

From: Jenni Le Forestier
Sent: Monday, February 8, 2021 6:47 PM
To: Regional Clerk <ClerkGeneralLine@york.ca>
Subject: The 6 Billion Dollar Pandemic Highway to Nowhere

Dear York and Caledon Regional Councillors and Mayors,

As a Caledon resident I am calling on you to oppose the Province's construction of the GTA West Highway (also known as Highway 413) at the upcoming York Regional Council meeting on February 11th.

This mega-highway will rip through our community with devastating impacts on our homes, our communities, our farmland, our wetlands, and will pave over many hectares of Greenbelt in Vaughan despite the Province's promises to protect the Greenbelt. It will also add more polluting cars and trucks to our roads and increase the region's greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite these impacts, York Regional Councillors voted to support the Province's GTA West Highway in December 2019, stating that "York Region supports the decision to resume the Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment and requests that the highway be constructed as soon as possible."

This endorsement came with no consultation, and it came at a time when many of York's municipalities like Newmarket and Vaughan have declared a climate emergency. This is a commitment to strong action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Endorsing the GTA West Highway directly conflicts with these commitments.

Since your 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 5000 people have asked the federal government to step in to perform a federal environmental assessment for this project.

The Caledon Mayor held a virtual town hall Feb 3rd. I submitted the following questions for the "question" period days before, and they were not read aloud by Mayor Thomson, nor were they subsequently answered.

Mayor Thompson, why did you support the report asking the province to expedite the GTA West on December 3, 2019, when highway pollution and destruction of biodiversity are well-recognized contributors to respiratory illnesses and pandemics, like Covid-19, and will seriously affect the health of Caledon residents?

<https://pub-caledon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=7873>

2) Mayor Thompson, in your call for Caledon to declare a climate emergency on Jan 29 2020, your document states that "A climate emergency is one that threatens life as we know it" - a state which clearly includes the current Covid-19 threats and restrictions. How will building highway 413 reduce this threat to life as we know it?

<https://pub-caledon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=8497>

3) The Town paid for a plan calling for zero new carbon emissions. Highway pollution is a known lung and respiratory threat which can only increase health issues related to Covid-19 and similar future pandemics. Recently, a law case in the UK awarded damages to the parents of an asthmatic child who died from highway pollution. How will supporting the 413 reduce new carbon emissions in Caledon to zero and prevent such obvious serious health threats to residents of Caledon?

<https://pub-caledon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=10392>

4) On June 30, Caledon staff's climate change expert issued a warning that the GTA West will make the climate emergency worse in Caledon. Since respiratory illnesses like Covid-19 will skyrocket with by worsening the climate crisis, why are you not doing everything possible to stop climate change?

<https://pub-caledon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=10396>

On February 11th, I am calling on you to take action, and withdraw York Regional Council's support for this highway.

On February 16th I call on Caledon to withdraw support for this highway.

Agenda item E.2.1 "Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Update" proposes further road widenings and harmful impacts to adjacent communities. Instead of adopting more road widenings, Council must move to withdraw its previous 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. We are asking you to do the same.

Enough is enough. Please listen to your constituents, and withdraw your support for the GTA West Highway.

Jennifer LeForestier