

Minister double-teamed on Corridor

By Bill Rea

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones was joined by her colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga Michael Harris, Progressive Conservative critic for transportation, last Wednesday in questioning Transportation Minister Kathryn McGarry about the future of the GTA West Corridor.

The Corridor, much of which traverses the southern portion of Caledon, has been under study for several years with an eye for transportation systems and other infrastructure running west from Highway 400, and then heading south and running through Halton. The proposals also included thoughts of a 400-series highway (informally known as Highway 413), and an environmental assessment (EA) had been started on the lands.

The Ministry of Transportation suspended work on the EA in December 2015, and set up the advisory panel to look into the matter. The government announced earlier this month the EA will not be completed.

Jones told the Minister more than \$14 million had been spent and a decade had been wasted on an EA that is not to be completed. The proposed highway was supposed to address congestion in the GTA West region and get businesses and commuters moving, she said in the legislature, according to the Hansard. Instead, the minister has cancelled the EA without telling Ontarians what her alternatives are. Fourteen million dollars and 10 years later, we're back where we started.

Although the EA will not be completed at this time, the technical information, the data collection and the analysis done during the project will not be lost, McGarry replied, adding the information gained will continue to be used for transportation and regional planning. We've taken the original EA assessment and we've narrowed it to about a third of the corridor so we can maintain a corridor for future planning for infrastructure needs. Whether it be transit or whether it be energy projects, we need to identify that corridor.

McGarry added the recent move provides certainty to municipalities moving forward. He also said there has been a lot of praise from environmental agencies that didn't think it was a good time to be paving over farmland in the Greenbelt this was the right time to be paving over farmland and the greenbelt.

Harris charged the halting of the EA has been a waste of time and taxpayers' money.

Fourteen years later, the Wynne Liberals have left communities without direction on EA-frozen lands and, of course, motorists stuck in gridlock; gridlock that a ministry advisory panel says can be erased through congestion pricing, he added. GTA motorists wanting to get home don't need government to tax their drive.

He also said communities that have been landlocked for years shouldn't have to wait any longer to move forward.

Harris called on the Minister to commit to releasing lands frozen out by the government's decade of delay.

The path forward for the final corridor will be determined in part by more comprehensive planning and analysis work that's taking place through that area, McGarry replied. We have identified about a third of the original area. The rest of the two thirds has been released back to the municipality, to planning.