

GTA West corridor poisoned dagger aimed at Lake Ontario

OUR READERS WRITE

When the Minister of Transportation, Steven Del Duca, announced the termination of an environmental assessment for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Corridor in December of 2015, those who cherish the earth in Ontario gave a great sigh of relief. The proposed 50 kilometer-long expressway planned to slash through entirely environmental and agricultural zones, much of which is protected by the Greenbelt. The plan was a salt tipped dagger on Lake Ontario.

Some 2,000 acres of this Class One Foodland in Vaughan is protected by the Greenbelt and was the proposed GTA West Corridor's likely route. The Greenbelt was established here to protect the headwaters of the Humber River in the Boyd Park area near Kleinburg that were being threatened by pavement.

The GTA West Corridor would go through the heart of one of Canada's largest remaining areas of Class One farmland with good heat units. These are the last of the best food-growing lands that can still be seen from Toronto's CN Tower. In 1980 Environment Canada calculated that most of Canada's best farmlands could be seen from here. Now, very few remain to be seen.

It is difficult to imagine a more cherished landscape in Canada to be ravaged by an expressway than the Greenbelt around Vaughan. The Class One farmlands here are around the precious nature education centers of Boyd Park and the Kortright Center for Conservation. They also buffer the McMichael Art Gallery which celebrates the artistic legacy of the Group of Seven. This is the landscape that caused the great Canadian author Pierre Berton to award Premier Dalton McGinty a walking stick for his creation of the Ontario Greenbelt.

The GTA West Corridor threatens the basic hope for ecological recovery in the Greater Toronto Region. Western Lake Ontario is already experiencing disturbing signs of salt pollution; and much of the hope for the lake's health is the key indicator species, the Atlantic Salmon, which lies directly in the proposed highway's path.

Few realized the abundance of the Atlantic Salmon in Lake Ontario before it was wiped out in the late 19th Century. One of the areas where Ontario's native salmon is beginning to recover is the Credit River. Many of its tributaries, most notably Black Creek, are wild trout and salmon rivers ? and are threatened by burial via the GTA West Corridor.

Expressways are a terrible threat to the survival of cold-water fish and amphibians. In winter and spring they unleash a deadly spray as far as a thousand meters wide full of salt and deadly chemicals from auto fluids, such as antifreeze. While salt pollution is a common plague ? wiping out, for instance, the fish in Pickering's Frenchman's Bay ? harmful chemicals are further broadcast through expressway spray through high-speed massive trucks and can be an especially horrendous vector for contamination of our waters and wetlands.

When in December 2015 the Minister of Transportation, Steven Del Dua, announced the termination of the GTA West Corridor, a new hope for the province appeared in store. The proposal was the last remaining big expressway going through an environmental review since the 407 was constructed in the 1990s. Hopes were especially high among environmentalists that this was a new, greener direction for the province. The announcement stressed the inappropriateness of the estimated \$5 billion project in terms of Ontario's commitment to take positive action to avert impacts of climate change.

Since the 1990s, there has been an effective moratorium on the building of major new expressways. Del Duca's cancellation is based in part because of the commitment of Ontario to make its transportation investments fit into a positive strategy to steer the province in an appropriate direction to counter the threat posed by climate change. It appeared to be part of a wise direction by the province.

Although Premier Doug Ford, by coupling his decision with attacks on federal carbon taxes, gives the resurrection of the GTA West Corridor the gloss of climate change denial, his decision is sadly popular among municipal politicians who dominate the Peel and

Halton Regions. The decision to build the expressway is popular with the Brampton Municipal Council carried by Patrick Brown, which refused provincial funding to build a light transit line. The entire region would benefit from a public transit system ? the city of Georgetown being the largest urban area in Canada without a bus system.

The same Brampton politicians who on October 28, 2015 condemned Del Duca's offer to fund the Hurontario Light Rail Transit system, denounced his cancellation of the GTA West Corridor a month later. Neglect of transit infrastructure in Vaughan, Peel and Halton region is behind much of the anticipated demand used to justify the GTA West Corridor. It is urgently hoped that the new consultations planned for this Fall by the province will be an occasion to show support for those who care for the planet and to call the Ford government to rebury this scheme.

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