



# THE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY OF MUSKOKA

## ENGINEERING AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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**TO:** Chair and Members  
Engineering and Public Works Committee

**FROM:** A.J. White, P.Eng.  
Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works

**DATE:** August 12, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Ministry Of Transportation Review Of Access To Highway 11  
At High Falls Road (Muskoka Road 50) And  
Holiday Park Drive In The Town Of Bracebridge

**REPORT NO:** PW-8-2010-8

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### RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS in 1992, the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) produced a study report entitled "Highway 11: Preliminary Design Study For The Ultimate Freeway Design" in which it was recommended that a new interchange be constructed on Highway 11 north of High Falls Road (Muskoka Road 50) and Holiday Park Drive in the Town of Bracebridge;

AND WHEREAS in 2010, the MTO is preparing to publish a Transportation Environmental Study Report (TESR) pursuant to the requirements of the Class Environmental Assessment (EA) For Provincial Transportation Facilities, to document a recent review of access to Highway 11 at High Falls Road and Holiday Park Drive;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the MTO be advised as follows:

- 1) The District Municipality of Muskoka prefers that access to Highway 11 be achieved through the construction of the interchange recommended in the MTO's 1992 study report; and
- 2) If the interchange recommended in the 1992 study report is rejected by the MTO, Muskoka's second preference would be for an interchange as shown in alternative 6c developed as part of the 2010 study of access alternatives, with the exception that the southbound on-ramp and the northbound off-ramp at the existing interchange at Muskoka Road 117 must not be closed; and
- 3) If the abovementioned alternative 6c (as modified) is also rejected by the MTO, Muskoka's third preference would be for alternative 6b developed as part of the 2010 study; and
- 4) If the abovementioned alternative 6b is also rejected by the MTO, Muskoka's fourth preference would be for alternative 6a developed as part of the 2010 study; and
- 5) Muskoka does not support the MTO's currently preferred solution as shown in alternative 5b, and if this solution is ultimately chosen, Muskoka will require the TESR produced for the current Class EA process to include a commitment to the future production of an addendum to address the need for a northward shift in the location of the overpass to better align with the Bracebridge north arterial route once its exact location has been defined.

*Managing Our Legacy Together*

.../2

## ORIGIN

Stantec Consulting Limited (SCL) and the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) have made two presentations to the Engineering and Public Works Committee on the subject of this report. The first was on November 18, 2009 and the second was on April 14, 2010.

## BACKGROUND

### The Current Study

The study now in progress is following the process set out in the Class Environmental Assessment For Provincial Transportation Facilities. The Environmental Assessment Act R.S.O. 1990, as amended (EA Act) provides for the preparation of Class Environmental Assessments (Class EA) for approval by the Minister of the Environment. A Class EA is an approved planning document that defines groups of projects and activities and the environmental assessment (EA) processes that the proponents commit to following for each of these undertakings. Provided that the prescribed process is followed, projects and activities included in the Class EA do not require formal review and approval under the EA Act. The Class EA for Provincial Transportation Facilities has been prepared by the MTO. In the municipal world, public works related to water, sewage and road networks are covered by a Class EA prepared by the Municipal Engineers Association.

Although there are differences between the Class EA for Provincial Transportation Facilities and the Municipal Class EA, there are also many similarities, and anyone familiar with the latter will recognize parallel processes in the former. Perhaps the most obvious similarity lies in the way the two Class EAs deal with concerns about significant undertakings that the proponents are unable to address. In both cases, where a person is not satisfied with the proponent's response, they can ask the Minister of the Environment to order the proponent to undertake an individual environmental assessment for the undertaking. This is sometimes referred to as a request for an order to comply with Part II of the EA Act, or a request for a "bump-up". If the Minister agrees that a bump-up is required, an individual environmental assessment report for the undertaking must be submitted for formal review and approval under the EA Act, and this may include a formal public hearing.

### Previous Studies

In 1992, the MTO published a document entitled "*Highway 11: Preliminary Design Study For The Ultimate Freeway Design*" which covered that part of Highway 11 from Muskoka Road 169 (then Highway 169) in Gravenhurst to the north junction of Muskoka Road 3 in Hunstville. This document included details pertaining to the section of Highway 11 from Muskoka Road 117 (then Highway 117) to the Bracebridge Resource Management Centre. The study concluded that the existing interchange at Muskoka Road 117 should be retained and that a new interchange should be constructed north of High Falls Road with a new entrance to the Bracebridge Resource Management Centre. Plates 4 and 29 from the study report illustrate this conclusion and they are attached as Appendix I and Appendix II respectively.

In June 1994, following several years of study, The Town of Bracebridge published a report entitled "*Town Of Bracebridge Transportation Study – Final Report*". Although the report was commissioned by the Town it was financed in equal shares by the Town, the MTO and Muskoka. Among other things, the report recommended the development of two new arterial routes around the urban core of Bracebridge – one to the south-west and one to the north. The northern route was to connect to Highway 11 via the interchange north of High Falls Road that was proposed in the MTO's 1992 study. Indeed, at the time that the MTO study report was published, the Town of Bracebridge study was sufficiently far advanced that the north route was identified in the MTO report (see Appendix II). Both the south-west route and the north route were incorporated into the Town's Official Plan and remain there today. Schedule "C" of the Town's Official Plan illustrates conceptual layouts for the two routes and a copy of the schedule is attached as Appendix III. Since only the north route is of current interest, it has been highlighted in Appendix III.

