

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Transportation Services
June 13, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Transportation Services

Greater Toronto Area West Highway Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and Highway 404 Extension Update

1. Recommendations

1. Council support a robust highway network to move people, goods and services and achieve provincial Growth Plan population and employment objectives in York Region and encourage:
 - a) The resumption of Environmental Assessment for Greater Toronto Area West Highway for near-term inclusion in the Southern Highways Program
 - b) The inclusion of the Highway 400-404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension to Highway 12 in the next Southern Highways Program
2. The Regional Chair communicate this position in a letter to the Members of Provincial Parliament from York Region and the Provincial Ministers of Transportation and Municipal Affairs and Housing.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Regions of Peel and Halton, Simcoe County, Town of Bradford-West Gwillimbury and the local municipalities.

2. Summary

This report provides Council with an update on the planned Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Highway, the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link (commonly known as the Bradford Bypass), and the Highway 404 Extension to Highway 12 and the critical role the highway corridors serve in accommodating the movement of goods, services and people to meet population and employment targets set forth in the provincial Growth Plan. Attachment 1 shows the alignment for these corridors.

Key Points:

- The three sections of highway are:

- The GTA West Highway is a proposed 50 kilometre long four to six lane provincial highway extending from Highway 400 in York Region to Highway 401 in Halton Region.
 - The Highway 400–404 Connecting Link is a proposed 16 kilometre, four-lane provincial highway that will connect Highway 400 in Bradford-West Gwillimbury to Highway 404 in East Gwillimbury. The EA for the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link was completed in 2002 and the lands are now protected for future highway construction.
 - The Highway 404 Extension is a proposed 39 kilometre, four-lane provincial highway that will extend Highway 404 from Woodbine Avenue south of Ravenshoe Road in East Gwillimbury, to Highway 12 in Durham Region. The EA for the Highway 404 Extension was completed in 2002 and the lands are now protected for future highway construction.
- The three proposed highway corridors would allow for improved goods and people movement from the southern urbanized communities of York Region to markets and employment locations west of the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA).
 - As the province has recently signalled its desire to build transportation infrastructure that will move people and goods more efficiently, support the growing population and strengthen the economy, it is recommended that Council now reaffirm York Region's position relative to these three critical freeway network elements.

3. Background

In 2018, The Ministry of Transportation Ontario announced they will no longer proceed with the Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment

The GTA West Transportation Corridor (GTA West Corridor) was identified to support future demand in the greater golden horseshoe through [a multi-modal Transportation Development Strategy \(TDS\)](#). This strategy made recommendations for optimizing the existing transportation network, improvements to non-roadway transportation modes such as transit and rail, widening of existing highways and a new transportation corridor. Work was underway through to December 2015 to identify the route and develop the preliminary design for the GTA West Corridor.

In February 2018, after reviewing advice from the GTA West Corridor Review Advisory Panel, Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) announced they would no longer proceed with the GTA West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment.

In March 2018, the province announced that MTO and the Independent Electricity System Operator would jointly proceed with a Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study intended

to identify lands for a multi-purpose linear corridor to protect for future infrastructure such as utilities, transit or other transportation modes.

In November 2018, the Province of Ontario announced their intention to restart the GTA West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment

In their release of “*A Plan for the People, Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, 2018 Background Papers*”, the province announced the following regarding the GTA West Highway:

“Ontario is doing the work necessary to resume the EA for the GTA West Highway Corridor, which was suspended in 2015. The EA will identify and address transportation needs in a corridor study area covering portions of York, Peel and Halton Regions. Building more transportation infrastructure would speed up travel, and help alleviate traffic congestion in the Greater Toronto Area”.

The Environmental Assessments for the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension were completed in 2002

On August 28, 2002, the Ministry of Environment granted approval for both the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link EA and the Highway 404 Extension EA. The Environmental Assessment identified a need for the highway to meet and support residential growth and goods movement between northern York Region, Simcoe County and Durham Regions and recreational traffic to areas such as Muskoka and Halliburton to the southern Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. In 2004, the province designed the approved alignment of the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and Highway 404 Extension as Controlled Access Highway Corridors under the Highway Traffic Act, thereby protecting the route from development until the highways are constructed.

Construction of the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension have not been identified in the MTO’s capital plan, Southern Highways Program.

The GTA West Highway and Highway 400–404 Connecting Link have been included in the provincial 2017 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

The provincial [2017 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe](#) identifies the GTA West Highway as a future transportation corridor and the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link as a highway extension. The Highway 404 Extension from Woodbine Avenue to Highway 12 is not identified in the Growth Plan.

The three planned highways are identified in the York Region Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan

The York Region [Official Plan](#) and [Transportation Master Plan](#) identify the GTA West Highway, Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and Highway 404 Extension as planned transportation corridors.

