

DEPUTATION REQUEST

REGIONAL COUNCIL

MARCH 18, 2021

Subject: GTA West Corridor / Highway 413, Urban Growth

Spokesperson: Irene Ford

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

Member of Stop The 413 Community Groups

Brief summary of issue or purpose of deputation:

Reverse endorsement of the GTA West Corridor/Stop the 413 and support the Federal Impact Assessment Request

OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL CLERK

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Irene Ford
Vaughan, ON

Mar 18, 2021

York Regional Council

Re: Agenda Items F.1, F.2 and F.4.2 at the March 18 Special Council Meeting

As a Vaughan resident I am asking York Regional Council to:

- 1. reverse endorsement for the GTA West Corridor/Highway 413;**
- 2. support the request for a Federal Impact Assessment;**
- 3. critically consider the direction and growth projections from the Province; and**
- 4. advocate for a future growth in York Region that does not promote car dependency, urban/employment/commercial sprawl and contribute negatively to climate change and public health.**

There has been little to no public support for this highway. It would be extremely concerning if York Region Council choose to continue to endorse the GTA West Highway when Vaughan, Peel Region, Halton Region and the City of Toronto have all passed motions withdrawing support and/or opposing and have supported the Federal Impact Assessment (IA)

Up until the release of the agenda last week there had always been reassurances that the highway will not cause sprawl and was not a means to open up land for development. Yet before you today you have these lands shown as prime agriculture in the Region Official Plan Update Report¹ and also as a potential area for future urban boundary expansion in the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment² (refer to Appendix 1 below). When I spoke with Region staff at the end of last year the direction, I understood was that there would be no net loss of prime agricultural farmland in York Region. Has this policy direction changed? I suspect the narrative today will change from the highway will not open up lands to sprawl to **we must build the highway because we have been directed by the Province to build for the highest growth scenario and we must build sprawl to accommodate this growth**. While I understand that these reports have been in the works for some time, I find it suspiciously convenient that they have been group together on the same agenda with both the GTA West Corridor/Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. **Who organized and decided to have a Special Council Meeting to meet the Federal government commenting deadline for the highways and then also choose to include staff reports that clearly will be used to debate a long fulsome debate on how York Region plans to grow?** I hope today you will question why is the Province directing to plan for the highest growth scenario, force York Region to sacrifice almost all of our white belt lands at the expense of Class 1 prime farmland 30 years into the future? **White belt lands are not destined for urban boundary expansion nor are they sprawl in waiting, most if not all are prime farmland** and a more accurate term would be 'Ontario's food-belt'. This appears consistent with the provincial

¹ <https://yorkpublishing.escrimemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=86d188d4-fb6e-47c3-8286-ba005fec8f58&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=12&Tab=attachments>

² <https://yorkpublishing.escrimemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=86d188d4-fb6e-47c3-8286-ba005fec8f58&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=11&Tab=attachments>

government's continual and unrelenting attack to enable all and any development without any regard for the environment, climate change or preservation of public goods.

Vaughan residents are highly concerned about how our interests are and will be represented today. **Vaughan Council passed a motion on March 10 to reverse endorsement for support of highway 413 and support the request for the Federal Impact Assessment³. This has not been acknowledged or presented in any staff communications at the time of writing and none of the Vaughan Council members who voted to support this motion are here today to represent us** only our regional representatives who all voted against the motion. On top of this staff have not documented Vaughan's decision in their response to the federal government nor do they express concern with the provinces ongoing EA stating:

"The Provincial EA process provides for the highest level of environmental assessment and stakeholder consultation. York Region is satisfied with the current Provincial process and would be negatively impacted by a lengthy delay in constructing the Project which would be likely if the GTA West Project were designated for the purpose of commencing a new Federal EA process."

