



IS BUILDING
HIGHWAY 413
THE BEST
OPTION

FOR MOVING PEOPLE
& GOODS IN
THE GTA-WEST
REGION?



environmental
defence

Sustainable Vaughan
Citizens Environmental Coalition



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario government proposes to build a new highway in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), from Highway 401, near Milton in the west, to Highway 400, near Kleinberg, in the east. The project, and its review, should be cancelled. The highway would cause significant negative impacts on the environment and on local communities. It would do little to ease congestion, and would consume billions of dollars that could be better spent on other transportation projects and solutions.

The GTA-West Transportation Corridor, otherwise known as Highway 413, has been under an Environmental Assessment (EA) study by Ontario since 2007. The highway portion of the EA was cancelled by the previous provincial government in spring 2018, based on a report by an expert Advisory Panel that found that the highway would deliver few benefits, and could not be justified. With the change in government later in 2018, the project is now under study again. In July, 2020, the Province proposed a new regulation to streamline the remaining steps in this EA study, including the ability to advance construction of early works like bridges and utility relocations. The proposal indicates that preliminary design could now be complete by 2022, rather than 2023 and beyond. In August 2020, the Province announced the preferred route for the highway.

But the fundamentals of why the highway is unjustified have not changed. The project should be cancelled again and replaced with investments in public transit, widening of existing highways, and other transportation system improvements. The adverse environmental impacts of a new transportation corridor of this size are significant, and include impacts to the natural environment such as rivers, wetlands and forests, loss of thousands of hectares of prime agricultural lands including about 1000 hectares in the Greenbelt, environmental damage from road salt, air pollution affecting nearby residents and increased greenhouse gas emissions.

There is no evidence that highway expansions solve traffic congestion. This is due to what's known as induced demand. Research has shown that construction of new highway capacity is met soon thereafter with an exactly proportional increase in traffic, due to changes in driving behaviour. Little is accomplished for traffic relief.

The cost of the transportation corridor was estimated in 2012 to be \$4.8 Billion, and is likely more than \$6 Billion today due to inflation and the increased costs of construction and land acquisition. Tying up billions of dollars in highway infrastructure will make it difficult to deliver much needed public transit projects. In addition, the new highway will not connect GTA-West residents to existing urban centres where the majority of jobs are located.

In August 2020, Brampton Council recognized the many disadvantages of Highway 413 and endorsed an urban boulevard alternative, which provides many advantages compared to the expressway.



If a new highway corridor is not the answer, then how are the transportation needs of a growing population in this area to be met? We recommend:

Committed public transit investment, including full GO Regional Express Rail on the Kitchener and Milton corridors, a new GO corridor to Bolton, and increased bus rapid transit or light rail transit for Vaughan, Brampton and Mississauga.

Transportation System Management and Transportation Demand Management – various initiatives to improve the operation of the existing transportation network.

More rail/road grade separations to facilitate goods movement.

Examine feasibility of truck priority on Highway 407ETR.

Widening of existing highways (already underway).

Continued monitoring and modelling, especially as new regional population and employment figures are developed by the Province as input to upcoming Municipal Comprehensive Reviews, and as transportation technologies and economic practices evolve.

A new 400-series highway is not the answer to ease congestion in the GTA. It would be a poor use of infrastructure dollars, pave over farmland and key environmental areas, and lead to more urban sprawl, more air pollution and more carbon emissions due to more traffic. The project should be cancelled.



FIGURE 1. THE LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED 400 SERIES GTA-WEST HIGHWAY (HIGHWAY 413)



IMPACTS, NEEDS AND ALTERNATIVES

1. IMPACTS OF A NEW 400-SERIES HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

All large projects need to evaluate negative impacts versus benefits. A highway of this magnitude will cause significant and irreversible harm to the environment in an area that is already under significant development pressure. It has a hefty price tag of an estimated \$6 Billion that will take away scarce financial resources from other worthy projects. The benefits of this project are not large, in that it is unlikely to reduce traffic congestion. Figure 1 (page 5) shows the proposed location of the highway corridor.

