

LILLEY: Ford pushes ahead with GTA's badly-needed Hwy. 413

Brian Lilley - Apr 19, 2021

It's a highway that has been talked about for 20 years but never built. The badly-needed highway is opposed by vested interests — many in the media — but supported by the public.

The GTA West Corridor often called Hwy. 413 now, was under consideration by PC and Liberal governments from 2002 until the Wynne government shelved the project in February 2018.

“Ontario has accepted an expert advisory panel’s recommendation that a proposed highway in the GTA West corridor is not the best way to address changing transportation needs,” the ministry of transportation said in a statement at the time.

A few months later, the project was back on the books after the Progressive Conservatives won the provincial election and Doug Ford was named premier. In an election where Ford ran a campaign with very few specific promises, building the GTA West corridor was one of them.

The proposed route would run westward from Hwy. 400 — just south of King Rd. in Vaughan — scooping under Bolton and Caledon before heading south at Mississauga Rd. and connecting with Hwys. 401 and 407, near Winston Churchill.

The four- to six-lane highway, with a transit corridor, will take congestion off the 401, the busiest highway in North America.

It should be a no-brainer; sadly, it's not.

With the environmental assessment proceeding and the project receiving full support from the government, the campaign to stop it is on. Well-heeled environmental groups have launched a political campaign targeting elected officials and the public.

Media campaigns against the highway have also been strong and at times going well beyond opposing the highway.

A front-page story in the *Toronto Star* — with the headline *Friends with Benefits* — resorted to racial stereotypes of Italians with the layout, graphics, and storytelling looking more like something you would see in a story about Mafia family business than that of land developers. It tried to paint a picture of home builders getting special favours from the Ford government.

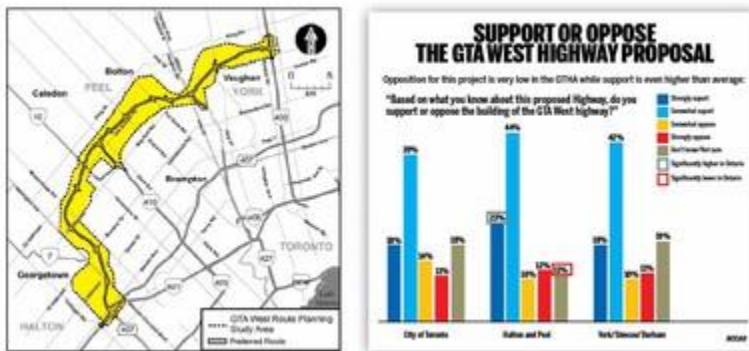
Truth be told, some of the developers who own land required for the project could stand to lose money from the highway winding its way across their lands: fewer homes built, less profitable homes built, opportunity lost — that's the reality.

What's also true is that this highway needs to be built to ease congestion and be ready for growth over the next several decades.

Yet, mayors and councils in Vaughan, Mississauga, and Brampton have all voted to oppose the highway after strongly supporting it for years. The latest polling on the issue would suggest those city councils and their mayors are offside with the public when it comes to building the 413.

A [poll commissioned by the trades union LiUNA](#) shows that across the province, 57% support the idea of a new highway when told the project is “critical highway infrastructure that will be increasingly needed due to the population growth.” After being told what both supporters and opponents of the highway have had to say about the project, support remained at 55% for building the 413.

Across the GTA, support for the highway was even stronger, ranging from a low of 57% in Toronto to a high of 67% in the regions of Peel and Halton. Support ran across political lines as well with 66% of PC voters saying they backed the new highway, 60% of Liberals offering support, and even 54% of NDP voters.



Opposition to Hwy. 413 is less than half, at times a third, when compared with the level of support. That's probably because the people who most support it live with the crowded highways and commutes already, know the growth that is coming, and are less likely to use public transit if they can avoid it in the post-COVID future.

The Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area is expected to grow from a current population of roughly 6.5 million people to more than 11.1 million by 2051. Peel and York Region alone are expected to add 2 million people to their ranks, according to the province's official growth plan.

Having that many people in one region requires housing, and it requires infrastructure — like highways — in order to make society work. Based on an industry average of 2.5 people per home, that means Peel and York alone will need 800,000 new homes over the next 30 years and the infrastructure to support that growth.

There is a segment of the environmental movement that believes we should stop all outward development. That simply isn't feasible in a growing area like the GTA where families want a

variety of options for their living space and the ability to get to and from work in a reasonable amount of time.

We've heard ad nauseam about the cost of congested roads and commute times to the economy and the strain on family life. It's for all of these reasons that this highway makes sense.

The opponents of Hwy. 413 may be able to convince councillors to pass motions against the highway, they may be willing to stoop to using ethnic stereotypes to smear some in support of the project, but that won't be the final say.

Voters will get the last say at the ballot box and based on what they are saying now, they see the need to plan for this highway.