## **Recent Developments**

The new arterial route to the south-west of the Bracebridge urban core was the subject of a Municipal Class EA process that was successfully concluded in 2008. Muskoka's 2009 Tax Supported Capital Budget included an allocation to support commencement of a similar Class EA process for the north route. However, when the MTO announced that it was planning to review the access to Highway 11 at High Falls Road and Holiday Park Drive, it was decided to postpone the Municipal Class EA process for the north route until the Ministry had concluded its work. On April 14, 2010, SCL and the MTO advised the Engineering and Public Works Committee that the Transportation Environmental Study Report (TESR) required as part of the Class EA For Provincial Transportation Facilities would identify a new preferred solution for access to Highway 11 that did not include a new interchange. Specifically, the preferred alternative, numbered 5b, involves the connection of Holiday Park Drive to Muskoka Road 117 via a new bridge over the Muskoka River on the east side of Highway 11, and the connection of High Falls Road to Holiday Park Drive by an overpass on Highway 11, all of which is illustrated in Appendix IV.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **New Provincial Standards**

As previously noted, in 1992, the MTO recommended the construction of a new interchange north of High Falls Road. In 2010, the recommendation has changed to an overpass at High Falls Road together with a bridge over the Muskoka River. Essentially, ramps have been traded for an additional structure over the river. A similar arrangement was considered in 1992 (see Appendix V) and rejected in favour of a new interchange. The main reason for the Ministry's change of heart is that in the years between 1992 and 2010, a new standard has been adopted for the minimum distance between interchanges. The current minimum separation distance of 3 kilometres is designed to ensure that conflicts do not arise between traffic entering and leaving the highway between adjacent interchanges. It is, therefore, primarily a safety standard.

### **Impact On Muskoka**

Unfortunately, from a municipal perspective, the application of the new Provincial standard at High Falls Road/Holiday Park Drive has a number of drawbacks. Ease of access to a future northern arterial route is negatively affected by the current proposal. Even if the currently proposed overpass were moved north to better align with the northern arterial route (wherever it may ultimately be located) the proposed solution is inferior to the previously proposed interchange in that motorists wishing to navigate between Highway 11 and the northern route would have to follow a very circuitous path. Another problem with the proposed solution is that with the overpass located as far to the south as it is, westbound traffic will be encouraged to use High Falls Road even if a new northern arterial route is developed. There are other negative aspects of the proposed solution that are of concern to the Town of Bracebridge that will not be addressed here. However, it is known that the Town's Public Works Department shares the concern of Muskoka's staff that the proposed solution will not provide adequate connectivity between Highway 11 and any route to the west, regardless of where it may be located.

### **Other Concerns**

Although it may be of little consequence to either Muskoka or the Town of Bracebridge, there is a significant question surrounding the relative costs of the 1992 and 2010 solutions. The latter involves the construction of two structures while the former requires only one. Intuitively, the 2010 solution should be more expensive, and this was certainly the conclusion reached in 1992 when the cost of the alternative

shown in Appendix V was compared to the cost of a new interchange (Appendix I). Also, the long term costs of maintaining, repairing and replacing structures far exceed those of ramps. Additionally, there are the less easily quantified impacts of a river crossing on the natural, cultural and social environments to consider. There are no doubt occasions where a river crossing may be unavoidable, but in this case an alternative is available and could be implemented were it not for the new interchange separation standard.

### **Muskoka's Long Term Needs**

Muskoka's best interests lie in the construction of a new interchange north of High Falls Road as recommended by the MTO in 1992. Assuming that the new standard requiring a minimum separation distance of 3 kilometres between interchanges is unassailable, and that the existing interchange at Muskoka Road 117 will remain, then the new interchange would have to be located much farther north than contemplated in 1992. Therefore, it is not surprising that the closest comparable solution offered in the 2010 study is alternative number 1 as illustrated in Appendix VI. In this alternative, the interchange is located so far north that it would have a significant negative impact on the Bracebridge Resource Management Centre, the consequences of which are almost certainly unacceptable.

As previously noted, the MTO's currently preferred solution is numbered alternative 5b in the 2010 study, and is illustrated in Appendix IV. If the MTO continues to promote this alternative as preferred, Muskoka's options include making a request for a "bump-up" in the status of the project to a full individual EA. Such a course of action would be expensive, time consuming, damaging to Muskoka's relations with the MTO (and, by extension, the Government of Ontario) while having no guarantee of success. Therefore, while Muskoka should make its preference for a new interchange as contemplated in 1992 abundantly clear, it should not be assumed that any perceived shortcomings in the MTO's response to Muskoka's concerns should lead to a request for a bump-up. Any decision regarding such a request should be taken only after the publication of the TESR.

Although the MTO's currently preferred alternative 5b does not fit well with Muskoka's long term needs, it could be improved by moving the overpass on Highway 11 further north to better align with the future north arterial route. This alternative is numbered 6a in the current study and is illustrated in Appendix VII. Although the efficacy of such a solution would fall far short of that offered by a new interchange, it would at least provide a connection to Highway 11 that would make the north arterial route a more natural choice for westbound traffic than High Falls Road. An overpass located further to the north would also provide opportunities for the future addition of an off-ramp for southbound traffic and an on-ramp for northbound traffic as contemplated in alternative 6b and illustrated in Appendix VIII. An off-ramp for northbound traffic or an on-ramp for southbound traffic (i.e. the creation of an all moves interchange) would require modification of the interchange at Muskoka Road 117 to overcome the lack of the required separation distance between interchanges. This arrangement is illustrated in alternative 6c in the current study, the relevant portion of which is shown in Appendix IX.

A modified version of Alternative 6c in which the northbound off-ramp and the south bound on-ramp at the existing interchange at Muskoka Road 117 are left open, is probably close enough to the solution proposed in 1992 to meet Muskoka's needs. The MTO cites relative cost, conflicts with the existing interchange at Muskoka Road 117, opposition to the creation of partial interchanges, and a lack of certainty surrounding the location of the north arterial route as reasons for not selecting this alternative as preferred. Nevertheless, from Muskoka's perspective, this alternative is preferred over alternative 5b.

