

Listening to the people? I don't think so!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

The last time I checked, Caroline Mulroney doesn't represent the Caledon community. Nor do I think she represents Dufferin Peel, or Peel Region. In fact, a quick Google search (when memory fails there's always Google) reminds me that she is the elected representative for York-Simcoe.

Why then did she feel it necessary to stand up in the provincial legislature recently and announce that she's been "listening to the people of Peel Region" who apparently want to see the proposed Highway 413 built - and pronto! Do we? At last check over 350 people immediately used their collective voice to remind her that, in fact, we don't. These voices were informal, of course, average citizens like you and I and don't begin to factor in the myriad of organized groups such as Environmental Defense (Stop the 413), the David Suzuki Foundation, Sierra Club Peel and the many others who are actively fighting against this highway.

Mulroney calling the #413 "critical" and necessary to "reduce gridlock" while a multi-lane, often relatively empty highway runs a mere 15 km south of Caledon is the very definition of an egregious overstatement. Shaving an estimated 60-90 seconds (at best) off the drive time of the average commuter is not, as she claimed, restoring quality "family time" to anyone.

What is critical at the moment? Affordable housing, an investment in public transportation, health care and in education! These are the building blocks of a well-functioning community.

When residents can afford to live, work, and ride transit easily to get around town and receive free health care and a good education, you have a community with a rock-solid foundation. You know what's not "rock-solid"? A highway that is paved over environmentally sensitive wetlands, (unstable) and which plows through fertile (for plants not cars) farmer's fields.

Last week I touched on infrastructure and the massive development that Caledon is currently experiencing. No doubt some will link those comments to the need for a highway barreling through the top end of Caledon. Citing a "build it before we need it" mentality was, after all, at least part of what I addressed last week. That said, there is more than sufficient evidence that while infrastructure IS necessary, this highway is NOT.

The only connections this highway forges are those between the government and big developers - many of whom you may recall - own land along its proposed route. Mulroney stood up in the legislature asking the feds to "do the right thing" and stop "the unnecessary delays" to get this highway built. She posited that our goods and services will continue to get more and more expensive because of gridlock, implying the only possible solution for lowering outrageous grocery store pricing has nothing to do with greed but rather, is to simply build a multi-billion-dollar highway. Is anyone else wondering how expensive food will be when there's no more local farmland to grow it on and it must ALL be imported?

Brazenly claiming that "it's time to start listening to the people of Peel Region," also overlooks the fact that many of the towns and cities along the #413 route actively OPPOSE the highway being built. This includes Mississauga, Halton Hills, Peel Region, King Township, Vaughan and Orangeville.

Further, at least for now, both Brampton and Caledon have withdrawn their support of a fast-tracked environmental assessment, a move that at least in part reflects the concerns of these two communities. I'm not sure who Mulroney is listening to but it certainly isn't to anyone who knows the proposed route will cut across streams and rivers a total of 85 times. That's a big deal because "every time a road intersects with a water source it degrades it, adding dirt and vehicle pollution to the water and exposing it to huge amounts of road salt each winter."

She also isn't hearing any of the voices warning about the more than 17 million tonnes of greenhouse emissions, nor to the folks who care that at least two species will effectively be rendered extinct with untold consequences.

Never mind listening, it appears Mulroney's not even reading her own government reports like the one published in 2018 that stated: "We now expect our transportation investments to help support a range of broader economic, social, and environmental goals - such as achieving more compact and complete communities, protecting the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting our natural and heritage resources for future generations - in addition to providing efficient movement of goods and people."

Such a focus would naturally also require "alternative approaches" to transportation like "full GO Regional Express Rail (service) on the Kitchener and Milton corridors, a new GO corridor to Bolton, and increased bus rapid transit or light rail transit in Brampton and Vaughan," each of which "were shown to cost far less and provide better outcomes to address traffic congestion than Highway 413."

Caroline, I'm respectfully inviting you to rethink for whom you speak. It is not for the residents of Peel Region. Many of us, should you actually be listening to us, would remind you that there sits a highway, multi-laned and virtually empty much of the time, in "like-new" condition and which spans over 150 km of east-west travel options, just waiting in the wings to be used. It's called the 407.