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# Metrolinx - GO Transit

## Vegetation Management Guidelines



### Document Approval Information

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Vegetation Management Guidelines	01 April 2013	Grant Bailie

**RAILWAY CORRIDORS  
CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT**

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## Document Approval History

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## 1. Introduction

GO Transit manages approximately 288 km of Metrolinx-owned railway corridors, corresponding to about 68 per cent of the total railway network that GO Trains regularly operate over. By keeping these corridors and the nearly 535 km of track they contain properly managed and maintained, GO Transit's Railway Corridors division helps to ensure that every week approximately one million train passengers get where they need to be going, safely and reliably.

The Railway Corridors Management Office (RCMO) resides within the GO Transit, Railway Corridors Division.

The RCMO supports safe and reliable train service through a variety of measures that range from trespassing prevention to ensuring vegetation does not block train sightlines. This group also deals with community proximity issues including anti-whistling initiatives and general landlord responsibilities associated with railway corridors, such as debris and graffiti management. To achieve these goals, the RCMO oversees the railway right-of-way maintenance contractor and liaises with the municipalities our corridors pass through and other government agencies such as Transport Canada.

In addition, the RCMO oversees all Third Party Project applications, such as utility companies or road authorities wishing to cross our tracks (either over, at-grade or under) or work undertaken adjacent to the railway corridor.

## 2. Purpose

One of the key cornerstones of the GO Transit Customer Service Strategy is a commitment to always take safety seriously. Keeping GO Transit managed rail corridors clear of brush and weeds is essential to rail operations and maintenance safety. For example, train operations crews and the public must be provided with clear sightlines as regulated by Transport Canada for signal systems and at crossings. Vegetation-free track also allows for better visual inspections of track components by maintenance staff.

GO Transit managed rail corridors are an integral part of the fabric of the communities that we serve. As such, we have a commitment to work with communities and stakeholders to ensure our vegetation management activities are in balance with our environmental obligations.

The purpose of the following Vegetation Management Guidelines are to provide an overview of:

- Vegetation Management Priorities;
- Approaches to Vegetation Management; and
- Approach to Tree Management Issues.

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### 3. GO Transit Operated Corridors Map

Figure 1 below provides an overview of all GO Transit managed railway corridors.



Figure 1 – GO Transit Managed Railway Corridors

### 4. Vegetation Management Priorities

Control of vegetation is a key track maintenance activity to ensure a safe operating environment. Work will be prioritized in the following order:

- **Emergent** - vegetation issues such as fallen trees, trees posing hazards etc. to ensure none or minimal impact to rail operations/service;
- **Sightlines** - maintenance of clear sightlines as regulated by Transport Canada for signal systems and at crossings;

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- **Track Systems** - maintenance of vegetation-free zones between the rails and on ballast to allow for better visual inspection of track components/equipment and maintain rail integrity;
- **Rail Head Leaf Mitigation** - removal and management of selected deciduous trees and canopy overhanging and within the railway corridor to reduce leaf volume and address rail adhesion related issues; and
- **Invasive Species** - removal and management of invasive species such as Giant Hogweed.

Vegetation growing outside of the rail system/ballast to the Metrolinx property line will not be managed outside of the above noted priorities. As such, typical landscaping activities such as grass cutting, weed treatment, tree pruning etc. will not be undertaken in these areas. This approach encourages the growth of native species of trees and shrubs and provides habitat for animals and other species.

In addition, Railway Corridors will coordinate with other internal stakeholders (e.g. Capital Infrastructure Environmental Compliance) to identify locations of planned infrastructure and/or operational modifications to assist in the prioritization of vegetation management activities annually.

### 5. Approaches to Vegetation Management

The current five-year contracts with PNR and TTR for Routine Track and Signal Maintenance includes provisions for vegetation management, utilizing a variety of vegetation control methods, including mechanical cutting equipment, manual brushing/mowing and the application of herbicides.

The use of herbicides is generally limited to track and ballast areas where it is impractical to use other methods. All herbicides are applied by authorized and licensed applicators in accordance with federal and provincial regulations and the manufacturer's recommendations. The contractor is also required to keep apprised of the technological advances in equipment and herbicide treatment levels for the purpose of reducing the amount of herbicide used, for instance utilizing weed seeker technology. The contractor will make every effort not to spray when the public is observed near the application area.

### 6. Approach to Tree Management Issues

The contractor is also responsible for retaining a Provincial certified arborist for the removal of trees and the trimming of tree limbs. Trees growing within the railway corridor (i.e. between the railway boundary fences) are the responsibility of GO Transit. However, trees growing on adjacent lands are the responsibility of the adjoining landowner and/or occupier. All owners of trees have an obligation to manage trees on their property (or overhanging/leaning over adjacent property) so that they do not cause a danger or a nuisance and to mitigate any risk.

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As such, GO Transit has an ongoing responsibility to manage trees within its property limits, but to also consider the condition of trees on adjoining lands which could be blocking signal or crossing sightlines or could fall onto the railway corridor and cause significant impacts to infrastructure and/or service delivery.

On occasion, GO Transit or its contractor will contact adjacent landowners and/or occupiers with trees on their lands to:

- Request and/or coordinate the felling or pruning of any tree which is causing concern; and
- Advise the landowner and/or occupiers of GO Transit initiated tree pruning activities on trees overhanging or leaning over the railway corridor.

Conversely, adjacent land owners should contact GO Transit to request and or/ coordinate the felling or pruning of any tree on GO Transit managed property which is causing concern. If an adjoining landowner or occupier fails to take responsibility for their trees, Metrolinx may initiate a claim for damages, restoration and legal costs.

## **7. Conclusion**

Keeping GO Transit's rail corridors clear of brush and weeds is essential to rail operations and maintenance safety. GO Transit's rail corridors are an integral part of the fabric of the communities that we serve. As such, we have a commitment to work with communities and stakeholders to ensure our vegetation management activities are in balance with our environmental obligations. GO Transit has an ongoing responsibility to manage trees within its property limits but to also consider the condition of trees on adjoining lands which could be blocking signal or crossing sightlines or could fall onto the railway corridor and cause significant impacts to infrastructure and/or service delivery.