

OAK RIDGES MORaine LAND TRUST

Submission by Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust

March 17, 2021

To: York Regional Council

Re: Item F.4.1 – Bradford Bypass Project
Item F.4.2 – GTA West Transportation Corridor

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the proposed recommendation that Council oppose a federal “Impact Assessment” of the lands affected by the Bradford Bypass Project and the GTA West Transportation Corridor.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT) was created to assist property owners who sought to provide greater long-term protection for lands they’d come to love, on and surrounding the Moraine. Recognizing the connectivity between the Moraine and the surrounding areas, the ORMLT Board expanded the area of protection to on or near the Moraine. We are now working with residents in the Town of Georgina and Innisfil to protect properties significant to Lake Simcoe and the watershed. We have now protected over 1800 hectares of land across the Moraine with 490 hectares in York Region. Within our Regional Municipality of York Region land securement agreement, we have worked, for over twenty years, to ensure that important natural heritage features in this region are protected, for the long-term benefit of the community and of the terrestrial, avian and aquatic species on those lands. These protected properties in York Region contribute over \$1.7million annually in ecological goods and services to York Region.

It is very distressing to see the Council attempting to truncate any efforts to ensure that the highest possible due diligence is placed on two massive infrastructure projects which, by Council’s own admission, will adversely affect agricultural lands, water courses and, in the case of the GTA West Transportation Corridor, lands within the Greenbelt. There may be a need for future growth on residential and employment lands, but the report before you, today, clearly states that the Province believes that that growth can be handled within existing urban areas and a small amount of white-belt lands – but with no mention of any need for intrusion on greenbelt or agricultural lands. Time does not permit going into the extensive list of reasons why we need to preserve agricultural land, but it has been recognized, by the Province, for decades, that the lands in the Holland Marsh area are the most productive agricultural lands in the country.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Bradford Bypass is over twenty years old, pre-dates the Greenbelt Plan and Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, and does not provide a climate change impact assessment. The preliminary EA predicted severe water quality impacts to groundwater and surface water in the Lake Simcoe watershed for which there is still no mitigation plan. Additionally, the Bradford Bypass would transect some of the best agricultural land in Ontario, destroy sensitive wildlife habitat in Greenbelt lands, and adversely impact one of Ontario’s largest remaining provincially significant wetlands. (22.1 hectares of woodlands, 17.2 hectares of

Holland Marsh, 9.5 hectares of provincially significant wetlands, and 32.7 hectares of significant wetlands.)

Please don't continue to allow development of lands which were once zoned agricultural, around Bradford, and now, promotes even further development in that area by constructing a massive new roadway between Highways 400 and 404.

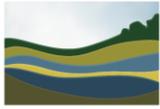
As with these types of projects, there is discussion about the need to accommodate growth and a lack of discussion of the environmental and social costs of destroying large tracts of forest and farmland. There is lack of critical analysis of alternatives which would accomplish any desire to facilitate easier road connections, but without destroying nearly as much greenspace. There is no cumulative effects study especially air and water pollution of sprawl and highways.

The same arguments hold true with the GTA West Transportation Corridor only, in this case, the Region is proposing to build through some lands which have been legislatively protected under the Greenbelt Act. Once again, the Region is promoting a course of action which will benefit a handful of developers who had the foresight to buy farm land which will, now, be near intersections of a new highway, but, for every happy developer, there will be hundreds, if not thousands, of York Region residents adversely affected by pollution, loss of agricultural employment and higher taxes. There is simply no one who can predict, within any credibility, what the long term impact of the pandemic will be on traffic patterns and growth. The movement to work from home won't end when everyone is vaccinated and the dramatic reduction in traffic volumes on Highway 407 should give great pause to anyone thinking that wasting several billion dollars on another, even less travelled, highway is a good use of taxpayer dollars at a time when the province has gone so far into debt.

A federal Impact Assessment, with its ability to take an arms-length view of the environmental, social and other factors, immune from any developer pressure, is essential for both these projects. Looking at options for the GTA West Transportation Corridor, such as widening existing north-south roads, such as Highways 27 and 427 and Keele Street, and any east-west connector along existing roadways should be reviewed and demonstrate how those less-costly and less environmentally-intrusive options compare against the impact of driving a brand-new highway through greenspaces. If those studies exist, then they should be tabled for the consideration of the public. Now that several municipalities, plus the Region of Peel, have come out in opposition to the GTA West, it would seem that, before making any further pronouncements of public support for this highway, it is incumbent on York Region to work with all the affected municipalities and re-visit the design and objectives of this project to determine what, if any, strategy, would garner support from those municipalities which will actually be affected, far more than those in York Region. That's just being a good neighbour, as well as being a thoughtful steward of York taxpayer funds.

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We encourage you to support a federal Impact Assessment and, moreover, that you suspend any further expense or effort on the promotion of either transportation corridor until such time as the provincial and federal assessments have been performed and have identified any areas of concern.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to address these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Susan Walmer".

Susan Walmer, CMA CPA
CEO, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust