not mean sacrificing safety.

Residential streets must remain places where people can safely walk, cycle, play and access their homes.

Major roads need to move significant volumes of traffic, but intersections must also work safely for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.

The challenge is designing each part of the network according to the job it is supposed to perform.

Major corridors should move traffic efficiently.

Residential streets should primarily serve residents and local destinations.

Transit should provide a compelling alternative to driving.

And provincial highways should carry the interregional traffic for which they were built.

My Priorities for the Next Four Years

1. Keep highway traffic on the highways. Continue pressing the Province to improve QEW capacity and the major highway interchanges through Burlington so congestion does not continually spill onto City streets.

2. Advocate for a long-term Burlington Bay capacity solution. Continue calling on the Province to examine additional bridge capacity and/or a tunnel beneath the Burlington Bay entrance as part of Ontario's long-term transportation planning.

3. Complete Burlington's Advanced Traffic Management System implementation. Use real-time monitoring and data to respond much more quickly to congestion and changing road conditions.

4. Expand adaptive traffic-signal technology where it works. Apply the lessons from Halton's pilot to appropriate Burlington corridors and measure actual improvements in travel time and congestion.

5. Better coordinate local roads with provincial highways. Strengthen cooperation between Burlington, Halton Region and the Ministry of Transportation so our transportation systems increasingly respond to conditions across the entire network.

6. Reduce highway cut-through traffic in neighbourhoods. Use targeted traffic management, traffic calming and other practical measures where evidence demonstrates that residential streets are being used as highway bypasses.

7. Modernize Burlington Transit. Introduce smaller, electric, on-demand vehicles and make transit sufficiently convenient that substantially more residents voluntarily leave their cars at home.

8. Make better use of existing road capacity before automatically widening roads. Use technology, signal optimization and intersection improvements to get greater performance from infrastructure taxpayers already own.

9. Measure the results. Track travel times, intersection delays, traffic volumes, neighbourhood cut-through traffic, collisions and transit use so residents can see whether our investments are actually working.

A Transportation System That Works as a System

Burlington cannot solve congestion with one project.

And Burlington cannot solve it alone.

The Province controls the QEW and the highway network.

Halton Region operates many of Burlington's major arterial roads.

The City manages local roads and neighbourhood streets.

Burlington Transit provides an alternative to private vehicles.

For residents, however, those jurisdictional boundaries don't matter.

They simply want to get where they are going safely and in a reasonable amount of time.

That means all levels of government need to make the transportation network work as one system.

Increase highway capacity where it is needed.

Plan now for the long-term Burlington Bay bottleneck.

Use technology to get more capacity from the roads we already have.

Keep unnecessary traffic out of neighbourhoods.

Give residents better transit alternatives.

And measure whether what we are doing actually reduces congestion.

Keep highway traffic on the highways. Keep neighbourhood traffic in neighbourhoods. Use technology to keep our roads moving. And give Burlington residents better choices about how they travel.

Paul Sharman

Ward 5 City & Regional Councillor