### **Muskoka's Submission To The MTO**

It is recommended that the following comments respecting access to Highway 11 at High Falls Road/Holiday Park Drive be submitted to the MTO :

- 1) The District Municipality of Muskoka prefers that access to Highway 11 be achieved through the construction of the interchange recommended in the MTO's 1992 study report; and
- 2) If the interchange recommended in the 1992 study report is rejected by the MTO, Muskoka's second preference would be for an interchange as shown in alternative 6c developed as part of the 2010 study of access alternatives, with the exception that the southbound on-ramp and the northbound off-ramp at the existing interchange at Muskoka Road 117 must not be closed; and
- 3) If the abovementioned alternative 6c (as modified) is also rejected by the MTO, Muskoka's third preference would be for alternative 6b developed as part of the 2010 study; and
- 4) If the abovementioned alternative 6b is also rejected by the MTO, Muskoka's fourth preference would be for alternative 6a developed as part of the 2010 study; and
- 5) Muskoka does not support the MTO's currently preferred solution as shown in alternative 5b, and if this solution is ultimately chosen, Muskoka requires the TESR produced for the current Class EA process to include a commitment to the future production of an addendum to address the need for a northward shift in the location of the overpass to better align with the Bracebridge north arterial route once its exact location has been defined.

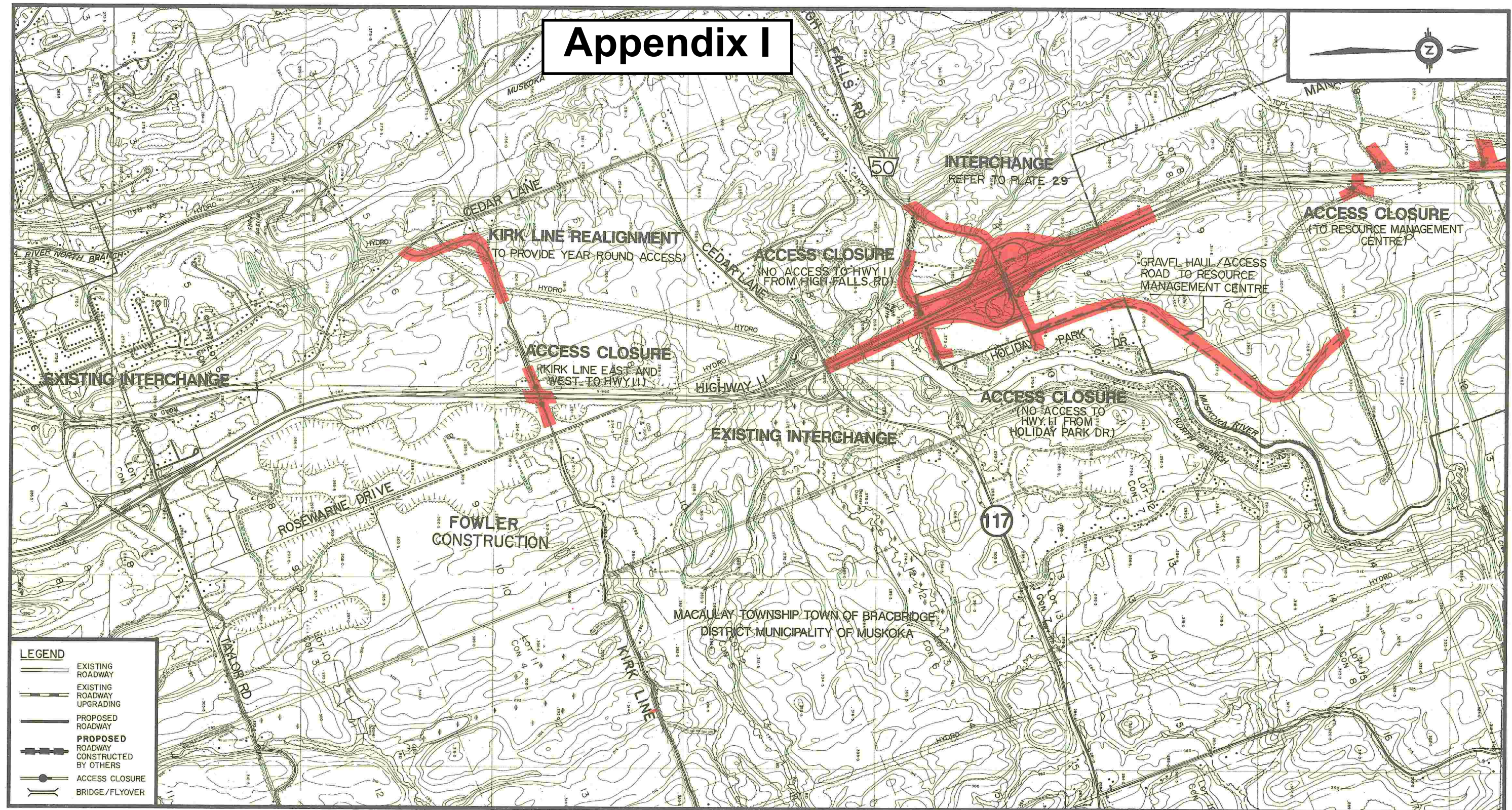
Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A.J. White', with a stylized flourish at the end.