Why have staff not included a staff report as was requested on Feb 25 and expected by Council members today? Why have staff not acknowledge the motions ratified by Vaughan Council on Mar 10? How can staff tell you that the Provincial EA process is sufficient when there are so many gaping information holes and the current provincial government has shown such a clear and utter disregard for environmental protection? The Province has quite literally demonstrated they are willing to rewrite provincial laws to do as they wish on environmentally sensitive land and do so retroactively to absolve themselves of wrongdoing⁴. At Peel Region Council last week there was at least a staff report that in response to public concerns and inform the discussion⁵. York Region residents have not been given this same courtesy. **Vaughan residents' concerns do not appear to be treated in a fair and ethical manner, as well as the decisions of Vaughan Council.**

Vaughan's Mayor and Regional Councillors are entrenched in their position to support this highway in the absence of public support, so much so that they have not been open to any new information put before them. More concerning is that **York Region Staff appear entrenched in their position to support this highway**. They do not acknowledge that the issues in the Advisory Report that resulted in the discontinuation of the highway in 2018, that province has changed EA legislation, proposed a streamlined EA that would allow early works construction prior to approval of the EA and significantly weakened environmental legislation. Nor provided any analysis or guidance for Council yet remain steadfast in their support and the provincial EA process. **Staff appear biased or lack autonomy**

³ <https://pub-vaughan.escrimetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=63425>

By approving the following:

1) That Vaughan Council asks the Federal government to undertake a Federal Impact Assessment on the proposed Highway 413 (GTA West Corridor), and that the Mayor write a letter to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Johnathan Wilkinson, informing him of the request for a Federal Environment Impact Assessment for Highway 413, and that this letter be circulated to all local area MPs and MPPs;

2) That the Mayor write a letter to the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Caroline Mulroney, and the local MPP, the Honourable Stephen Lecce, requesting that the Minister host a public information meeting for Vaughan residents for the purpose of receiving and answering the public's questions and addressing concerns related to the Province's GTA West Corridor, and that all other local MPPs be invited to attend this public information meeting;

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-doug-ford-mzo-pickering-duffins-creek-1.5937584>

⁵ <https://pub-peelregion.escrimetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=07635824-13c5-4829-88d2-2a80590cf657&Agenda=PostAgenda&lang=English&Item=129&Tab=attachments>

to report truthfully. This is very concerning because it impacts Council's ability to make informed decisions and we as the public are forced to use our own resources and time to ensure you are getting all of the information.

The highway will always be doubted because the provincial government and York Region Council have not acknowledged or addressed the concerns in the [Advisory Panel Report](#), which concluded the EA was fundamentally flawed and that other viable solutions, such as better utilization of the 407, were not fully explored (refer to Appendix 2). This highway was put on hold in 2015, cancelled in 2018, during this time period of uncertainty did staff conduct any work to determine what alternatives York Region should be considering, develop any contingency plan or alternatives or do they continue to wait for environmentally destructive mega-series highway that is inconsistent with the Region's policy and objectives surrounding environment, climate change and healthy communities. Staff state they have consulted on the transportation plan yet I speak with people living along the route that have no idea how close the highway may be to their homes and others wondering how the Region plans to expand and upgrade surrounding roads in response to the highway. The Feb 11 staff report requested regional roads have four-lane cross sections at interchanges⁶. Some residents read this and immediately were concerned for their homes because if these regional roads expand it will consume their homes. We've asked the Region about regional roads and have yet to receive a response.

This highway is not about improving transportation for residents, it is about improving transportation for the commercial and industrial section and is also in response to e-commerce, at the expense of our farmland, greenbelt, source and storm water protection. These distribution facilities come with community impacts and external costs that are not accounted for or acknowledged; the economic benefits are not implicit there are externalities that are not included in the evaluation. The rise in E-commerce is impacting more than how we buy goods it is also having a major impact on land use planning and transportation. This is recognized but the environmental and social impacts that come with this model are not acknowledged nor how this model further contributes to Climate Change. There are much broader policy implications beyond the scope of this Council but ones that can't be ignored because the influence of this model is so powerful and already our communities and economy is being molded in away that is at the expense of public goods.

Are we willing to subsidize and spending billions of dollars to pave over farmland and the Greenbelt so Amazon can deliver packages within 2 days and avoid tolls on the 407? Or should we be responding and reviewing what this means for land use, our transportation system and considering policy implications to ensure this economic opportunity is embraced in a manner that is in the interest of both the public, government and the private sector.

