

DEPUTATION REQUEST

REGIONAL COUNCIL

MARCH 18, 2021

Subject: Bradford Bypass Project and GTA West Transportation Corridor

Spokesperson: Steve Gilchrist

Name of Group or person(s) being represented (if applicable):

Brief summary of issue or purpose of deputation:

Pursuant to the solicitation for deputations, in the Notice of the Special Council Meeting, I would be grateful for the opportunity to make a deputation on the matters of the Bradford By-pass Project and the GTA West Transportation Corridor. As the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing who led off the process of protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine, I continue to have a keen interest in developmental issues which impact the greenbelt, as well as an historical perspective on those issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submission by Steve Gilchrist

To: York Regional Council

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

I appreciate the chance to offer some observations about Items F.4.1 and F.4.2 on today's agenda.

First a bit of a historical note. These comments are truly offered in the spirit of assisting Councillors and staff who may not have been in their current positions, twenty years ago, when the public campaign to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine demonstrated the true value that York Region residents placed on protection of local natural heritage – when they became aware of threats to those features.

The public awareness and outrage was a result of the developers in York Region deciding to use some very underhanded techniques to bully the provincial government into allowing the rezoning of the

Moraine lands which fell within York Region. York Region had actually agreed with the developer goals when the time came for Richmond Hill Council to make similar changes to their Official Plan and allow for the rezoning of virtually all Moraine lands from agricultural to high-density residential. As a result of sympathetic articles in the local media, and the active involvement of virtually every environmental group in the province, the Council meeting saw the largest attendance at any planning meeting in the history of the province. Well over 2,000 people attended and over 99% of the comments were in opposition to any rezoning of the land. To their credit, Richmond Hill Council respected the will of the people and cancelled plans to rezone Moraine lands in their community. Within one month, York Region Council reversed their decision and agree with the protection of 100% of the moraine lands which weren't already subject to any active planning applications. In short order, the province introduced legislation which banned any structure from the natural core and natural linkage portions of the Oak Ridges Moraine. The next government doubled down on that protection and incorporated the Moraine into the Greenbelt.

It would appear that history is repeating itself but, this time, while the developers are the original instigators of the pressure to develop these two new highways, the provincial government has, if you will, primed the pump by garnering considerable awareness of its use of an unprecedented number of Minister's Zoning Orders, as well as controversial changes to the Planning Act and the Conservation Authorities Act. On top of that, applications to circumvent Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine legislation, at sites such as Mary Lake, have created the highest level of public interest in environmental matters in twenty years.

To their credit, as a reflection of that public outrage and opposition, every single lower-tier municipal Council, plus Peel Region, have voted in opposition to the GTA West Corridor and it would be an affront to all those Councils if York Region was to take a contrary position – particularly since the communities in Peel Region would face far higher impacts, should the highway be built.

Those other Councils also recognized that the pandemic has fundamentally altered commuting habits and lowered traffic volumes. It would be fiscally irresponsible for the province to proceed with highway construction without updated traffic projections and the reality is that we may not now, for several years, the extent to which remote learning and working become the norm. It is absolutely appropriate for both the provincial government and, because of the interference with water courses, the federal government, to undertake comprehensive environmental assessments and the suggestion that York

Region opposes either, or both, raises very real questions about what it is afraid that those assessments will uncover.

Finally, even if updated traffic studies show that some expansion of the road network is in order, it is completely illogical to not start with less expensive, and less environmentally intrusive projects, such as expanding Highways 27, 427, 89 and Keele Street. If, and only if, those expansions fail to meet the need, then the second step should be to utilize existing east-west roads, such as Holborn Road and Old School Road, instead of developing parallel highways which will wreak far greater havoc, at far greater expense, on agricultural and forested lands.

Common sense, lower traffic volumes, greater provincial debt loads and an increased awareness of the environmental hazards posed by the Bradford By-Pass and the GTA West Transportation Corridor all serve to justify the strongest possible environmental and impact assessment and I would encourage the Council to drop any opposition to those assessments and, instead, embrace them. Thank you, again, for the chance to offer these comments.

Steve Gilchrist
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