

Highway 413 won't solve congestion

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Highway 413 is a blast from the past that has no place in our future.

In 1950s Ontario, roads were the path to the new suburbs and industrial areas that surrounded our cities. Our original network of two-lane highways were soon crowded so we built the 401 – the continent's widest multi-lane highway. We expanded the length and breadth of the QEW all the way to Niagara and built the 403. Over time even these mega-highways were not enough and their traffic has slowed to a crawl. It's time to say a firm goodbye to this 1950s approach.

Unfortunately, some of our transportation engineers are stuck in an outdated mindset for moving people and goods. They have proposed (or built) a series of new "ring roads" outside of the existing network. The proposed 413, likely another toll highway, is the newest ring road that if fully built would extend from Niagara to Peterborough. In the east the 413 would encompass the Mid-Peninsula route through Niagara to Milton. The mid-section of the 413, the GTA West, would mirror the 407 from Milton to the 400.

The first section of the 413 (also called the GTA West) is the latest in the series of poorly conceived, expensive (\$4 billion and growing) highway proposals. If built, Highway 413 would generate more traffic on our already clogged roads, encourage more sprawl and pave over farmland, including a portion in Ontario's Greenbelt.

People are tired of spending hours stuck in cars. Studies show that highways don't solve congestion, just encourage more people to drive, further clogging up our roads. We need to change our growth patterns away from planning and transportation options that favours cars.

Transportation planning should aim to move more people by public transit along congested urban corridors. Case in point is the area around Toronto's Pearson Airport, the second highest concentration of jobs in Canada. Ninety-three per cent of the employees working here use a car to get to work. The airport employment zone is serviced by the 427, 401 and 409 highways yet congestion persists. Getting public transit in the right areas can reduce congestion, get people to work and school faster and improve the efficiency of goods movement to get our economy moving.

Following the UN climate summit and significant public concern, Ontario announced a temporary suspension (until spring) of Highway 413's environmental assessment pending a review. This review must model demand based on a toll road (which the 413 would likely be), evaluate the climate impacts of this highway and look at transit alternatives.

Transportation planning should reflect smarter growth, not fight against it. The 413 should be scrapped outright, and the province should invest the \$4 billion in rail to move goods, and in public transit to move more people. Both would reduce the number of vehicles on the road, eliminating the need for new highways – not to mention preventing farms, forests and wetlands from being paved for traffic-clogged highways.

Members of the public concerned about the risky Highway 413 can sign a petition and order free lawn signs at Stopthe413.ca.