To be the clear the public is not telling you that you can't develop or build roads or that our cities can't grow or change. The public is telling you that you can't build mega-highways and you can't support sprawl on prime farmland, on lands that are imperative to source and stormwater protection for all of the GTA. The public is telling you that building a mega-series highway is not consistent with our true,

⁶ Recommendation in Staff Report dated Feb 11 Recommendation 1: *Council request the Ontario Ministry of Transportation reconstruct Weston Road, Highway 27 and King-Vaughan Road to include a **four-lane road cross-section** across the future GTA West highway, as well as walking and cycling facilities.* See: <https://yorkpublishing.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19164>

immediate priorities and needs and that the focus on the highway distracts the discussion and resources away from developing and improving the built environment of our existing communities so that they are sustainable, healthy, active, transit orientated and climate friendly. The public is telling you that we want solutions where traffic congestion exists then we can embrace more density so that our communities can grow; but right now we can't move in our communities so we fight density. We are telling you that we will not support our taxpayer dollars to be spent on something that predominately will benefit larger powerful private interests at the expense of public goods, when we have clearly stated our priorities and needs are to improve our existing communities to accommodate growth.

We are telling you the development model that supports this highway and the direction from the Province for updating Official Plans is longer acceptable to future of Ontario, the future of York Region and the future of our communities. Most importantly we are not advocating we are reminding you of decisions that must be made by all levels of governments based on science and facts and the recommendations of subject matter experts. **Climate Change is here and demands urgent action by all levels of government in the next ten years. Before you today are decisions that must be acted upon in the face of the realities of Climate Change.**

Thank you.
Irene Ford

Appendix 2: Supporting Information for Withdrawal of York Region's Endorsement of the GTA West Corridor/Highway 413

Advisory Panel Report, Conclusions on Why the Phase 1 EA is Fundamentally Flawed

- The EA did not demonstrate 'need' rather 'opportunity'
- The two Phased EA approach has allowed the highway to proceed without properly evaluating impacts to Greenbelt lands to avoid key natural heritage and hydrological features making it unclear if it conforms to the Greenbelt Plan.
- Modeling scenarios did not adequately account for future uncertainty (travel demand assumptions, self driving cars, growth forecasts – pandemics?).
- Other transportation infrastructure solutions recommended in Phase 1 have not been fully developed or utilized; such as better utilization of the 407.

Council must withdraw support for this highway for the following reasons.

- Destruction of precious Class 1 farmland, a finite resource.
- The highway cuts through agricultural, natural heritage and environmentally sensitive lands - bisecting 85 streams (10 of which are ecologically high priority) destroying seven entire wood lots, including 5.95 km length of forest, significantly fragmenting valley lands, disrupting 1000 ha of land significant to wildlife movement, paving over 8.8 million square metres of surface.
- The streamlined EA allows for pre-construction and expansion of bridges and other infrastructure which renders the Provincial EA meaningless and if such infrastructure is found to be detrimental to the environment, it will remain.
- The new highway encourages more vehicles and more pollution and provincial EA is not looking at the alternative of more public transit such as the construction of the many new GO stations that were approved in 2018.
- Hwy 413 is very close to the already functioning and underutilized Hwy 407 therefore a new highway is neither needed nor worth the destruction of the environment and farmland
- The highway is fiscally irresponsible and takes away resources from our immediate transportation needs and priorities to address traffic congestion where it exists.

Appendix 3: Reasons Why York Region Council Should Support the Federal Impact Assessment

Council must support the request for the Federal Impact Assessment for the following reasons.

- The streamlined EA allows for pre-construction which renders the Provincial EA meaningless and if such infrastructure is found to be detrimental to the environment, it will remain.
- The TRCA stated: *"As MTO is exempt from the regulatory requirements of the CA Act, TRCA has significant concerns there is no mechanism in place for the protection of life and property or the management of natural resources...which fails to fulfill the objects of the EA Act."*⁷.
- The Provincial governments weakening of environmental legislation with unclear regulations and outcomes is no longer equivalent to Federal legislation.
- Proceeding under the current regime will cause irreversible destruction to farmland, wetlands, forests, natural hydrological features and put endangered species at further risk.
- No public health or agricultural impact assessment has been completed.

⁷ TRCA Letter Re: Proposed regulation for a streamlined environmental assessment process for the Ministry of Transportation's Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor project (ERO #019-1882), refer to pg. 3: <https://pub-trca.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=6249>