

From: Jean-Francois Obregon

Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2020 9:37 AM

To: Regional Clerk

Subject: Letter about GTA West Corridor Update for May 14 2020 Committee of the Whole meeting

Dear Madam or Sir,

Attached is my letter regarding Agenda Item E.2 Reports - E.2.1 Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Update.

Please confirm with me whether any additional information is required and if the letter will be accepted.

Thank you.

Best,
Jean-François

Agenda Item on GTA West Corridor

RE: E.2. Reports – E.2.1 Report of the Commissioner of Transportation Services and Chief Planner - Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Update.

By pursuing a highway project, we are spoiling an opportunity to make the most of and to protect the natural assets in the Greenbelt, which would be the envy of many places around the world. It provides employment to local farmers and is a local tourism destination. I would like to express my opposition to this project for the following reasons:

- 1) Environmental impacts. The proposed project runs through the Greenbelt, which protects countless acres of flora and fauna in Vaughan and York Region. The Greenbelt also provides better air quality thanks to the carbon capturing benefits of the trees and plants. As well, it provides a nature refuge for animal species, which are increasingly running out of places to go to. The low-rise development that will probably come with the highway will encourage increased car usage and higher carbon emissions, if vehicles are gas-powered. It will also reduce the region's biodiversity. Forest cover can play a role in temperature regulation and capture rainfall.ⁱ With climate change set to worsen, it would be wise to preserve the Greenbelt. I would encourage York Region to study the value of the natural assets in the Greenbelt and not pursue this highway project.
- 2) Economic: The agenda item states that there would be "support" for "improved employment growth, improved goods movement". I would ask Council and Staff to specify what kind(s) of employment would be supported. There are great food land producing areas along the proposed corridor route. During the COVID-19 pandemic, international supply chains have been impacted. There is increased public interest in buying from local farmers. I recently bought meat from a King City farmer. Since we do not know the complete impact on the food supply chain yet, it would be wise to maintain the farmland that would be impacted by this proposal. Building a highway could threaten local food supply chains and food security in a worst-case scenario. Secondly, I kindly ask that Council and Staff consider studying the state of low-rise employment areas – typically "industrial" areas – in the City of Vaughan. This would include low-lying areas around Dufferin and Steeles, along Steeles West going towards Brampton, along Highway 7 (and close to it). I would consider improving these current employment areas available in the City of Vaughan to start-up businesses.
- 3) Natural capital: We may not be valuing the economic value of the natural assets (e.g. forests and farmland) along the proposed highway route. By destroying this to make a highway, we may be removing future dollars from a carbon cap and trade system thanks to the carbon removed from nature. Leading global investors are looking at natural capital seriously because of anticipated future carbon regulations.ⁱⁱ Conservation easements can help to create an asset class from forest land that is an investable product with revenue sources from permits for camping, for instance.

- 4) Social: The benefits of the Greenbelt impact local health include improved air quality and mental health. The former puts people at lower risk of respiratory issues, which would help with viruses like COVID-19.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, Having access to a nature preserve provides people with a local destination that is relaxing and help them address anxiety and depression, which are on the rise with COVID-19. Lastly, I would argue the proximity to the Greenbelt would help long-term property values as residents would value it, addressing the points under Regional and municipal collection in “5. Financial”.

ⁱ Ellison et al., 2017. Global Environmental Change 43: 51-61

ⁱⁱ <https://www.responsible-investor.com/articles/treat-biodiversity-loss-as-an-asset-management-problem-experts-tell-uk-government/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/17/air-pollution-likely-to-increase-coronavirus-death-rate-warn-experts>