

Council wants to see maps of proposed east-west road

By Bill Rea

The Province wants input from Caledon council on the latest work on the GTA-West Transportation Corridor, including the latest alternatives for the proposed highway.

But councillors told them Tuesday that will not be possible without more exact mapping.

Representatives of the project were at Tuesday's council meeting with an update on the progress that's been made.

Neil Ahmed, consultant team project manager with MMM Group, told councillors the project is in its second stage, focusing on the corridor that runs for about 50 kilometres, west from Highway 400, through Caledon, then south through Halton Region to the area of the interchange between Highway 401 and 407.

"It is a big project," he commented, adding it involves more than just a highway, but other potential transportation improvements, like transit routes and other infrastructure for the movement of goods.

The current project is looking at a four to six-lane highway which will require a right-of-way of about 110 metres. In addition, Ahmed said they are looking at a transit right-of-way that would take up about another 60 metres, with transit stations at key interchanges and connection points.

He did tell council it will take time to choose where the interchanges will go, although he said they will be required where the road meets with other 400-series highways. He added they will try to minimize impacts on existing development.

There is a short list of route alternatives through Peel, mainly south of King Street in Caledon. Ahmed expressed the hope that the road will improve traffic flows both getting in and out of Caledon, with options for connections to Highway 410.

"We're not looking for you to choose a winner right now," he assured councillors.

Ahmed also said there's a focused analysis area (FAA) surrounding the short-listed routes, and that will be further refined with more field work. There has been concern that the lands in the corridor are frozen from development, and he said other lands outside FAA might be returned to the development process.

"It's good we can have some of our lands freed up again," Councillor Nick deBoer commented.

The consultation process is continuing. Ahmed said more than 750 people attended the first round of public information centres late last year, and the next round is planned for late 2015. There will also be community workshops in the spring.

Ahmed assured councillors they are working hard to keep on schedule.

"We know it's important to everybody to get this thing done," he remarked.

He also said presentation of a preferred route is expected in the fall or winter of this year.

DeBoer pointed out a lot of the lands in the area are in transition, and he wondered if land ownership patterns were being considered.

"We know there are things in motion," Ahmed replied, adding they are still working on integrating everything.

Natalie Rouskov, project manager with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), added a 50-kilometre corridor provides plenty of challenges. She said there will be some stretches that are impacted more than others.

DeBoer also observed the development will take place over a long time. There will be a need to recognize the importance of agriculture, and move people elsewhere who want to stay in farming.

In terms of commenting on a preferred route, Councillor Jennifer Innis said they will have to know exactly where it is before they can comment.

Mayor Allan Thompson agreed with the need for exact mapping.

"There are people's homes there, and people's farms," he observed.

Rouskov commented they have been getting a lot of requests like that. She pointed out this is a project that's in progress and they want to avoid misinformation getting out.

"It's in a state of flux," she added.

Innis pointed out the public and council will need time to study the preferred route, adding people can't give accurate input until they know.

"You're not giving them a fair opportunity to share their concerns," she said.

Ahmed added a corridor that wide allows for "a bit of wiggle room for us," commenting they have not done all the field work.

Things will be refined as they find more features on the land, such as environmental concerns, cemeteries, etc.

Councillor Annette Groves agreed the mapping is important.

She added the Town is trying to move forward, and that it's important the highway does not negatively impact the financial sustainability of the municipality.

Rouskov told Councillor Rob Mezzapelli there is currently no money committed for the road. That will have to wait until the environmental assessment process is complete.

Ahmed also told him the proposed transitway is really nothing new. There's one in Mississauga along Highway 403, as well as one in Ottawa. He added one is being planned beside Highway 407. He said they allow buses to move faster and connect with other services, like GO.

Ahmed also told Mezzapelli there is no new GO train line being planned in the corridor, although some form of light rail might be contemplated in the future.

Mezzapelli urged the highway be kept as close to urban areas as possible.

But Councillor Gord McClure was of a different mind. He pointed out there are farms on Creditview Road, south of Old School Road and the highway would be best going north of that.

Thompson pointed out this is a regional plan, as opposed to a provincial one. He said it's important the benefits be felt locally.

"We'll all have to work together to make this work," he added