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Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

Faster environmental assessments needed for rapid bus routes and HOV lanes, RCCAO says

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Transit expansion tools such as rapid bus transit and dedicated vehicle high-occupancy lanes should fall under an accelerated environmental assessment process, says the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

“RCCAO supports a broadening of the definition of a ‘transit project’ to include such projects as HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lanes intended for the use of transit and other HOV vehicles, as well as to include dedicated transit (bus) lanes, on existing shared roadways as eligible projects,” says Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO.

The RCCAO supports Ontario’s transition to a focused and predictable environmental assessment (EA) for transit projects.

The province recently issued an interim guide for the transit assessment process and collected feedback from various stakeholder groups. A clarification on whether or not HOV and dedicated bus lanes on existing roads would fall under an accelerated assessment process is needed, Manahan says.

“These types of projects are practical for dense urban areas which do not have the space resources to create dedicated transit-ways that are separate from other vehicular traffic.”

An awareness campaign about the new assessment process that includes the importance of preparing upfront studies, should be undertaken by an appropriate provincial agency and Metrolinx, adds the RCCAO.

“If such a campaign is not conducted there could very well be expectations that the new transit EA process will be completed within six months in all cases,” says Manahan. “This type of misunderstanding will disappoint everyone involved, from politicians to the public and

contractors and construction unions when the process takes much longer than expected.”

RCCAO once again stressed to the province that “use or misuse” of time-out provisions in an assessment process could be the “Achilles’ heel” in terms of reaching a six-month EA time frame.

Manahan says clarification is needed in the EA guide that projects cannot be delayed indefinitely and that there must be an ultimate time limit for time-outs. Consideration should also be given by the province to indicate that there is a limit to the number of time-outs that can be triggered by objectors to a public transit project.

The RCCAO is not alone is asking for time-out limits. The Toronto Board of Trade has stated before it also is a supporter of a time-out maximum so they cannot be used as delay mechanisms.