

From: Chris Ballard
Sent: Tuesday, February 9, 2021 12:01 PM
To: Regional Clerk <ClerkGeneralLine@york.ca>
Subject: GTA West Highway, Feb. 11 Agenda item E.2.1

Dear York Regional Councillors and Mayors,

At the February 11 York Region Council meeting I'm asking you to take action against the proposed GTA West Highway (also known as Highway 413) and to vote to withdraw Regional Council's support for this multi-billion dollar "white elephant."

As a York Region MPP, I opposed the construction of the Highway for many reasons, but chief among them: the need for the highway had not been demonstrated, especially with an under-utilized Highway 407 nearby; there was not (and still isn't) a clear understanding of how highway usage will be affected with the introduction of autonomous vehicles and new transportation technology; vehicle pollution worsens climate change and the province and Region need to invest in transportation infrastructure that provides cleaner alternatives; finally – the awful and lasting impact this massive highway will have on an important part of Ontario's Greenbelt. Add to these reasons the unknown affect the current pandemic will have on commuting traffic as employees move permanently to working from home, and Region Council should show little to support for this expensive and destructive highway.

Quite simply, transportation needs are in flux, the Greenbelt needs protecting and Ontario taxpayers cannot afford what will become an un-needed "white elephant" even before it is finished.

I recognize the Region and municipalities are eager for the investments and tax dollars this highway will open through new development. I argue that the financial and environmental cost to your citizens will be far greater than any additional municipal tax revenue.

York Region's GTA West Corridor endorsement in 2019 came with no consultation, and it came at a time when many of York's municipalities like Aurora, Newmarket, King Township and Vaughan have declared a climate emergency. Their declarations are a commitment to strong action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Endorsing the GTA West Highway conflicts directly with these commitments.

Environmental Defence reports that since the Region's 2019 endorsement of the highway, more than 10,000 people across the GTA West corridor have signed petitions asking their MPPs to reconsider this highway. More than 500 phone calls have gone to MPPs from concerned residents just in King-Vaughan. In the last 48 hours alone, almost 5,000 people have asked the federal government to step in to perform a federal environmental assessment for this project.

York Region Council Agenda item E.2.1 "Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Update" proposes further road widening and harmful impacts to adjacent communities. Instead of adopting more road widening, Council must move to withdraw its current support for the GTA West Highway corridor, in light of the potentially devastating impacts to York Region residents' communities, farmlands, wetlands, forests, and green spaces.

The Province has proposed weakening environmental assessments for the GTA West Highway to the point where they are essentially meaningless, allowing "early works" like bridges and waterways to be built before the environmental impacts are fully known. Your constituents could see devastating impacts to their farms, wetlands, and water sources that will not be known until it's too late. Your continued endorsement of the Province's plans for this highway tells residents that York Regional Council does not support preserving the Greenbelt, prime agricultural land, wetlands and water sources, and urgent action on climate change.

The decision on whether or not to build the highway rests with the Province. But the decision on whether or not to declare your support for the highway rests with you. Halton Region, Orangeville, and Halton Hills

have all chosen to oppose Highway 413 based on local opposition. Brampton City Council proposes an alternative.

I am asking you to say “no” to the GTA West Highway and to ensure the Region’s support is ended. Support for an unproven, outdated and “white elephant” project is never a good thing.

Sincerely,

Chris Ballard
Aurora