A.J. White, P.Eng.  
Commissioner of Engineering  
and Public Works

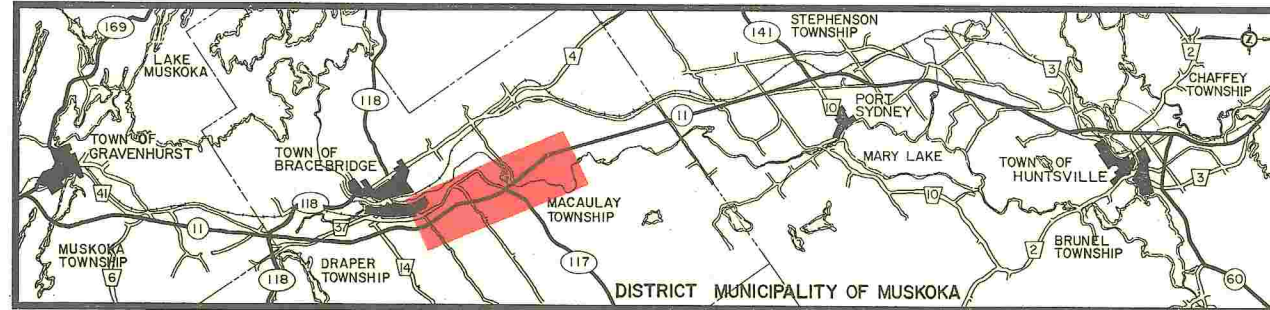


# Appendix I



**LEGEND**

- EXISTING ROADWAY
- EXISTING ROADWAY UPGRADING
- PROPOSED ROADWAY
- PROPOSED ROADWAY CONSTRUCTED BY OTHERS
- ACCESS CLOSURE
- BRIDGE/FLYOVER



## RECOMMENDED NETWORK

FROM **TAYLOR RD.** TO **BRACEBRIDGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CENTRE**

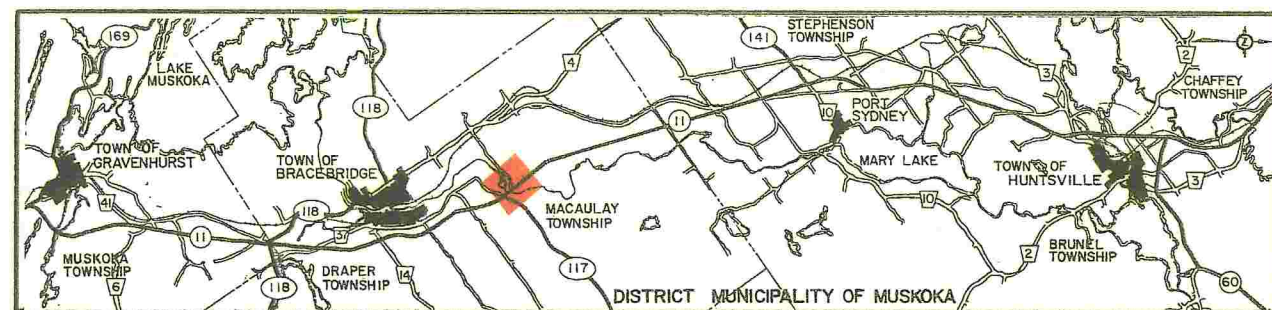
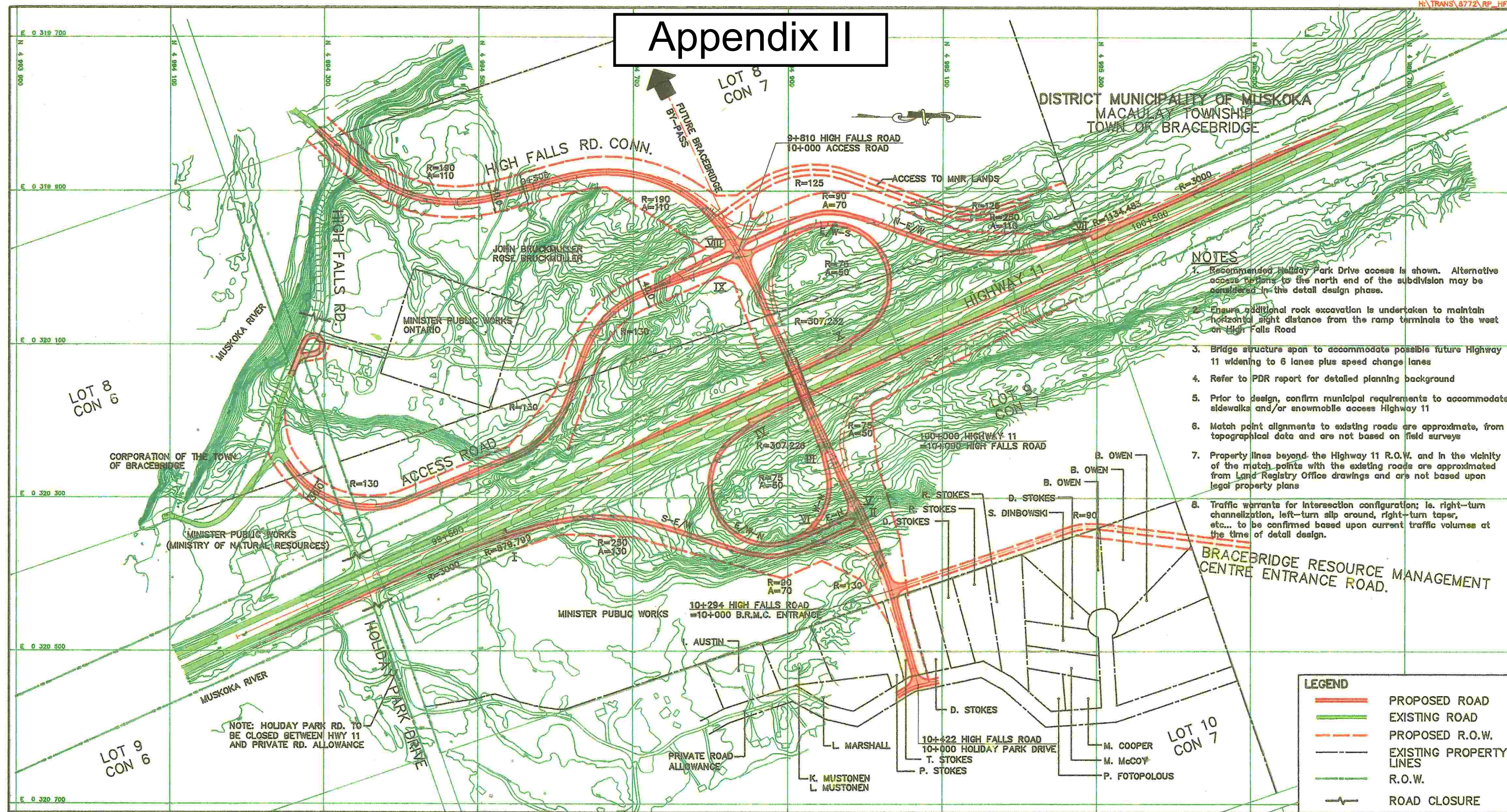
PLATE **4**

