

Puzzlement as to why study stopped

By Bill Rea

Few people seem to know how to react to last week's announcement that the Provincial Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has suspended its work on the environmental assessment of the GTA West Highway Corridor.

Municipal and Provincial officials contacted in the last week seemed almost caught off guard by the announcement, and there are many questions as to just what it means.

In a bulletin issued last Wednesday, the government stated they are making unprecedented investments in public transit and transportation infrastructure to help manage congestion, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the province's economy. The government is stressing the need to have a forward looking plan when it comes to relieving congestion.

Having the right transportation network in place that builds on our climate change commitments, our ability to embrace new and emerging technologies and the sharing economy, will help us plan for a flexible transportation system that adapts to our quickly changing landscape and positions our province for success for generations to come, commented Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca.

It was announced earlier this month that a Public Information Centre slated for December on the Corridor would not be taking place as planned. At the time, it was explained MTO officials needed more time for this complex study.

Others have a lot of questions, including mayor Allan Thompson.

I find it a concern, he said, adding he would have liked some advance warning before this move was taken by the Province.

The Corridor has resulted in lands in the Bolton area, as well as Mayfield West, being frozen. Building permits have been delayed and people are seeking temporary zonings for properties, pending the matter being resolved.

It's costly for businesses across Caledon, Thompson said, adding he's one of many who wants to know what the government's thinking and where things are going. I just want to know why they're pulling up on the reins.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones pointed out the whole announcement was contained in a brief statement.

No reason was given, she said. It puts a lot of people and a lot of planning in limbo. If you're going to suspend it, at least communicate why.

The announcement to suspend the GTA West corridor was sudden and unexpected, Councillor Johanna Downey said in a statement last week. Very little information is available at this time. Council will be following up with a motion to request answers to all questions.

Councillor Jennifer Innis confirmed a motion was slated to go to council Tuesday (after press time).

What does 'suspended' mean? she asked. What does it mean to our residents?

She also pointed out that many residents have taken the time to attend meetings and take part in the process, yet it's been suspended with no regard to them.

We had hundreds of residents attend those meetings, she said, adding there was no consultation before the process was suspended.

That's a disgrace, was the reaction of Councillor Gord McClure.

How many billions have they spent on it? he asked. I don't think anybody knows for sure.

I don't understand why at this point they would suspend the EA, Councillor Annette Groves remarked.

She said it has been a considerable cost to municipalities across the study area, adding it was unfortunate there had been no consultation with municipalities before the announcement was made.

They've left us in the dark, she commented, also pointing out people had been expecting details on the final proposed alignment for the planned road this month. I think it's very irresponsible of them.

Councillor Nick deBoer wasn't sure if it was good or bad news.

We need to know what it means, he said, adding it puts residents living around the Corridor in a difficult spot. It just leaves more uncertainty for them.

DeBoer wasn't sure whether or not such a road would be a benefit, but he pointed out people are having their lives tied up while the government decides what to do.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli was another who had been expecting the process to continue.

He did say he's always maintained that if a highway is to go through the Corridor, it has to be a net benefit to Caledon.