

DEPUTATION REQUEST

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

FEBRUARY 11, 2021

Subject: GTA West Corridor

Spokesperson: Irene Ford

Name of Group or person(s) being represented (if applicable): Stop the 413
(Vaughan/York Region Citizens)

Brief summary of issue or purpose of deputation:

Request Council reconsider support and endorsement of the proposed Highway 413/GTA West Corridor

OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL CLERK

1-877-464-9675 x. 71320

york.ca



York Region Council
1725 Young Street,
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1

Feb 10, 2021

Re: Agenda Item E.2.1 GTA West Transportation Corridor Update

Regional Chair Emmerson, Mayor and Regional Councillors,

The purpose of this letter is to express concerns about York Region Council's (Council) support for the proposed GTA West Corridor/Highway 413 (the highway). Today I am asking Council to consider two requests.

- 1) Reverse support and endorsement for the highway**
- 2) Officially request the Federal Government conduct an Environmental Assessment of the proposed highway as has been done by Ecojustice on behalf of Environmental Defence and the Town of Halton Hills¹**

Public Consultation, Awareness and Feedback

As residents learn more about the proposed highway, they are starting to fully grasp the size of scale of what Council is supporting on their behalf. It is not a corridor and it is misleading of Council and the Province to call it such. It is a mega-400-series-highway equivalent if not larger in width than the existing 400, 401 or 407 with multiple interchanges comparable, possibly larger, in size^{2,3}.

Community members are extremely disappointed that Council choose to support such a large infrastructure project without asking, consulting or informing the community. I understand that this is a Provincial project, I understand that Council is not able to undertake public consultation on all issues. This issue is not minor; it's a multi-billion-dollar project that will fundamentally change the local character of communities, bring more traffic and air pollution into and through Vaughan, destroy prime farmland and environmentally sensitive lands, fragment and isolate our community, farms and wildlife. There are members of the community that are only finding out now; they were completely unaware and many are still ill informed. Continually our elected

¹ Environmental Defence, News Release: Groups request the federal government conduct environmental assessments for two proposed Ontario highways on environmentally sensitive land. 3 Feb, 21. See: <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2021/02/03/groups-request-federal-government-conduct-environmental-assessments-two-proposed-ontario-highways-environmentally-sensitive-land/>

² Community Value Plan Meeting #2 Nov 3, 2020 see Slides 11, 16-20: <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CVP-Meeting-2-Presentation.pdf>

³ https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Technically-Preferred-Route-By-Section_Aerial-Photography-Background.pdf

representatives promote the importance of community engagement, accountable and transparent government. You can imagine why some of these residents feel like these are only words and not reflected in actions⁴. Our MPPs are absent they have been continually emailed but the community has not even been given the courtesy of a response. The province's GTA Project West established email has not sent a single communication update since the release of the preliminary design last August and does not respond to emails. To put your hands up in the air and tell us it is the Province's project and you have no choice is not true. The Province may still construct the highway but that does not mean you have no choice to support or not support the highway.

Support for the highway is not consistent with public feedback received through the ongoing municipal comprehensive review. Residents are not asking for mega-highways, they are not even asking for new roads they are asking for better transit, to utilize infrastructure we already have (road, rail), to make transportation healthier, more climate friendly and for walkable communities that promote active transportation^{5,6}.

Local Traffic & Public Health

How will this highway support and alleviate any of the traffic woes experienced by Vaughan residents? Major pain points are nowhere close to the highway. It seems more likely to create traffic congestion and negative community impacts. Current local and regional roads adjacent to the route are not able to accommodate large volumes of traffic or heavy vehicles. Regardless, the City of Vaughan is proceeding like the highway has been approved by choosing to endorse a MZO for a Walmart Distribution Facility that will bring 100s of trailers daily to our community⁷.