SCALE

300 200 100 0 100 200 300



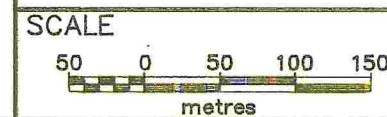
# Appendix II



## RECOMMENDED CONFIGURATION

### HIGH FALLS ROAD INTERCHANGE

PLATE  
**29**

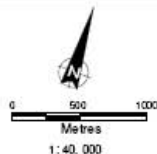




## Appendix III

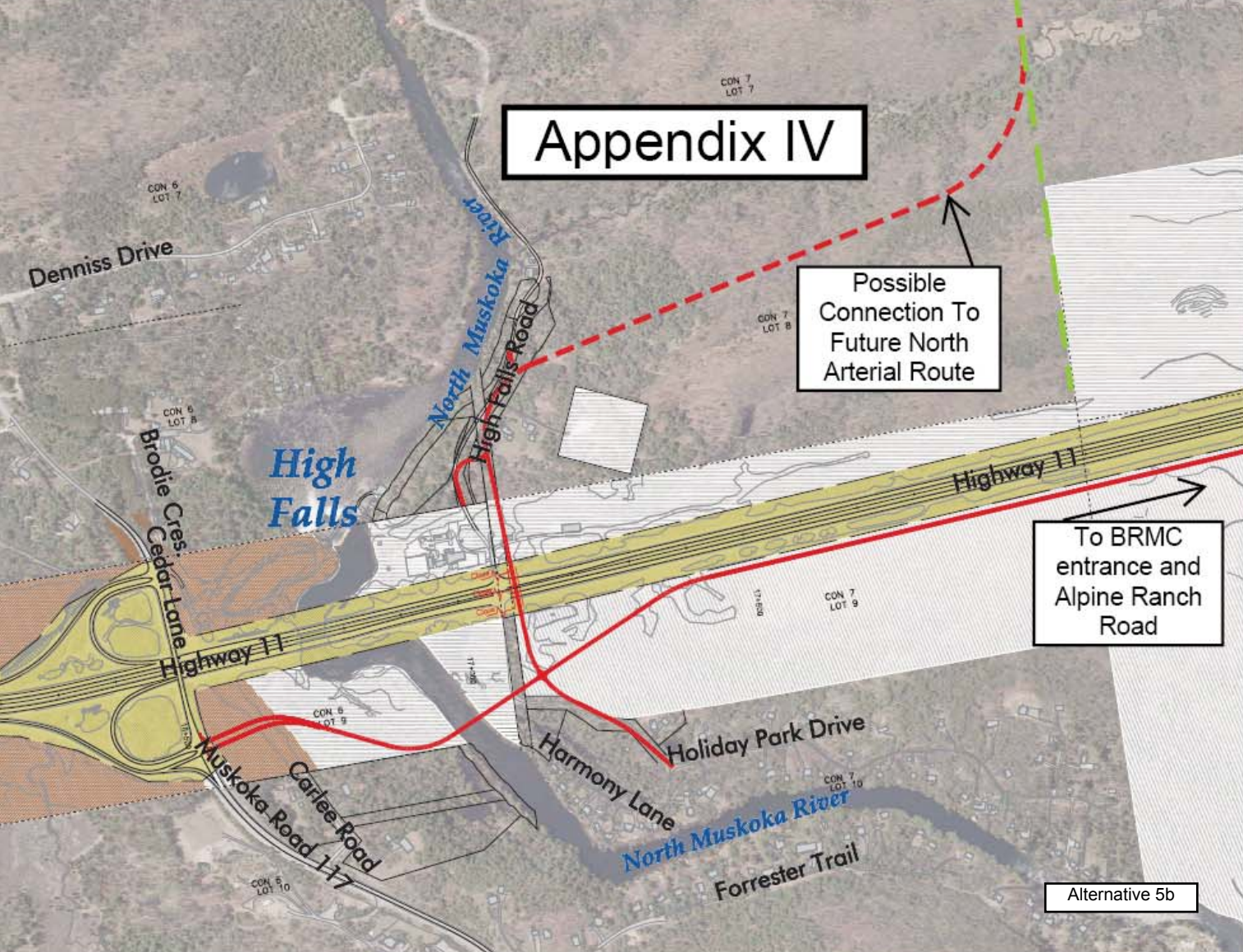


- - - - - BRACEBRIDGE URBAN BOUNDARY  
 - - - - - NEAR URBAN AREA BOUNDARY  
 - - - - - INTER-REGIONAL (PROVINCIAL HIGHWAY)  
 - - - - - ARTERIAL  
 - - - - - COLLECTOR  
 - - - - - PROPOSED NORTH AND WEST  
 - - - - - TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS  
 - - - - - MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY





