

Highway plan gets cool response

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Neil Ahmed, MTO's consultant project manager from McCormick Rankin Corporation said the environmental and cultural features within Halton Hills is "largely isolated... and they can be avoided or mitigated through the next process of route planning."

"This sounds like a done deal to be quite frank," said Ward 4 Councillor Bob Inglis, who objected to MTO's 'sales pitch'. "I'm sure you're sensing you're in a hostile environment ... there's not a lot of happiness on this side of the table."

"I'm getting the feeling that we're not being closely listened to," said Ward 2 Councillor Joan Robson, who represents the area most impacted. "Do you think it's fair to say that we've been agriculturally, industrially and culturally assaulted?"

"I don't agree with that assessment," said Wang.

Under the EA, he said, the MTO planners have looked at all of the social, cultural, heritage, environmental and other impacts, and said, "I think we have a done a fair job in considering all these factors prescribed under the Act."

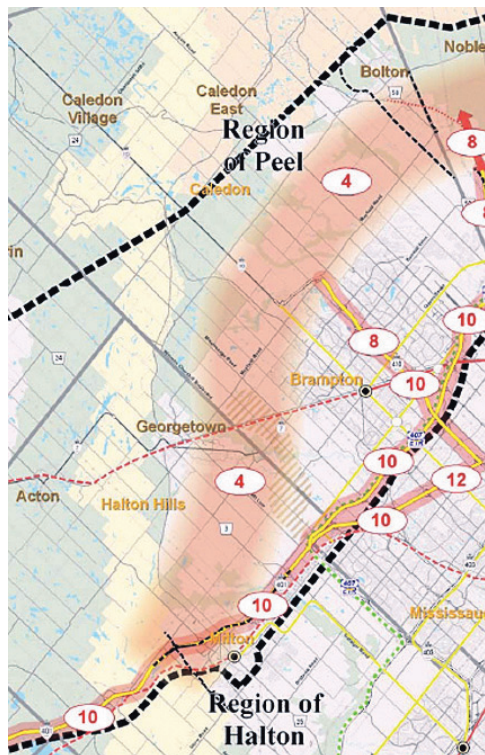
There is no hidden agenda, Wang said, noting that the study was precipitated by the future growth of three million people with the accompanying travel headaches, whether by car, transit or train.

The Province is looking at reaching the best solution for the entire region under the study area, Wang said, but acknowledged, "These solutions will have an impact on the Town of Halton Hills."

Wang said it would take about 10-15 years before the highways are built, including three to five years just to pinpoint the 175 metre corridor.

"It's about 12,000 acres in that corridor area, which is a massive part of south Halton Hills, pretty well every bit of land south of 10 Sideroad," said Wards 1&2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville. "It puts a hold on that whole area and what happens to landowners' rights when you're taking three to five years to study this?"

Wang said the designation remains the same as the Official Plan, and agrees, while there will be some uncertainty, MTO will complete the stage as quickly as possible. He added that landowners' rights remain the same as they are now.



"Well I don't buy that," replied Somerville.

Council wants MTO to take a look again at Option 4.4— a potential ring highway north of Halton Hills that links to Guelph and would serve as a bypass around Norval and Acton. But Wang dismissed that option because the impact on the environment (Niagara Escarpment and Greenbelt) outweighs the transportation benefits.

MTO planners have also noted potential development conflicts within Halton Hills from Hwy. 407 to Trafalgar Rd. at Hwy. 401. Ahmed said MTO will be working with Ministry of Municipal Affairs and municipalities to protect the land for the transportation corridors.

Wang said MTO would look at these development applications on a case-by-case basis, and could prevent them from going forward if they impact the potential highway corridor.

Other councillors also suggested that the use of rail and transit be emphasized over highways through farmland.

Ahmed noted that construction of the highway would likely be deferred until the transit connections proposed in the strategy such as GO service to Guelph "picks up".

Details on the MTO study are available at www.gta-west.com.



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