

Tolls on Hwy. 412 always part of the plan, province tells Whitby

Impact of fees on traffic volumes to be measured in coming months

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WHITBY -- Protests by local residents and politicians against the Province of Ontario's decision to charge motorists to travel on Hwy. 412 have fallen on deaf ears.

A new stretch of Hwy. 407 in Durham, running eastward from Brock Road in Pickering to Harmony Road in Oshawa, and Hwy. 412, which connects Hwy. 407 to Hwy. 401 in Whitby, opened last June and the province announced tolls wouldn't be imposed until the new year. On Feb. 1, despite growing concerns across the community about the impact that the added fees - specifically on Hwy. 412 - would have on local traffic, tolls came into effect on both roads.

"It is upsetting that our voices were not listened to," said Whitby Regional Councillor and Deputy Mayor Derrick Gleed, at a recent public meeting.

The town sent a letter to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) on Dec. 19, requesting Hwy. 412 remain toll-free. The letter points to the fact that all other Ontario link highways to and from Hwy. 401 are free to travel on. Introducing tolls on the 412 "will drastically discourage people from driving it and increase traffic on local roads and Highway 401," it said. A petition posted on Change.org regarding the matter has nearly 6,000 supporters.

"Hopefully, in time, the province will see the error of its ways as traffic will likely flow now onto Lake Ridge (Road) and become more of a problem there, and they won't be receiving the revenue that they expected on the 412," said Coun. Gleed.

In the MTO's response to the town, dated Jan. 20, regional director Teepe Khawja wrote that the Highway 407 East Project "was designed to include Highway 412 and Highway 418 (being built as part of Phase 2) and the intent was always to toll these connectors to Highway 401."

The project is expected to "provide significant economic benefits to Durham

Region now and for years to come," he said.

"Highways 407 and 412 will help manage traffic flow and provide alternate travel routes for the region and the province," Khawja wrote, adding that toll revenue received from both routes will return to the Ontario treasury, "generating funds for government priorities".

"Toll rates for Highways 407 and 412 are lower than tolls on Highway 407ETR; approximately 15 per cent lower during off-peak periods, and approximately 30 per cent lower during peak periods."

At the meeting on Jan. 30, Coun. Gleed said he took exception to the claim that a tolled route was always part of the plan.

"The original RFPs (requests for proposals) that went out did not include a toll route on the 412 ... no information was received and no dialogue was engaged in with the town with regards to the eventual tolling of Hwy. 412," he said.

Whitby's commissioner of public works, Suzanne Beale, said both the town and the Region of Durham will be collecting data to help determine the impact of the tolls on local traffic in the coming months.

"I think some people have gotten used to using the 412 so they may continue but certainly the tolling will result in traffic being shifted over," she said.

"Between us and the region, we'll have a pretty good idea soon in terms of the impact on Lake Ridge."

Mayor Don Mitchell said he predicts Hwy. 412 will be empty and Lake Ridge Road will be heavily congested.

"If that prediction is true, I think that gives us the ammunition to go back to the province again."

The second construction phase of the Hwy. 407 East project will include an extension from Harmony Road to Hwy. 35/115, and Hwy. 418 in Clarington connecting Hwy. 407 to Hwy. 401. This final section will be built by 2020, with an interim opening from Harmony Road to Hwy. 418 by late 2017.

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