# Appendix IV



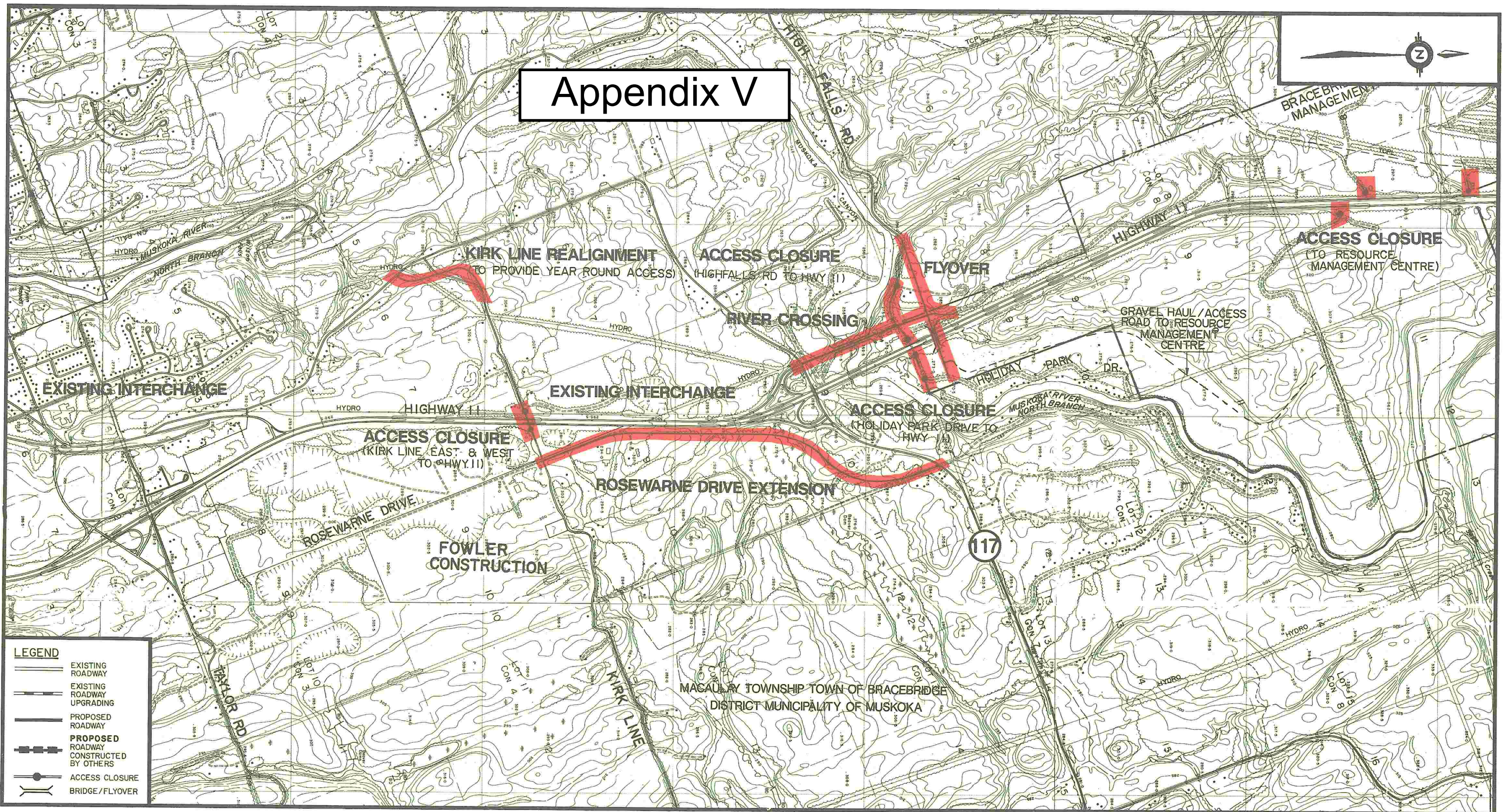
Possible  
Connection To  
Future North  
Arterial Route

To BRMC  
entrance and  
Alpine Ranch  
Road

Alternative 5b

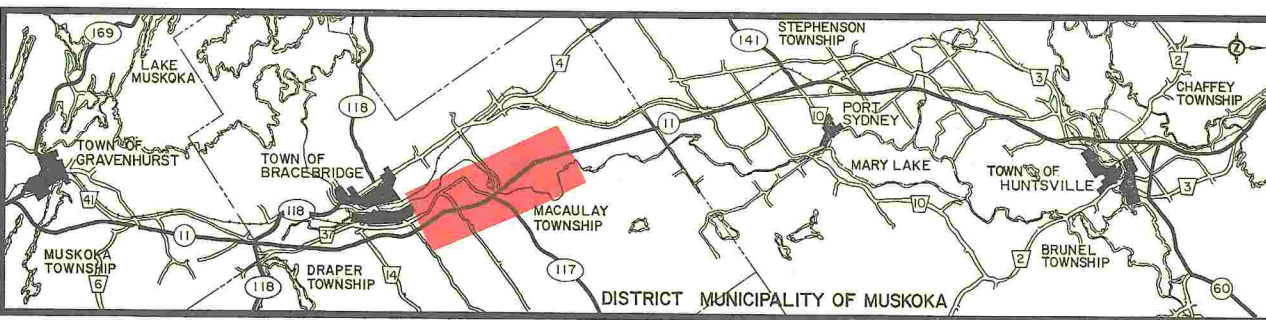


# Appendix V



**LEGEND**

- EXISTING ROADWAY
- EXISTING ROADWAY UPGRADING
- PROPOSED ROADWAY
- PROPOSED ROADWAY CONSTRUCTED BY OTHERS
- ACCESS CLOSURE
- BRIDGE / FLYOVER



