

Green Leader responds to Ford's announcement on Highway 413

By Rob Paul

On Wednesday, November 10, Ontario Premier Doug Ford was in Caledon Village to announce, in part, investments towards ensuring Highway 413 moves forward.

These investments were detailed in the Province's Fall Economic Statement and include over \$145 billion in funding for infrastructure projects.

At the announcement, Ford was joined by Minister of Transportation Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy, and Mayor Allan Thompson.

"The current infrastructure that you're dealing with is totally inadequate in our mission to build a better Ontario for everyone," said Ford. "The construction of Highway 413 would also create 3,500 jobs and pump \$350 million into the economy. This is a win for commuters, a win for workers, and a win for Ontario. That's why we also announced plans for the Bradford Bypass a new four-lane freeway connecting Highway 400 and Highway 404. We're going to get communities moving again, we're going to get goods moving again, and we're going to get this province moving again."

The controversial Highway 413 has seen residents in the communities it will impact protest it throughout the process, and many homes throughout Caledon have "Stop the 413" signs on their lawn.

The main argument of Ford's government is that the highway will reduce commutes to allow people more time with their families while also helping the economy

"Over 3,000 thousand commuters in York, Peel, and Halton regions experience gridlock every single day," said Ford at the announcement. "Building Highway 413 a transit corridor across the regions will save commuters up to 30 minutes one-way and 60 minutes two ways. Building Highway 413 makes sense for people's lives, but getting drivers around more quickly makes economic sense as well, because we know that not only will Highway 413 help get people where they're going much faster, it will also help get goods to market faster. The transportation system is the backbone of our export driven economy, it's 40 per cent of the jobs in the entire sector."

As a result of Ford's announcement, Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner held a press conference that afternoon along the proposed route of Highway 413 to call on Ford to cancel the highway.

Schreiner was joined by Dufferin-Caledon Ontario Green candidate Laura Campbell and 2021 Dufferin-Caledon federal candidate Jenni Le Forestier who is also a Caledon resident and environmental activist.

The Green Party has long argued that the highway will mostly benefit wealthy land speculators and PC donors while the Ontario Greens want to build the livable, affordable, communities people want so they don't have to commute for hours.

"Let me be clear: Highway 413 is a climate and financial disaster," Schreiner said. "It needs to be cancelled."

The topic of what Highway 413 will actually do as the population in the area booms in terms of saving time for commuters has been polarizing and more and more local municipalities and communities are coming out against the highway.

It is estimated that Highway 413 would pave over 2,000 acres of farmland, 400 acres of the Greenbelt, and cut through 85 waterways while saving commuters just 30 to 60 seconds, according an expert panel study.

According to Environmental Defence, Highway 413 would pump 17.4 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions into the air cumulatively by 2050?that's more than the entire City of Toronto emitted in 2018.

?We need to protect nature and build a more livable future for our kids,? said Campbell. ?That's what I hear from the local people in this community. But Doug Ford would rather pave over wetlands and farmland and increase emissions than take meaningful climate action.?

Schreiner has long stated that his concerns about the decision-making of the Ford government after learning the developers are also donors to the Conservative party and thinks that's a factor as to why alternative options weren't given more critical thought when looking for an answer to the truck traffic problem.

?I think there's a lot of wealthy donors to the PC Party and people who have purchased land in the region who stand to gain literally billions of dollars if this highway gets built because the value of that land, they've speculated on will go up,? Schreiner told the Citizen in April. ?I think that's what's driving it.

?If the government truly wanted to address the issues around truck traffic?an issue that needs to be dealt with?some of the expert reports that came out five years ago pointed to some other ways to address the issue that would be more cost effective. One is better utilization of the 407 and two is better transit in the region to get cars off of roads so there's more capacity available for truck traffic.?

More recent investigative studies have linked Doug Ford's insistence on Highway 413 to a number of wealthy land speculators that would stand to gain from the project.

?Doug Ford is making decisions that will benefit his deep-pocketed friends instead of investing in the people of Dufferin-Caledon,? Le Forestier said. ?He's putting profits before people and the planet. It's unacceptable.?

Schreiner emphasized a number of alternatives to Highway 413, including a dedicated truck lane on the 407, that would help increase the flow of goods without increasing climate pollution through induced demand.

?Ontario Greens have a better plan,? Schreiner said. ?Instead of pumping billions into more highways and urban sprawl, let's invest in livable and affordable communities connected by transit that protect nature and crush climate pollution.

?We need to improve transportation in the region. Building a GO Station and extending GO to Bolton would make a lot of sense. Investing in better regional transit period, study after study has shown that investing in transit addresses gridlock and investing in more highways just leads to more gridlock. Investing in a highway is not going to solve the transportation issues in the region, investing in transit will.?

Given how much is being invested into infrastructure and highways, Schreiner would like to see that money be spent on more important needs that will have a positive widespread impact on the people of Ontario.

?There's a whole host of things that I think are of higher priority investments for us rather than spending it on a highway that's not needed and will create a significant amount of environmental destruction and threaten our food and farming economy,? he said.