There has been no acknowledgement of the public health burden Council will facilitate and force upon residents by supporting the highway. Minister Caroline Mulroney was

⁴ The Regional Municipality of York, Code of Conduct for Council Members, 18 Apr, 19: https://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/70c4d0c7-0196-4e6e-9819-2fc97319f327/Code+of+Conduct_Council+Members.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mLVV0xf

⁵ York Region Municipal Comprehensive Review [What We Heard](#)

- Transit is the top Regional service that residents indicate they will rely on most in the future and York Region should continue to invest in public transit
- Residents want compact, walkable communities that offer employment opportunities, community facilities, local services, stores and places for social connection
- Affordable housing is one of the most important components of building complete communities, however, many of us are facing housing market challenges
- Residents want our communities to reduce emissions and are aware of the impacts of climate change in York Region
- Residents want to protect our forests, parks, trails, agricultural lands and green spaces
- Residents want a variety of Employment Opportunities within their community

⁶ Province of Ontario, Ministry of Transportation Public Survey Results: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/greater-golden-horseshoe-ggh-transportation-plan#section-2>

⁷ Mayor Bevilacqua's Members Resolution entitled: "REQUEST FROM CONMAR DEVELOPMENTS INC. & FENLANDS VAUGHAN INC., DG GROUP AND LORWOOD HOLDINGS FOR MINISTER'S ZONING ORDER FOR THE DECLASSIFICATION OF PROvincially SIGNIFICANT WETLANDS IN BLOCK 34 EAST" Mar 9, 2020: <https://pub-vaughan.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=30449>

quoted saying the highway is expected to support 300,000 trips per day⁸. What does that mean for local air quality and pollution? Especially in context of climate change, which will worsen local air quality. At any time has Council expressed concern for the health of their residents or requested the province complete a Health Impact Assessment? Did you not care to ask or are you not aware that there has been no analysis of potential health impacts completed by the province⁹?

The Justification for the Proposed Solution is Fundamentally Flawed

The EA process has been heavily criticized for good reason. In 2017, an Advisory Panel concluded that the EA was fundamentally flawed on needs and alternatives and did not demonstrate that it was the only option to address regional transportation needs¹⁰. All of the information and studies supporting the highway, including the demand analysis are dated more than ten years¹¹. On top of this, as a result of the pandemic our lives have changed dramatically, people have been forced to embrace working from home and telecommuting. We do not yet know how this may impact transportation habitats and needs. The province has not addressed or acknowledged any of these concerns.

In May, 2020 a presentation to Ontario Ministers from industry groups representing the Residential and Commercial Construction Industry contained a recommendation to accelerate approvals of the GTA West Corridor and other key pieces of York Region infrastructure, in order to 'unlock housing supply' and create more certainty of future housing supply¹². In July, 2020 the province released legislative changes to fast track the EA approvals under the guise of economic recovery from COVID-19¹³. The development pressure on local governments will be insurmountable and local Councils will not be able to resist, especially in the absence of provincial support. Speculation has already commenced based on a Commercial Real Estate analysis¹⁴, suggesting prime agricultural land is and will be developable around the highway 27 interchange.

⁸Toronto Star Article, Noor Javed. "This is a Stupid Place to Put a Highway" 27 Jan, 21.

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/01/27/this-is-a-stupid-place-to-put-the-highway-doug-fords-government-has-fast-tracked-a-new-gta-freeway-during-covid-19-sparking-local-opposition.html>

⁹ Letter from Minister Caroline Mulroney to Michael Chong. 20 Jan, 20

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/residents/resources/Documents/MTO---GTA-West-Update-2020.pdf>

¹⁰ May, 2017 - GTA West Corridor Advisory Panel Report

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190618163558/http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/publications/gta-west-report/executive-summary.shtml#conc>

¹¹ Pg. 16: <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA-West-Travel-Demand-Backgrounder-v1-red.pdf>

¹² Residential and Commercial Construction Industry Government of Ontario's Post COVID-19 Recovery Construction to Kick Start Ontario's Economy - Proposed Liquidity and Recovery Measures. 19 May, 20

<https://bildgta.ca/Assets/BILD%20OHBA%20CHBA%20Final%20OJRC%20-%20June%202020.pdf>

¹³ Proposed regulation for a streamlined environmental assessment process for the Ministry of Transportation's Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor project.