## ALTERNATIVE NETWORK

FROM  
**TAYLOR RD.**

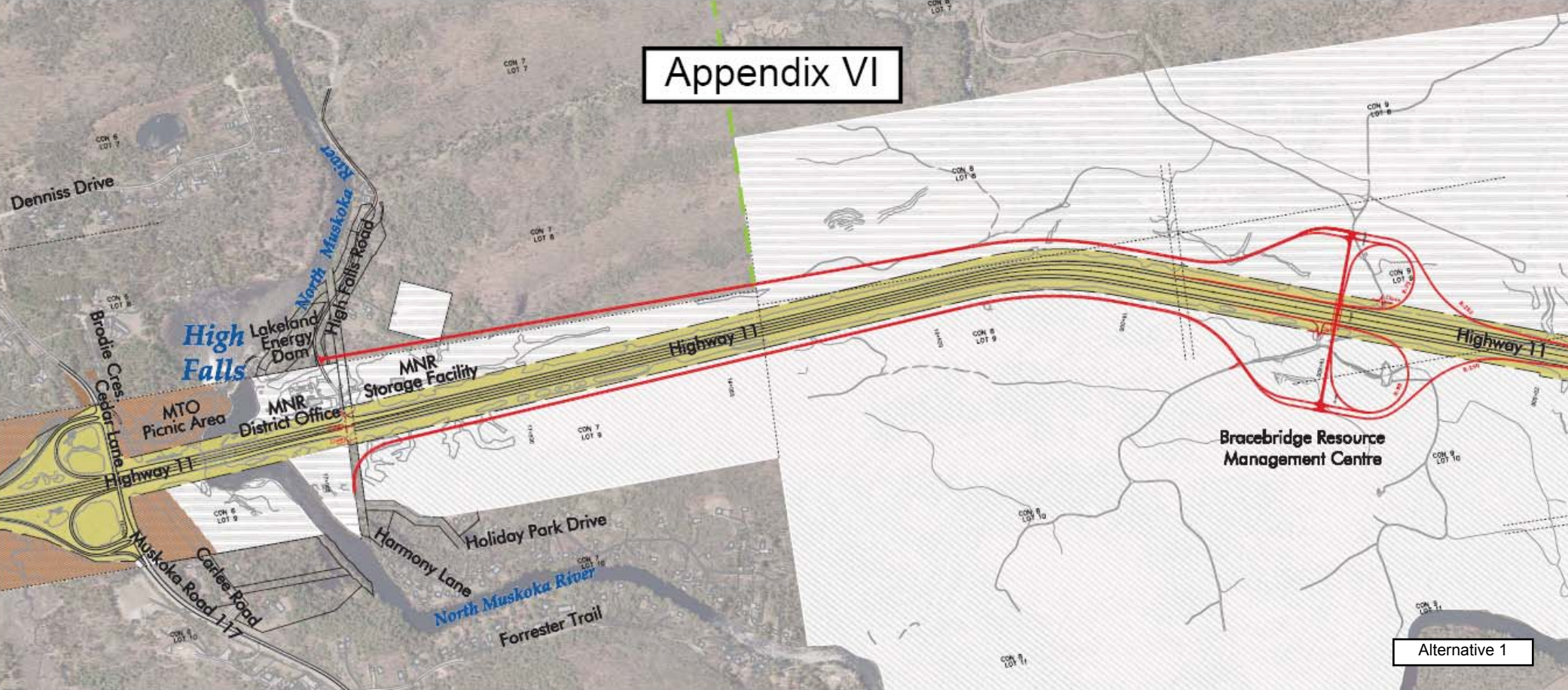
TO  
**BRACEBRIDGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CENTRE**