4. Analysis

Council has long advocated for accelerated implementation of the GTA West Highway and the Highway 400-404 Connecting Link

Council advocacy for the GTA West Highway is summarized below:

- [May 2007](#) - Council requested that MTO expedite the GTA West Transportation Corridor and other EAs that are needed for the provincial Growth Plan.
- [May 2011](#) - Council advised MTO that York Region will continue with the planning of lands affected by the GTA West Transportation Corridor route planning area, while ensuring appropriate secondary and official plan policies for those lands recognise and protect for the transportation corridor as it is being defined through the on-going provincial EA process.
- December 2012 - GTA West Transportation Corridor Council Resolution: The following was resolved:
 - MTO be requested to proceed with Stage 2 of the EA as expeditiously as possible;
 - MTO be requested to work collaboratively with York Region to prioritise the refinement of the Preliminary Route Planning Study Area in York Region as an early part of the Stage 2 work in defining and assessing alternative alignments for the GTA West Highway.
- [March 2016](#) - report provided Council with an update on the suspended EA process and recommended that MTO resume the EA and define the preferred alignment as soon as possible.
- [April 2018](#) - Council Memo informed Council of the province's decision to no longer proceed with the GTA West Transportation Corridor EA, and that the province was proceeding instead with a planning study to identify lands for a multipurpose linear corridor to protect for future infrastructure such as utilities, transit or other transportation modes.

Council advocacy for the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link is summarized below:

- [March 2008](#) - Council requested that the Regional Chair communicate to the province that the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link must be included in the provincial plans as necessary infrastructure required within the 2031 horizon, and request that the province develop a schedule to move forward with the highway construction.
- [January 2011](#) - Council endorsed staff comments on the proposed Growth Plan Amendment including the need for the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link to support growth to 2031.
- [November 2011](#) - staff reported that York Region and Simcoe County staff had developed the scope of work for a joint York-Simcoe Cross Boundary Transportation Study. Council endorsed the scope of work and authorized staff to proceed with the study. The joint study, completed in 2012, reconfirmed the need for the Highway 400–404 Connecting Link.
- [June 2012](#) - Council directed staff to work with Simcoe County, Bradford West Gwillimbury, East Gwillimbury, Newmarket and Georgina to develop a joint communication strategy to advocate for the Highway 400 - 404 Connecting Link.

The completion of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area freeway network in York Region is critical to supporting provincial objectives, help build resilient and sustainable communities and support economic growth

The planning, design and construction of the GTA West Highway, Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension, are foundational to building resilient and sustainable communities in York Region and the GTHA. These highway connections will allow the Region to more efficiently connect people to jobs and support economic growth through expanding highway connections both north and south and east and west to better complete the provincial highway network across the GTHA.

Over the next ten years, the Region is investing \$2.02B in arterial road improvements to build an arterial road network to assist in supporting Regional economic growth and new and existing homes and businesses. The completion of the provincial highway network will build upon these road improvements to establish a reliable, well-connected, robust transportation network. This network will facilitate the efficient movement of goods, services and people in and through York Region, connect existing and future employment lands in York Region, Simcoe County and Peel Region, enhance the economic vitality of the Region and improve live-work opportunities, particularly for residents in the Region’s northern municipalities.

Arterial road and provincial freeway improvements will be key to the Region meeting provincially-directed population and employment objectives and to accommodate provincially and federally significant goods movement corridors.

The Highway 404 Extension should be added to the provincial 2017 Growth Plan to align with the York Region Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan

The most recent phase of the Highway 404 Extension from Green Lane to Woodbine Avenue/Ravenshoe Road was opened to traffic in September 2014. The further extension to Highway 12 in Durham Region has been EA approved since 2002 and the corridor protected for future construction.

As a first step, the Highway 404 Extension should be added to the provincial Growth Plan to align with the Regional Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan.

5. Financial

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

6. Local Impact

Local municipalities generally benefit from new highways that provide capacity needed to accommodate growth and improve traffic congestion.

The exact alignment of the planned GTA West Highway has not been confirmed. This alignment uncertainty impacts a number of development areas in Vaughan, including Vaughan 400 North Employment Area Secondary Plan, Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan and West Vaughan Employment Area Secondary Plan. MTO has been working with the City of Vaughan to ensure that the alignment alternatives are protected within development plans.

7. Conclusion

York Region continues to advocate for provincial highway expansion, including the planned GTA West Highway, Highway 400–404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension. Highway expansions are key elements to supporting the Region's economic vitality and accommodating the provincial Growth Plan.

For more information on this report, please contact Brian Titherington, Director, Transportation and Infrastructure Planning at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75901. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Paul Jankowski**
Commissioner of Transportation Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

May 30, 2019
Attachment (1)
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