<https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882>

¹⁴ Avison Young, GTA WEST Multimodal Transportation Corridor, Factsheet

<https://www.avisonyoung.ca/documents/56635302/56647756/GTA+West+Multimodal+Transportation+Corridor+Factsheet/475acaa9-7667-41f3-bca9-e0b9ebada2bc>

Council's Support for the Greenbelt & Climate Change is Compromised

Preservation of prime farmland is continually advocated by government yet we are still losing 5 farms/week to development in Ontario. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has not opposed the highway but has requested that an Agricultural Impact Assessment be completed. This has not been addressed by the Province.

The value of Natural Asset Management, the ability to provide ecosystem services and enable climate resiliency (natural cooling, source and storm water protection, carbon sequestration) for free, is increasingly recognized; the highway weakens and undermines this free asset¹⁵. This will translate into costs borne by municipalities to pay for engineered treatment of drinking water and storm water protection, not to mention increased public health burdens (extreme heat, poor air quality). **The largest loss of forests from the proposed highway will occur in Vaughan; a 1.5 km stretch around the twin valleys of the Humber and East Humber Rivers**¹⁶. Conservation Authorities will not have any oversight or be involved the permitting and approvals for construction over environmentally sensitive valleys and water crossings.

In the context of a Provincial government that has changed almost every piece of Ontario's environmental legislation to its detriment **local governments must be stronger**. Reliance from the province for leadership on environmental protection and climate change is meaningless and it is foolish to think or advocate otherwise. Council cannot say they are committed to strong and urgent action on Climate Change, preservation of the Greenbelt and prime agriculture and support the highway without question. It is a contradiction and **if Council continues to support the highway then the statement you're making to your constituents is that you don't care about Climate Change or the Greenbelt or prime agricultural land**. I am not advocating to you when I speak about Climate Change. I am reminding you of the truth based on scientific fact, governments need to act urgently and take decisive action.

Council's continual unwavering support for a questionable mega-400-series highway combined with continual attempts to rezone and redesignate greenbelt land and certain local councils endorsing excessive and unnecessary developer requests for MZOs **forces me to question whose interests you're representing; your communities or developers?** I do not believe that the majority of your constituents want a meg-400-series highway that will pave over farmlands, wetlands, forests, drive climate change and impede meaningful climate action. I do believe residents want better transportation options through improvement of regional and local roads, more walkable communities and better transit.

¹⁵ <https://www.watercanada.net/feature/a-few-more-steps-understanding-the-economics-of-low-impact-development/>

[Opinion: It's time to reveal the hidden value of Canada's natural assets](#)

¹⁶ AECOM, GTA West Natural Environment Existing Conditions Map <https://www.gta-west.com/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/Section-04-Natural-Environment-Existing-Conditions-Map.pdf> Also derived from MNR Natural Heritage Mapping tool: https://www.gisapplication.lrc.gov.on.ca/mamnh/Index.html?site=MNR_NHLUPS_NaturalHeritage&viewer=NaturalHeritage&locale=en-US.

Please consider my request today to reverse support for this destructive and controversial highway. If you still want to proceed with your support at a minimum request the Federal government conduct a thorough and comprehensive environmental assessment to facilitate a transparent and accountable process for York Region residents. This would also support York Region's ability to meet all of your strategic goals, rather than weak justification of economic benefits that discount environmental and community impacts¹⁷.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Irene Ford

Note this letter will be forwarded to applicable Provincial MPPs, Federal MPs and local Vaughan Councillors

¹⁷ York Region. 2019-2023 Strategic Plan: https://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/e9612765-7323-40bf-904c-715cd0c21d6b/18453_CorporateStrategicPlan-Approved.pdf?MOD=AJPERES