PLATE  
**13**

SCALE  
300 200 100 0 100 200 300



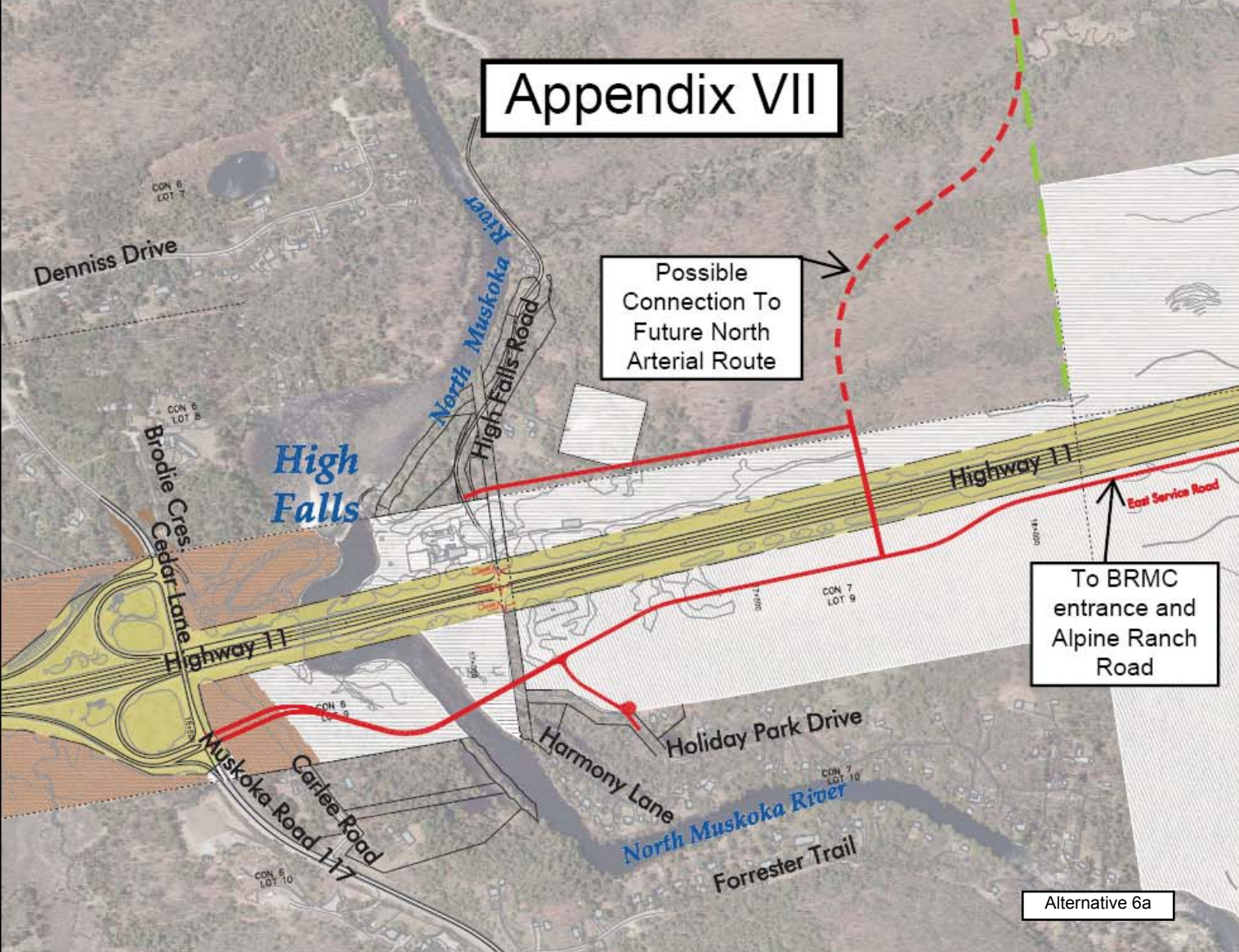
## Appendix VI



Alternative 1



# Appendix VII



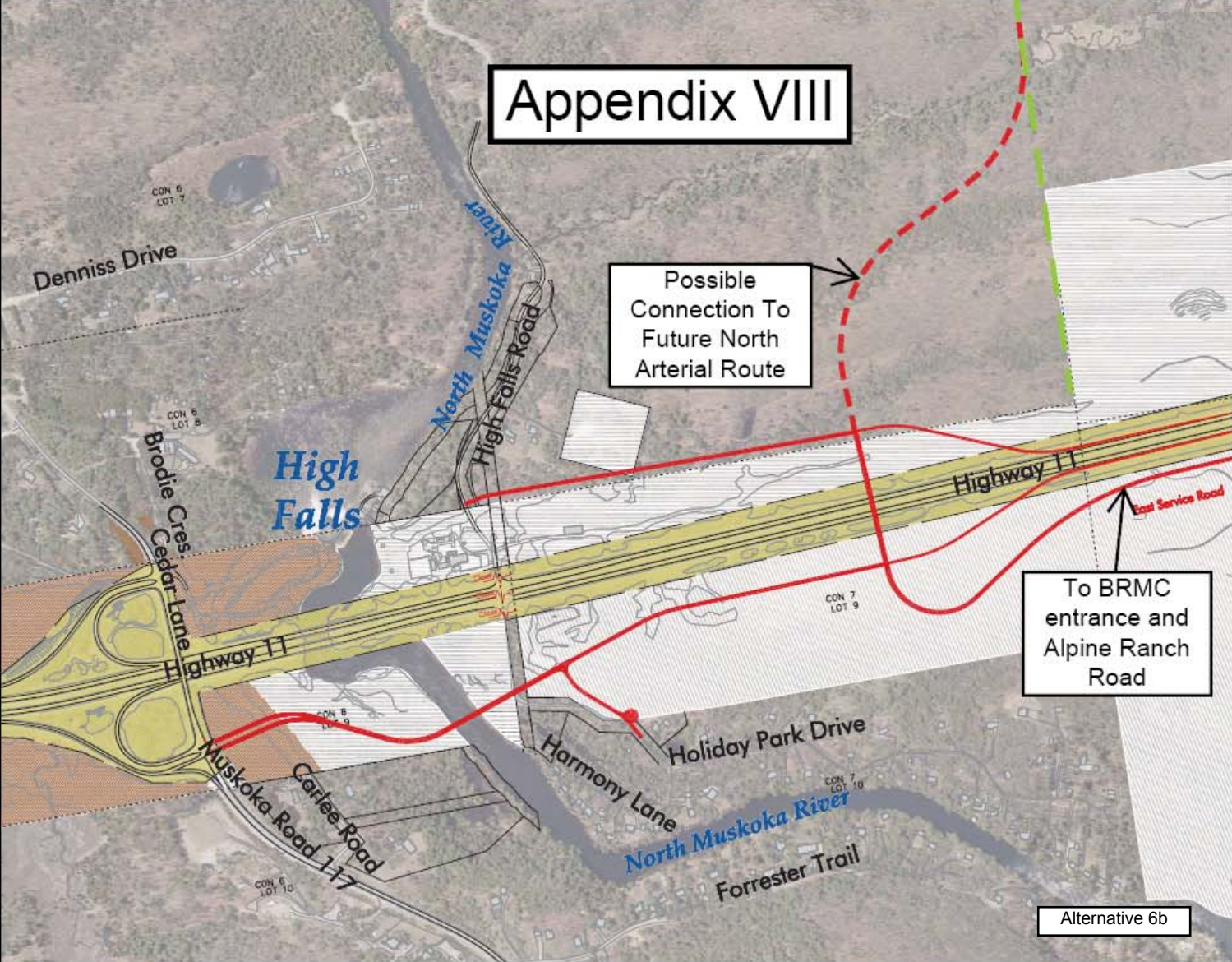
Possible  
Connection To  
Future North  
Arterial Route

To BRMC  
entrance and  
Alpine Ranch  
Road

Alternative 6a



# Appendix VIII



Possible  
Connection To  
Future North  
Arterial Route

To BRMC  
entrance and  
Alpine Ranch  
Road

Alternative 6b



## Appendix IX

Possible  
Connection To  
Future North  
Arterial Route

To BRMC  
entrance and  
Alpine Ranch  
Road

Alternative 6c includes the closure of all interchange ramps at Cedar Lane / Muskoka Road 117.

Alternative 6c