

CCKT endorses OGA position on planned corridor

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July 31 marked the deadline by the GTA West Project Team, part of a private consultancy group hired by the Provincial Government called ?URS Canada Inc.? to receive public input on the current phase of their environmental assessment for a proposed new 400-series highway route.

The corridor being examined as part of this planning exercise is quite broad: Originally envisioned as a route connecting Guelph to Vaughan, it has morphed over time into a more limited route connecting Milton to the City of Vaughan via what is essentially a bypass route for the Highway 400 and 401 interchange.

It would cut through a large swath of Greenbelt, itself a large concern to CCKT, that presents just one of several major issues to be considered in the larger context of Ontario's economic, environmental and not to mention, financial sustainability.

CCKT has been watching and participating in this project for the past several years. We did not come to it with a pre-set perspective. In fact, there appeared to be some potential benefits of a new transportation corridor to our local village sustainability, particularly Nobleton and King City.

To date we have not released a formal public policy on GTA West.

For the most part, we've been observing and discussing the pros and cons as we perceive them, for this significant infrastructure project that would extend itself through a significant portion of Greenbelt.

We know that the car is not going away anytime soon.

We know that public transit will remain a challenge for several, if not many, years to come until new transit infrastructure can be completed.

We know that locally, Nobleton and King City both require road bypasses to preserve what we can of the intimacy of these villages.

We also know that for the most part, this potential toll highway will not physically touch King Township, other than a concerning route alternative ? ?Route 7F? ? that comes close to a significant residential development.

That said, we are not a ?NIMBY? organization (Not In My Back Yard). CCKT takes a broader geographic view of our environment (the Moraine and Greenbelt cross multiple jurisdictions for example) and our approach to GTA West is consistent.

Of late, we had been discussing in detail the route and interchange alternatives of the current Phase 2 plan, with this in mind, as well as the implications for King Township and specifically, Nobleton and King City residents.

We found ourselves mired in details over essentially, which alternatives are less troublesome than others. This corridor is massive, troubling, complicated, and fraught with compromises that only attempt to minimize the certain negative impacts on our environment.

Even we, one of the larger and more established environmental advocacy groups in York Region, are challenged to properly assess this proposal.

We decided after reviewing the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance's submission (CCKT is an active member) that it speaks to our fundamental concerns. There is much work to be done before such an expensive, potentially damaging, and arguably unnecessary project like this can be justified.

The GTA-West Project Team behaves as though this is a ?done deal? ??let us assure you it is not. The provincial government is accountable for this as part of its transportation strategy. It is they who must approve and account for this massive, and we now believe, misguided undertaking. And so far, the province has been noticeably silent, not to mention absent.

We encourage you to read the OGA submission. It recognizes that indeed car and truck transportation does have its place. It suggests:

? Expanding on existing routes rather than cut new ones through prime agricultural lands.

? Reinforcing the need for significant public transit investment.

? Challenging the need for this arguably antiquated form of investment in moving goods when it's clear Ontario is moving away from manufacturing and toward a service economy.

Recommending minimizing interchanges, if indeed it must be built, to minimize traffic disruptions in local communities.

? Locating the highway as far off the Greenbelt as possible, if indeed it must be built, and as close as possible to the areas it is supposedly designed to serve.

? Accounting for the full cost of the project. Land acquisition costs have not been included in their calculations to date. As well, the environmental cost has not been addressed in any significant form from which to make an informed decision on alternate routes and

interchanges, and for that matter, the project as a whole.

It's for these reasons that CCKT has decided at this point in time to publicly endorse the OGA position on GTA West. Their policy is our policy.

If and when a more meaningful set of data can be made available, we will certainly revisit this. And as we have done since this exercise began, we will follow and participate where we can.

We at CCKT welcome and encourage your commentary on this and more issues we are following on our interactive web blog cckt.ca as well as on our Facebook page (Facebook.com/CCKTCA) and Twitter at Twitter.com/CCKTCA.