

Preliminary work starts on Highway 413 corridor

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Preliminary pre-planning has begun on the somewhat controversial Highway 413 transportation corridor. King councillors received an update from Ministry of Transportation staff recently. While there's grassroots opposition to the highway, studies will look at all aspects of the project to determine its impact. Project manager Hossein Hosseini noted the federal environment minister of climate change designated the 413 under the federal IA Act. This planning and decision-making tool will assess the positive and negative environmental, economic, health and social effects of the corridor. He noted the corridor will include some 11 municipal interchanges, and connections with Highways 403, 427, 410 and 401/407. It's very early in the pre-planning phase and much of it is a conformity exercise, summarizing issues and stakeholder submissions. Mara Bullock, consultant with WSP, noted some key issues include the fact it doesn't conform to the Greenbelt Plan. There will be negative impacts on flora and fauna, along with environmental costs. TRCA and CVC are active partners in the project's review. Some of the complaints arise from a lack of public consultation, and a charge the project only benefits developers. There will be health and socio-economic impacts, she said. At a recent York public information meeting, the issue of connectivity in Vaughan and the impact on local roads was discussed. As well, the new road could impact the historic Carrying Place Trail which runs through King. She said WSP will take all the issues and document them in the project description. Hosseini said the ministry will still accept submissions on the concept. Councillor Debbie Schaefer noted some 10 municipalities representing 60% of the GTA population have voiced their opposition to the project. Hosseini did admit the agency feels there will be an adverse impact on three federally listed species at risk. Currently, the process involves submission of the initial project description, followed by conformity and engagement on issues. It's estimated it will take five years before a concrete decision is made. The presentation did show adverse affects on Greenbelt and agricultural lands. There will likely be impacts on human health from increased pollution caused by the traffic, and potential impacts on drinking water and wells. There is a potential the projects will result in the loss of heritage resources and cultural land spaces. MTO noted there has been a deficiency in engagement with the Indigenous community. While the 413 is intended to be a multi-use transportation corridor, there are questions whether it's the best option. An Air Quality Impact Assessment, which is part of the Provincial EA, predicts the cumulative concentration of various contaminants and GHGs. A human health impact scoping report will be prepared to assess human health impacts. Social, economic and health studies are being conducted for the three regions - Halton, Peel and York - as well as municipalities like King, Vaughan, Brampton and Caledon. Everything from air quality, noise, safety, land use, employment opportunities and travel and tourism will be reviewed. Through 2022, MTO will continue to meet with municipal staff, stakeholders and review feedback. The initial project description will be submitted later this year to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. Further progress will depend on the IACC's decision on whether a Federal Impact Assessment is required for the 413.