

## Public input sought on GTA West Corridor review

By Bill Rea

The review of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West highway corridor is continuing, and input from the public is now being sought. Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson reacted positively to the news, while Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones was more reserved.

The Ministry of Transportation suspended work on the environmental assessment (EA) of the corridor in December 2015 to conduct an internal review of the work undertaken since 2007, and ensure that the project still aligned with current government policy and emerging technologies.

To assist with the review, an advisory panel, made up of industry experts, was appointed. The panel consists of Gail Beggs as Chair, along with Rod Northey and Matthias Sweet.

Beggs is a former Deputy Minister with the Ontario Public Service, with extensive experience in environment and resource management public policy.

Northey is an environmental lawyer and partner in the Toronto office of Gowling WLG. He is in his 27th year of private practice, focusing on project approvals tied to the environment.

Sweet is an assistant professor at Ryerson University, with research interests in transportation policy, land use planning and urban economics.

The panel is working on a strategic assessment of potential alternative approaches to meeting future transportation demand and infrastructure needs for the efficient movement of traffic.

‘Finally,’ was Jones’s initial reaction to the news, pointing out it took a long time to get the names of the members of the panel. She even submitted a Freedom of Information request because she couldn’t get the names, ‘which didn’t sound very open or transparent to me.’

‘Better late than never, I guess,’ she added.

The panel has had the opportunity to review material dating back more than a decade, and is now seeking public input through a call for submissions, an online questionnaire and stakeholder consultations.

Municipalities, interested stakeholders and the public are invited to provide feedback. An online questionnaire will be available at [www.gtawestreview.com](http://www.gtawestreview.com), and questions or comments may also be submitted by email to [gtawestreview@ontario.ca](mailto:gtawestreview@ontario.ca)

‘With new emerging technologies and the government’s commitment to help protect the environment and the Greenbelt, it is essential to have a forward-looking plan when it comes to dealing with congestion and transportation needs,’ Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca observed.

Thompson pointed to recent comments from the Peel Federation of Agriculture. Representatives recently spoke at the public meeting regarding the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES), held by Peel Region. Federation President Keith Garrett had stressed the need for an effective transportation network, adding a lot of the Federation’s members have been involved with the EA. If work there doesn’t proceed, he said there would be impacts.

‘This is about getting on with life,’ Federation Director and former Caledon Regional councillor David Lyons added.

‘They’ve done their homework and research,’ Thompson observed adding a lot of tax money has already gone into the EA and the work should be finished. ‘We all put a lot of money into this.’

Thompson also pointed out a lot of good information has come out of the EA study so far, which can be useful in the years to come.

‘It’s a loss for us, the taxpayers, if they don’t finish it,’ he said.

Jones observed the government has said the panel will be making recommendations by the end of the year.

She agreed it would be best if the work of the EA is completed.

‘It doesn’t make sense to have the EA 80 per cent finished, and stop it,’ she remarked.

But she’s not hopeful that will happen.

‘If I were a betting person, I would say they’re going to stop it,’ she commented. ‘To be blunt, if they do that, they’re stopping it with no alternative.’