

Webinar highlights impacts of 413 proposal, rallies neighbours to oppose plan

By **ROB PAUL**

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Environmental Defence, an organization dedicated to defending clean water, a safe climate, and healthy communities, held a webinar Tuesday for the Caledon community regarding Highway 413.

The webinar's focus was on the potential negative impacts that will come with the construction of the highway with the proposed route, approximately 59 kilometres long and 170 metres wide, running from Highway 407 near Milton to Highway 400 near Kleinburg.

Environmental Defence has been holding these webinars for the different communities the highway would affect to inform residents why they need to fight back.

The webinar was hosted by Environmental Defence's Ontario Climate Program Manager Sarah Buchanan and she was joined by the Pointer's smart growth reporter Isaac Callan and Gravel Watch President Bryan Smith.

Buchanan's portion of the webinar looked at the limited positives of Highway 413 and what it will mean for the environment in the area, specifically the Greenbelt.

'There's been a lot of debate about how much this highway is going to cost,' she said. 'It was pegged at about \$6 billion, that was back in 2012, and if you think about how real estate prices have skyrocketed since 2012, you start to get a sense about how much more expensive this highway will actually be. It also may be a toll highway, when Ministry of Transportation staff were recently asked a few days ago [Thursday] at the York Regional Council meeting whether this would be a toll highway, their response was, 'maybe, we don't know yet.'

'Also, it's estimated that the average time savings for folks across the region would only be about 30 to 60 seconds. This highway will also be pretty destructive. It will destroy prime farmland, our estimate is about 400 acres of Greenbelt, many river valleys, and conservation areas, like the Nashville Conservation area. It will also increase carbon pollution, which is a big concern when so many of these municipalities on the highways route have declared climate emergency, as well as, Canada has declared a climate emergency. Lastly, it will also increase air pollution along the highways route, and that will bring respiratory illness, it's been proven that folks who live close to highway routes do suffer from greater respiratory illnesses and there's higher amounts of premature deaths in those areas.'

Referencing the previous cancellation of Highway 413, Buchanan spent time talking about how people in the community are still capable of fighting back, like they did before.

'I tend to call it the 'zombie highway' because it was previously cancelled and that's one of the things that makes me think about how important our voices are in this fight against the highway,' she said. 'Frankly, we have done it before, people spoke up and contacted their elected officials and it was previously cancelled.'

'One of the reasons it was cancelled in 2018 is because there was an expert panel appointed, who took another look at some of the studies that had been done for the first stage of the environmental assessment and they concluded, based on their evidence, the highway was not the best way to move people around the region. Later that year, the highway was resurrected by the Ford government and brought back from the dead.'

Knowing that there is a need for better transportation options given the growing population in the area, Buchanan spent time going

through more efficient alternatives than the highway.

?I want to stress that there really are credible alternatives to this highway,? she said. ?One of our asks is that the provincial government and municipalities seriously look into these alternatives instead of going with the classic car-dependent build-a-highway model, let's think about the future of the region and more sustainable ways to grow. One of the alternatives is to make better use of the mostly empty Highway 407, which is a toll highway, and potentially allowing trucks and goods movement to have some toll relief, a dedicated lane, some way to get some of the trucks off the 400 and 401 and allow them to bypass Toronto on the 407.

?Another alternative is to improve transit where it makes sense to do so. There's an idea on the table to get commuter rail?a GO station in Bolton?to help people move more people who live close to those urban centres. Also, another alternative is to think more deeply about how the region grows and to plan for future growth where options like transit and rail already exist.?

Callan broke down the situation from the view of growth and how the building of a highway will have a direct impact on how the community is developed going forward.

Smith examined how the construction of Highway 413 will have a long-term impact on water quality and how construction can disrupt the water cycle which, in turn, can cost residents money as they deal with the impacts on wells as well as effects on their health.

?Gravel Watch represents communities across the province who are facing proposed pits and queries for aggregate or are dealing with the consequences of them and it's my fear that the people of Caledon will join them,? he said. ?Whenever you dig things out of the ground, you have to move things around a lot.

?One thing you move around a lot is the upper layers of soil, those are filtration layers, and you need to consider their effects on the filtration of water. We also know when you dig deep and adjust the landscape, overland water flows can change direction which means water will end up in places that it wasn't expected to be beforehand and it will cease to be in areas where it's necessary for the environment and human use. It will also bring surface water into contact with groundwater. That's problematic?they're very different in characteristics and different in terms of what they do to your pocketbook.?

Caledon is known for the Greenbelt and agricultural land in the area, but Smith says the construction won't only cause disruptions in the area, it will also devalue the land.

?To get to the rock below the ground, topsoil and subsoil gets bulldozed aside?83 per cent of the time aggregate is extracted from prime farmland,? he said. ?What that means is the prime farmland ceases to be prime farmland and ceases to provide food. In terms of food sustainability as a region and a province, we're going to have a problem.

?There's also emerging science coming out of the National Farmers Union that suggests when you want to put that topsoil back in, it's lost its fertility. Pits and quarries don't look pretty, but they also have multiple impacts on property value?it's estimated between 25 and 40 per cent property loss value.?

For those wishing to show their support in stopping Highway 413 from being built in their community, they can request a ?Stop the 413? lawn sign by contacting Bolton's Dan O'Reilly at (905) 857-3743 or danoreilly@sympatico.ca.