

Rally against Bill 212: 'Reducing Gridlock' 'Saving You Time Act' coming to Dufferin-Caledon

By Constance Scrafield

Doug Ford's new Bill 212 is an omnibus bill, directed primarily, but not exclusively at fast-tracking building Highway 413.

Opposition to this project stems from its infringement on the Mississaugas of Credit First Nation, a destructive path through sensitive wetlands, and the risk it poses to 29 endangered or at-risk species. This, and the removing of the project of the 413 as an exception from environmental assessment are all causes for a local protest taking place later this month.

On Friday, November 22, a series of rallies will be staged outside a number of Conservative MPP offices, including Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones, in Orangeville (180 Broadway).

The essential basis for the highway's construction is 'reducing gridlock,' according to the Ontario government, although this has been denied by various organizations as incorrect. In particular, Environmental Defence formally requested that Canada's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Stephen Guilbeault, review the project and re-designate it for a Federal Impact Assessment under the Impact Assessment Act (IAA) after the bill was introduced.

There is real urgency as the Ford Government is changing the conditions to kick start the first levels of early digging and appropriation of land to stall such an assessment.

While construction has not commenced, there is still time for the Federal Government to come in, as such projects cannot be designated for assessment once construction has begun, in a meaningful way.

Penalties in Bill 212 for the resistance of entry into one's homes or property for expropriation purposes are \$50,000, with \$10,000 per day of further resistance; on a second offence, the penalty is \$100,000, and for corporations, such objections and resistance can cost \$1 million.

Tim Gray, Executive Director of Environmental Defence, called Bill 212, 'an attack on freedom and the environment.'

'We know in order to solve gridlock we need transportation options, putting people on transport,' he said. 'Municipalities know how to make that happen and they have proceeded with that.'

'The government says, 'we don't care about bike lanes, or public transport.' They are lying about the usefulness of bike lanes; they are the opposite of creators of traffic congestion. More people are using bike lanes than they say and they know it's not true.'

Gray says he is very concerned that the 413 is to be exempted from an Environmental Assessment review for highways going through the Greenbelt.

There are 29 endangered species in question, Gray told the Citizen.

'It is so important the feds designate these protected areas,' he said. 'Ford can't override the Federal government with a notwithstanding clause.'

The Ford government is working on enacting legislation on municipalities to limit bike lanes, which will force people to take bikes back into traffic or go back to their cars, Gray said.

To relieve gridlock, the answer is good public transit, he said. The 413 is going to cost at least \$10 Billion and Gray suggested that

money should be spent on train lines, bus lanes ? all the things for getting people out of their cars.

?A study by transport consultants confirmed it would be cheaper to go on to the 407. They [the tolls] are high but the highways are empty. You can put the trucks on the 401 and on the 407, and make money. 51 per cent of the 407 is owned by the Canada Pension Plan,? said Gray.

People protesting has been the strongest tool for change so far and it has worked in the past, he emphasized. In the previous protests against developers going into the Greenbelt, the Provincial government eventually changed its position and didn't move forward.

Gray said the way forward is to appeal to the Federal Minister of the Environment; he is sitting on the request for Environmental Defence's demand for an Environmental Assessment.

?There's a bunch of things they need to do,? Gray said. ?Possibly next year, they can start.?

Urging the population to commit to rallies, he said, ?It's very important that people come out. They need to make sure the MPPs know they are concerned about putting people at risk over bike lanes and the heavy damage the 413 would cause.?

Showing up at the rallies matters, he said. It is important that people know about the risks and get in touch with their MPP, Gray urged. The more people they hear from, the better.

?This week was November 11. Many of our ancestors fought for our freedom and safety,? he said. ?It is our responsibility to protect that.

?We can't afford to ignore our responsibility.?

On Friday, November 22, there are groups in several rallies all along the Highway 413 corridor in recognition of the potential harm caused by Bill 212. Friday is a Constituent Day for MPPs across Ontario.

The rally, called, ?Say No to 212? is set to meet at noon outside Sylvia Jones' Office, 180 Broadway.

Environmental Defence has a list of rallies on their website for stopping the 413 at environmental.ca/stop-the-413/.