

RCCAO: controversial Highway 413 ‘desperately needed in the province’

Don Wall November 17, 2021



ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE — Opponents to Highway 413 held a day of action Nov. 13 with protests in four municipalities. Pictured, protesters picket the constituency office of Minister of Education Stephen Lecce in King City.

A new impact-analysis report from the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) bolsters the economic argument supporting construction of the Highway 413, highlighting significant job creation during the build, hundreds of millions of dollars in spinoffs and a major boost to apprenticeship opportunities.

The controversial new 400-series route would run from the Highway 401/407 interchange in Halton to Highway 400 in Vaughan with an estimated price tag of \$4 billion to \$6 billion.

The report was released Nov. 10, the same day Premier Doug Ford hosted a media event in Caledon announcing that the province was moving ahead with the project. Ford cited other benefits such as reducing travel time for drivers, getting goods to market more quickly, linking growing regions, accelerating the construction of new homes and attracting industrial investment.

The RCCAO said the project would support up to 8,000 jobs annually in construction and other industries over a five-year construction period, generating up to \$2.3 billion of earnings for workers in Ontario and enabling 600 new apprenticeships.

“Constructing Highway 413 will generate much-needed jobs while improving the long-term economic competitiveness of our province,” said RCCAO executive director Nadia Todorova.

“We wanted to make a case that this highway is desperately needed in the province. We’ve been calling it the highway for the future because it really is infrastructure that is going to be addressing the future growth, future needs of the province.”

The report notes the project’s supply chain effects will support a further 2,300 to 2,900 jobs annually. Approximately 360 to 450 of these jobs will be in various manufacturing industries in Ontario and a further 610 to 760 of the supply chain jobs will be in engineering, IT and other technical fields.

The population of the GTA is expected to grow by 2.8 million people over the next 25 years, the report states, with 58 per cent of that growth occurring in York, Peel and Halton regions. The new highway will serve a region where more than 80 per cent of people commute by vehicle.

“We also wanted to present the innovative components of this infrastructure because it is being designed with a lot of forward-looking and innovative technology including EV charging, and more importantly an accompanying transitway which is going to be built parallel to the highway which is going to be exclusively for public transit, such as buses,” said Todorova.

On Nov. 13, hundreds of protesters showed up at anti-413 demonstrations in Bolton, Holland Landing, King City and Mississauga organized by such groups as the Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition, Sustainable Mississauga and Environmental Defence. The municipal governments of Halton Hills, Halton Region, Vaughan and Mississauga have passed motions opposing Highway 413.

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Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association

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Environmental Defence

Patrick McManus, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association, a member of the RCCAO, said in commissioning the report from the consultant Prism the alliance felt it was time to counter misinformation.

“What we were hearing and seeing, we found, seemed to be very skewed and biased toward one small component of the larger argument around the highway,” said McManus. “It was our impression that there were very significant elements of the reasons for the highway that were being left out of the discussion.”

The case for the highway goes beyond the corridor it will serve, McManus said, with benefits to accrue across a broad region including Simcoe and cottage country to the north and the booming regions to the west including Waterloo Region, Woodstock, Guelph and London.

“We need to move goods back and forth without having to come into the heart of Toronto, and that’s really where the great benefit of this highway is going to be,” said McManus. “Right now the only way to do that is to drive either up country roads or into the heart of Toronto and then north.”

Keith Brooks, programs director with Environmental Defence, said the 413 would cross 85 rivers and streams including the Humber and Credit rivers, and as bridges are built and footings laid, “you’re going to cause massive disturbance.”

The highway will destroy precious wetlands and farmland essential to Ontario’s food basket that can never be recovered, he added.

“Sure, we need more places to house people, but sprawl is not the solution,” Brooks commented. “Getting more people out further and further from the city, forcing people to live in car-dependent communities far away from transit, far away from services.”

The answer to housing people, he said, is not to continue to build single-family homes extending north almost to cottage country but rather to intensify existing cities such as Toronto, Markham and Vaughan.

“The City of Brampton has an alternative vision called an urban boulevard,” said Brooks. “That vision is one we’ve been talking about, a walkable, transit-friendly cycle-able community.”

McManus said once Ontario’s environmental assessment for the project is concluded, the design phase will find ways to mitigate many of the environmental concerns identified by opponents.

“That’s the thing about engineering and construction, going into 2022 we don’t build things the same way that we did in the ‘50s and ‘60s and ‘70s. We have much, much more innovative ways to mitigate environmental issues,” he said.