

Province suspends EA on proposed GTA West highway that would have cut through Halton Hills

The Province has put the brakes on its plans for a new 400-series highway in Greater Toronto that would have bisected the south end of Halton Hills.

Last week, the Ministry of Transportation said it "suspended" its work on the GTA West Highway Corridor, the proposed highway of up to six lanes that would connect Vaughan to Halton Hills. The ministry said it will be reviewing the project over the next few months.

The Province was deep into Stage 2 of the project, which included detailed environmental assessments of a number of proposed routes, and numerous public meetings. The ministry said its goal was to identify a preferred route by the end of this year that would link Highway 400 in York Region to Highway 401/407 ETR in Halton Hills, and include a dedicated transitway.

Instead a ministry spokesman said an update on the future of the project will be provided next spring—and all further public meetings have

been cancelled.

"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," Minister of Transportation Steven Del Duca said in a statement.

Late Wednesday, Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette responded to the news.

"This sounds like very positive news," he said. "This should free up the 1,700 acres I have been fighting for on behalf of the landowners who had their properties essentially frozen."

But the mayor says the announcement has generated a lot of

questions.

"Is this highway cancelled or just postponed? The status of the Norval bypass? If it is indeed cancelled there may be other transportation opportunities. The timing is perfect as I have a meeting with Minister Del Duca coming up in January with our MPP (Ted) Arnott. We hope to get more information from that meeting," said Bonnette.

Last week, Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott arranged a meeting with Del Duca at Queen's Park on Jan. 20. Bonnette, Town councillors and Halton Region Chair Gary Carr are invited.

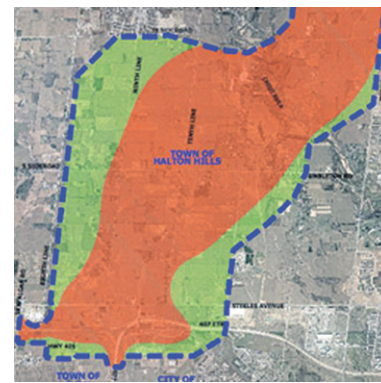
While it's unclear what stalled the proposed highway, the move was lauded by environmental groups across the province, that have long expressed concern about the impact the roadway would have on thousands of acres of Greenbelt lands. The Greenbelt legislation, which

prohibits development on protected land, allows the province to build and expand infrastructure — such as a highway — as long as it serves growth and economic development in southern Ontario.

"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," said Burkhard Mausberg, CEO, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

"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."

Earlier this month, a sweeping



The area in south Halton Hills under study for the GTA West proposed highway.

review of the Greenbelt by former Toronto mayor David Crombie included recommendations to expand and strengthen the Greenbelt. Some believe the 117-page report may have influenced the decision to suspend the highway.

"This highway is inconsistent with the province's attitude on the Greenbelt, so I can see why this project may be a question mark going forward," said Susan Swail, Greenbelt Program Manager for Environmental Defence. "We are looking at this as good news," she said.

—Torstar News Service with files from The Independent & Free Press

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— Mayor Rick Bonnette —

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