

Tolls possible for proposed mid-peninsula highway

But ministry yet to decide

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

The bell has not yet 'toll' for the proposed mid-peninsula highway.

Critics of the road from Niagara to the Hamilton-Halton area say documents show a toll highway is planned.

But the ministry of transportation says the information is from the earlier needs assessment stage, when both toll and non-toll scenarios were being examined.

Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE) say they're against the highway regardless of whether it's a toll road.

Ontario residents are already upset about Hwy. 407 toll rate increases and they don't think the mid-peninsula highway is nec-

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BOB NICHOLS

essary, said COPE's vice-chair.

"They think it will have tolls on it and they won't give the government carte blanche to build it," said Dave Eckersley.

He said if a mid-peninsula toll highway is built, it will likely be connected to the other toll route, Hwy. 407.

The mid-peninsula route would run from Niagara to Hamilton's airport at Mount Hope. It would then extend to one of three possible connections.

Alternatives being considered include a link-up with Hwy. 407 in Burlington.

This route would continue to Peter's Corners (Hwys. 5 and 8), loop north of Waterdown and head down the Niagara Escarpment to connect with Hwy. 407 near Walker's Line.

Mr. Eckersley noted the ministry initially rejected the two other proposed connections — Hwy. 401 west of Milton and Hwy. 403 in Hamilton. "They added them again to quiet some of the protests," he said.

Mr. Eckersley said both toll and non-toll scenarios were examined only for the Hwy. 407 connection.

He said he believes this further indicates the ministry favours a Hwy. 407 link-up for the mid-peninsula highway. "They were only going to do all the math on the one they were going to build."

Mr. Eckersley said building another toll route will create a two-tiered road system, with toll highways serving "the rich guys."

He said ministry documents also indicate private partners are being sought to produce revenue for the proposed highway.

This can only be done through tolls, said Mr. Eckersley.

Evidence of planning for a mid-peninsula toll highway is found in ministry needs assessment and technical summary documents, say COPE officials.

A ministry cost estimate noted that "fully electronic tolling technology has been assumed (as per Hwy. 407)."

Toll rate policies and their revenue impacts were part of critical issues in the ministry's needs assessment demand forecast.

There were ministry references to "identifying the impacts of tolls on the demand for the mid-peninsula corridor and on the QEW" and "identify an optimal tolling strategy."

Ministry documents also mention confirming the route's financial feasibility as a toll facility, plus assisting ownership and partnership opportunities for the mid-peninsula corridor.

A ministry spokesperson said when determining traffic levels for the proposed highway, both toll and non-toll environments were examined.

"The fact that we looked at and generated these scenarios does not imply the proposed highway will be tolled," said Bob Nichols. "That remains something for the government to look at at a future date."

Considering toll and non-toll information provides the ministry with a better understanding of what traffic levels could be on the highway, he said.

The spokesperson said both toll and non-toll options are still being considered.

As for only doing both scenarios for the Hwy. 407 connection, Mr. Nichols noted existing highways were not to be tolled when the needs assessment was being done.

The next phase of planning for the proposed highway involves determining terms of reference for the environment assessment. The Ministry of Environment is expected to rule on this by March.

Besides the Hwy. 407 link-up, other alternatives involve connecting with an expanded Hwy. 403 on Hamilton Mountain or a route through Peter's Corners and Flamborough to link up with Hwy. 401.

The latter connection would be made west of Milton and would avoid a cut through the escarpment.

Registration for JK and SK now accepted

The Halton District School Board is now accepting registrations for junior and senior kindergarten for September 2003.

Parents or guardians are asked to check the Halton District School Board Web site, www.hdsb.ca, for important registration information and to check school attendance boundaries. The information can be found on the home page under the 'Schools' link.

When registering your child, you need to bring proof of your child's age (birth certificate or passport), immunization records, your child's Ontario Health Card and proof of address. If you aren't the child's parent, please bring proof of custody (court order).

To register for the fall of 2003, junior kindergarten children must be four years old by December 31, 2003 and senior kindergarten children must be 5 years old by December 31, 2003.

Parents with children currently attending junior kindergarten won't need to re-register for senior kindergarten.

Registration should be completed at designated schools by February 14.

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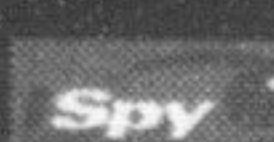
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