

Stopping Corridor EA?creating municipal complications

By Bill Rea

The Province's recent announcement to stop the environmental assessment (EA) on the GTA?West Corridor has not simplified things for municipalities.

The issue came up a couple of times at last Thursday's meeting of Peel Regional Council.

One of the points that was made is there's still a general feeling that an east-west highway is required in the area.

The environmental assessment (EA) of the Corridor, which traverses the southern portion of Caledon was started in 2007 to address transportation needs in the area. The Corridor was created to provide a transportation link heading west from Highway 400, and there had been considerable talk about a 400-series highway going in (it was informally known as Highway 413). The Ministry of Transportation suspended work on the EA in December 2015, and set up the advisory panel to look into the matter.

Last month's announcement stated the Province had accepted the expert advisory panel's recommendation that a proposed highway in the Corridor was not the best way to address changing transportation needs. The Province also called for the protection of a much smaller corridor (about one-third the size of the original one) so infrastructure needs, such as utility, transit and transportation options, can be assessed.

The matter was mentioned in a staff report that went to Regional Council last week, regarding the methodology for assessing proposed land needs in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The report stated transportation needs within the new corridor will be assessed through the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan study, which is already going.

The report added that owing to last month's announcement from the Province regarding the halting of the EA, staff will have to re-evaluate matters, including corridor protection policies, population and employment growth allocation, employment strategies, and transportation infrastructure. That will slow down progress on Regional Official Plan amendments dealing with things like growth management and transportation.

?Staff plan to report to Council once the impact of the announcement is fully assessed and discussed with stakeholders,? the report stated.

As well, last Thursday's agenda also included a summary note issued by the Province, dealing with the decision to cancel the EA, and reaction outlining key considerations for Peel.

?For several years, the Region of Peel, the City of Brampton and the Town of Caledon have advocated for a highway in the GTA?West Corridor, which was also envisioned to include a dedicated transit right-of-way and a hydro corridor,? it stated, adding this decision by the Province might have ?significant consequences for Peel and the local municipalities in terms of long-term transportation and land-use planning.?

In fact, mandatory public information meetings to discuss growth management and transportation issues had been scheduled for last Thursday. They were postponed because Regional staff said they needed time to assess how the announcement would impact policies and growth allocations.

?The GTA?West Corridor would have supported a smoother flow of people and goods throughout the region by diverting trips from local roads and alleviating congestion on other corridors, such as the 401,? staff added, pointing out the decision could result in Regional and municipal roads having to carry a greater load to support growth.

?Peel's stance is that a highway is required, not only for transportation capacity, but also as a catalyst for further economic growth in Peel Region,? staff maintained.

Several Regional councillors agreed.

Mayor Allan Thompson was concerned that local taxpayers will be on the hook for the expenses, as the Province is calling for intensification, but falling far behind on infrastructure.

?Where are they to help us get where we need to go?? he asked. ?We, as the taxpayers, are picking up the difference on this.?

?We're going to need a highway in that Corridor,? Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri observed.

Manager of Policy Development and Integrated Planning Adrian Smith told him staff are working on a work plan, but the implications of last month's announcement still have to be weighed.

?It's kind of fresh news,? he said.