

Ford announces GGH transit plan that includes moving forward with Highway 413

By Rob Paul

On March 10, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced in Woodbridge, at one of the future sites of Highway 413, the province's transportation plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Among those joining Ford for the announcement were Minister of Transportation Caroline Mulroney, Vaughan-Woodbridge MPP Michael Tibollo, and Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson.

With the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe to grow to nearly 15 million people over the next three decades, Ford announced details around "Connecting the GGH: A Transportation Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe."

Included in the plan are over 100 immediate and near-term actions that include building Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass.

"Our government has a plan for growing a stronger economy, an economy that works for everyone," said Ford. "It's a plan that will attract investment to create good jobs in our auto and manufacturing sectors. It's a plan that is connecting resources and industries in Northern Ontario to the future of clean steel and electric vehicles. And it's a plan that's building roads, bridges, and highways, expanding subways and public transit, and constructing more homes, allowing for a growing province."

Though Highway 413 is expected to cost around \$6 billion and is estimated to save commuters 30 to 60 seconds in average travel time across the region, the Ford government is adamant it is needed to deal with growth without increasing gridlock.

"To the people of Ontario, I've heard you," he said. "I know you don't want to be trapped in gridlock for hours during your daily commute. And you know that our growing province needs more subways, it needs more roads, highways, and more options to get around. That's exactly where we're putting your money, it's exactly what we're doing. A province growing as fast as ours needs the transportation infrastructure to support it. That's why our government is saying yes to finally building badly needed new highways like the Bradford Bypass and a new highway for Vaughan, Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga, the 413."

Along with building the new highways, the province is planning to move forward with the largest subway build in Canadian history alongside the expansion of regional passenger rail services. This is to help ensure the province delivers on its mandate of two-way, all-day, 15-minute service.

"We're saying yes to expanding regional passenger rail options and bringing new bus service to the areas underserved by local transit. We're saying yes to the largest slate of subway builds in Canadian history with over 40 kilometres of new tunnel. It's why we're now launching our plan for transportation in the Greater Golden Horseshoe."

To help connect the province while bolstering the economy, Ford's government sees the transportation plan as a way to both help people move more efficiently while also creating jobs.

"The Greater Golden Horseshoe, stretching from Niagara in the west to Northumberland in the east, is vital to Ontario's economic health," he said. "\$1.16 trillion in goods move through the region annually. It is home to 10 million Ontarians and adding 200,000 new residents each year. Our 30-year plan is designed to not only address today's transit needs but to put proactive solutions in place to prepare for generations that will follow. We're not just building for today; we're building for the next 50 to 100 years. Our plan will also create good jobs and boost Ontario's competitiveness as a North American business hub. It's all part of our government's \$28.5 billion investment in transit infrastructure.

Neither Ford nor Mulroney mentioned the cost of the two highways but rather focused on the necessity of them to deal with growth and gridlock.

“Our government is building roads, highways and transit to connect communities, fight gridlock and keep goods and people moving across the province, including in Ontario's economic engine, the Greater Golden Horseshoe,” said Mulroney. “No matter how you choose to move, we are building all forms of transportation infrastructure to help you get to where you need to go more safely, quickly, and conveniently. Our bold vision will create jobs, boost Ontario's competitiveness and meet the demands of people in this rapidly growing region.”

Although some Councils (such as Markham's) have come out against Highway 413, Caledon Council has continued to support it and as part of the transportation plan, the Caledon-Vaughan Go line will move forward.

“Multiple transit options are critically needed to support the significant growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and that includes the 413 and the future Caledon Vaughan Go Rail Line,” said Mayor Thompson. “The 413 will move goods and people across the GGH and will take traffic off our local Caledon roads; the Caledon Vaughan Go Rail Line will help to create transit-oriented communities. Thank you, Minister Mulroney and the provincial government, for moving forward in building modern multimodal transportation infrastructure to serve our growing communities.”

Caledon Ward 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Jennifer Innis came out in support of the plan because of what it will mean for transportation efficiency for the residents of Caledon.

“I am pleased that the current provincial government has recognized that a transformational Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan is essential to support the anticipated growth that this region will experience over the next 30 years,” she said. “Proposed infrastructure such as a Caledon-Vaughan GO Line and the GTA West Transportation Corridor being implemented together demonstrates this government's understanding of the complex issue facing us all.”

“It is particularly important that our residents are provided with the appropriate transportation options that suit their needs and lifestyles, while at the same time ensuring that connectivity between neighbouring communities is enhanced to foster the region's economic growth in the decades to come. I believe this Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan provides the opportunity to achieve that goal.”

Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner made a statement in response to Ford's announcement on the Greater Golden Horseshoe transportation plan.

“Doug Ford's transportation plan will pave over our children's future,” he said. “Highway 413 and the Holland Marsh Highway are climate and fiscal disasters. Yet today, Premier Ford and Minister Mulroney doubled down and said the two multi-billion-dollar Greenbelt highways are a ‘critical part’ of their transportation plan. Doug Ford thinks that the road to the future should supercharge expensive sprawl, ramp up climate pollution, pave over farmland and wetlands, and pollute Lake Simcoe. He has it completely backwards. Just last week, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released the bleakest warning to date on the impacts of the climate emergency. We need to urgently crush climate pollution and protect the nature that protects us from climate disasters like flooding. That means building livable and affordable communities that are connected by clean, accessible transit. Not more expensive sprawl. Doug Ford will make your life more expensive and pave over the places we love.”

According to Environmental Defence—a Canadian environmental organization—based on the current mix of vehicles on the road in Ontario, Highway 413 will create approximately 17.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide total by 2050, approximately 700,000 tonnes of annual vehicle emissions (the same impact as energy use from 81,000 homes in one year), approximately 100,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from highway construction and maintenance, and over \$1.4 billion in cumulative damages from air pollution.