

Wynne unveils Highway 427 extension plans in Vaughan

By Angela Gismondi

The government of Ontario plans to extend Highway 427 north through Vaughan to Major Mackenzie Drive if the provincial budget is passed.

Premier Kathleen Wynne came to Vaughan to deliver the news in person Thursday. She was joined by Vaughan MPP Steven Del Duca, Transportation Minister Glen Murray, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Linda Jeffrey and Vaughan Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua and members of council at Conair/Cuisinart Consumer Products in Vaughan.

The Highway 427 extension is included in the 2013 Ontario budget. If the budget is passed, construction on the 6.6-kilometre highway extension would begin in 2016/17. The extension would take the highway from its present terminus at Zenway Boulevard up to Major Mackenzie Drive in Vaughan. The project proposes three new interchanges including Langstaff and Rutherford Roads, nine bridges and protection for a future transitway and transit stations along the west side of the highway.

Wynne, the former Minister of Transportation, said she knows how important the project is to the community.

"Our investments in infrastructure are building a roadmap for Ontario's future," said Wynne. "As our communities continue to grow, we need to fund smart projects like this that will help people get home from their jobs quickly at the end of the day, and connect our businesses to their expanding markets."

The expansion of the highway would open up the Vaughan Enterprise Zone employment lands, an integrated multi-modal transportation services and economic hub of regional importance in the city's southwest corner. The Vaughan Enterprise Zone encompasses an area of more than 1,120 hectares (2,767 acres) and is currently home to more than 350 businesses.

"As businesses expand, we need to be able to facilitate the expansion in a smart and sustainable way," said Wynne, adding the extension will also help goods and people move more efficiently, help connect businesses to their workforce and allow commuters to spend less time in their cars. "It's about job creation and quality of life."

The extension is part of government's commitment to make smart infrastructure investments to improve infrastructure across the province, explained the premier. The investment is part of the government's strategy to create jobs, help Ontario create a competitive business environment and help people in their everyday lives. This project has been in the works for years. An environmental assessment has already been completed.

"There have been works ongoing on this project for a number of years," said Wynne. "What's important is that we have the plans and we can have the shovels in the ground and move ahead as soon as the plans are finalized."

MPP Del Duca, who has lived in Vaughan for 28 years, welcomed the funding news which he said will have a tremendous positive impact for Vaughan. He added the Liberal government is committed to investing in important public infrastructure such as the extension of Highway 427.

"This is a project that when fully built out, will help residents in Vaughan and York Region and particularly in Woodbridge and Kleinburg to spend less time in their cars so they can do the things they want to do with family and friends," said Del Duca.

Furthermore, the extension of the highway will unlock the potential in the Vaughan Enterprise Zone, Del Duca explained.

"This is something Vaughan is very proud of and rightfully so," said Del Duca. "There is tons of potential here, potential which will be realized thanks to today's announcement. It's a huge win for moving our economy forward."

Mayor Bevilacqua said he is grateful for the attention the provincial government has given the City of Vaughan and York Region.

"We understand and we appreciate the fact that you're making this investment in our region, in our city, when resources are scarce," said Bevilacqua, adding the extension will create jobs and improve the quality of life for local residents and businesses. "This project speaks to the vision the premier has for this province."

It will also provide economic growth opportunities, better connect communities and improve the flow of traffic and goods and services in the Vaughan Enterprise Zone, which the mayor said is one of the most valuable employment areas in the Greater Toronto Area.

"The 427 announcement today is a value driven announcement," said Bevilacqua. "In order for the province to grow, we need to invest in areas that have the potential to grow. Vaughan, the entire GTA and the province of Ontario will benefit from this. Thank you for stepping up to the plate and making this happen in this region."

Murray pointed out the City of Vaughan needs 21st century infrastructure to keep up with the population growth. One aspect of this is the extension of the subway, the other is the extension of Highway 427.

"The subway will help connect Vaughan and create a dynamic, complete community," said Murray. "The 427 completes that trifecta

of really important infrastructure for the way to secure the future of Vaughan.?

Not everyone was impressed with the Highway 427 extension announcement. Vaughan provincial Progressive Conservative candidate Peter Meffe said he was pleased to hear the 427 extension was included in the budget, but felt it stopped short of what the community really needs.

?I am overjoyed at the news that the Liberals have finally admitted we were correct in demanding the extension of Highway 427 north, although they stopped short of the critical need for this highway to reach at least Highway 9 to relieve traffic gridlock on Highway 400 and throughout our communities rather than simply dumping traffic onto Major Mackenzie Drive,? stated Meffe in a release.

The vote on the budget is expected at the end of the month. The Liberals need the support of the Andrea Horwath and the New Democrats in order to pass the budget and avoid triggering an election.

Although Wynne admitted she met with Horwath, she was reluctant to speak on the details of the meeting and said that it was ?productive? and she was ?optimistic.? She plans to meet with the NDP leader again this week.