

Ontario backs off on review of GTA West Corridor

By Mark Pavilons

Word that the province has suspended its work on the proposed GTA West corridor comes good news to opponents.

The Ministry of Transportation has suspended its work on the environmental assessment of the Greater Toronto Area West Highway Corridor (GTA West). The project will be reviewed and an update will be provided in spring of 2016.

It appears the province is rethinking its plan for a thoroughfare.

The province is making investments in public transit and transportation infrastructure to help manage congestion, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the province's economy. With new emerging technologies and a steadfast commitment to protect our natural heritage in Ontario, including the Greenbelt, it is essential to have a forward looking plan when it comes to relieving congestion.

The Ministry of Transportation extended its thanks to those who have participated in previously held public information centres as part of the environmental assessment process. No further public information centres will be scheduled at this time.

Having the right transportation network in place that builds on our climate change commitments, our ability to embrace new and emerging technologies and the sharing economy, will help us plan for a flexible transportation system that adapts to our quickly changing landscape and positions our province for success for generations to come," said Steven Del Duca, Minister of Transportation.

This comes as welcome news to Environmental Defence.

Investing in a redundant mega-highway over much needed transit is out of step with the Ontario government's commitment to tackle climate change and create livable cities," according to Susan Lloyd Swail.

The proposed route of the GTA West Highway also known as Highway 413 cuts through local farms, forests and rivers, as well as a portion of the Greenbelt. If built, it would encourage more car use, enable further sprawl and contribute to traffic congestion in the GTHA that damages the economy, our health and quality of life. Because of its high risks, the citizen and community movement to stop the 413 is growing. Transportation Minister Del Duca is doing the right thing by taking a second look at the need for this highway.

In order to make a meaningful dent on carbon emissions, the province's future transportation infrastructure investments, including public transit and roads, needs to be aligned with key employment and urban growth centres. Another highway on the fringe of the GTHA would add to Ontario's emissions, and is inconsistent with sustainable growth. Investing the estimated \$4 billion cost for this highway in public transit will get more people moving across the region and is the healthier choice for the environment.

We applaud the Ontario government for making the difficult, but necessary decision to suspend the GTA West Corridor project," said Burkhard Mausberg, CEO of Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. With an estimated \$5 billion price tag and no research to show that our region's crippling congestion will be reduced, it's time for another look at this project in the context of the Province's review of the Greenbelt Plan.

Mausberg added there is nearly universal recognition that we need to build more livable communities and better align growth and infrastructure investments. This should not include the construction of an expensive and unnecessary 400-series highway paving over sources of local food, the water systems that clean our drinking water, and the forests that filter the air we breathe.

We look forward to hearing from the Province regarding the next steps in the review of this project," he added.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT) and the King Vaughan Citizen Coalition (KVCC) are thrilled with this decision and applauds Minister Steven Del Duca and MTO for listening to the local community throughout this process.

KVCC wishes to praise the provincial government and especially Minister Steve Del Duca for his recent proposal to better understand the Sensitive Protected Countryside of section 7 and of course our beloved homes and community.

We are delighted that MTO and the minister have considered the environmental impact of the proposed highway seriously and were willing to listen to our concerns," said the Hon. Hal Jackman, ORMLT Trust Ambassador. The Land Trust protects ecologically sensitive properties within the study area that are protected through the Federal Ecological Gifts Program.

Over the past year, we've been meeting with all levels of government including the Federal Ministry of the Environment, MTO staff, consultants, and local politicians. This decision demonstrates the government's commitment to protecting green space in Ontario," he added.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust protects 50 properties across the Moraine and Greenbelt, ensuring the source of drinking water for much of southern Ontario is safe.

King Vaughan Citizen Coalition is a group of citizens from King and Vaughan. This group of enthusiastic homeowners and

landowners reside on or near King Vaughan Road at Highway 27.