1.1 THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF A NEW 400-SERIES HIGHWAY

The corridor needed for this highway would be 170 meters wide and about 50 km long, extending across the Greenbelt in Vaughan and across undeveloped land not in the Greenbelt (known as the Whitebelt) in Caledon and Brampton. It would have significant environmental impacts, including:

- Impacts to natural areas such as rivers, valley lands, wetlands, conservation areas and forested areas, including approximately 53 river and stream crossings.
- Loss of thousands of hectares of prime agricultural lands, including about 1000 hectares in the Greenbelt in Vaughan. The highway would also lead to fragmentation of remaining agricultural lands.
- Increased emissions of greenhouse gases. Transportation accounts for approximately 33 per cent of all emissions in the GTA. York and Halton Regions have the highest proportion of their emissions from transportation at 47 per cent each. Building a new highway will only increase the emissions of greenhouse gases in these regions when we should be reducing them. Several lower and upper tier municipalities, including King, have declared climate emergencies.
- Increased air pollution from cars and trucks, adversely affecting health of residents living near the corridor.
- Damage to streams, groundwater and plants from road salt runoff.
- Increased urban sprawl which will perpetuate and amplify the impacts listed above.



1.2 HIGHWAYS DO NOT REDUCE TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Although on face value, it may seem obvious that new highways are the solution to too much traffic, we now know that it's not so.

There is now a large body of evidence demonstrating that, soon after construction is completed, traffic increases to fill new road capacity. Drivers change their behaviour by driving more often, or longer distances, or at busier times as more road capacity is built. In a few short years, traffic is as bad as it was previously. This phenomenon is often referred to as induced demand.

The effect was first observed decades ago in New York City, where newly constructed bridges and parkways rapidly filled up again without relieving overall traffic congestion.¹ A contemporary example of this problem is the Katy Freeway in Houston, which was widened to 24 lanes with no improvement in traffic flow.² Interstate 405 in Southern California is another example, and continues to be the most congested freeway in the USA despite new lanes. This freeway gained notoriety in 2011 in the “Carmageddon” prediction, where it was predicted that a planned construction closure would paralyze the area with traffic. In reality, traffic was lighter than usual, largely due to more public transit use. This is an example of induced demand in reverse.³ When the road reopened, traffic reverted to the previous congested level.

A good summary discussion of induced demand can be found in the paper *The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion: Evidence from US Cities*, by Duranton and Turner.⁴ The paper analyzed a large array of USA data and found that the extension of interstate highways is met with an exactly proportional increase in highway traffic volume, and also a minimal decrease of traffic on urban arterial roads. Simply put, highway expansions do not decrease traffic congestion.



2. NEED FOR MORE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

How can we better spend \$6 Billion to help suburban commuters get to and from work without sitting in traffic while at the same time building infrastructure that reduces greenhouse gas emissions for future generations?

Halton Region was the third fastest growing region in Canada, with population growth between 2011 and 2016 of 9.3 percent. Milton continues to be one of the fastest growing cities in all of Canada, with a population increase of 30.5 percent since 2011.

Brampton sits at the centre of what is sometimes referred to as the Toronto-Waterloo Innovation Corridor. This corridor generates 17 per cent of Canada's GDP and is home to over 200,000 tech workers. Brampton is Canada's second fastest growing large city, increasing in population by 13.3 per cent between 2011 and 2016. Brampton is also home to one of the youngest and most educated work forces in the GTA. Additionally, public transportation is critical to Brampton residents as the city has continued to increase transit use and experienced ridership growth of 18.4 per cent on its existing bus system from 2016-2017. In August 2020, Brampton Council recognized the many disadvantages of Highway 413 and endorsed an urban boulevard concept as an alternative for the large planned Heritage Heights Community. Staff cited many advantages, including environmental protection, sprawl reduction, better sense of place, less land consumed and improved financials.

We face a critical choice with the GTA-West Highway. Do we sink \$6 Billion of tax payer money in highway infrastructure that may become obsolete due to rapid changes in transportation or business technology, such as self-driving vehicles, shared mobility or more people working from home, or do we instead largely invest in public transit infrastructure projects to an equal level of funding?

We can only choose one. This is a choice that governments need to make.



3. GTA ADVISORY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

If a new 400-series highway is not the answer, due to environmental, social and induced traffic concerns, then how are the transportation needs of a growing population in the study area to be met? A report commissioned by the Ontario government in 2018 to review the GTA-West project provides some good answers.

The report, drafted by an expert Advisory Panel, noted that there is a much higher uncertainty about future travel demand than when the EA was initiated 10 years ago. This includes uncertainties in transportation technology (e.g. automated vehicles, shared mobility), economic changes (e-commerce and working from home/remote office, different manufacturing centres, a bigger service economy) and policy changes (climate change mitigation, protection of valuable land, complete communities). If the aim is to meet the future transportation needs of this growing region, a broad range of scenarios should be modeled. The Panel indicated that a preferred planning approach would be to develop a single unified transportation plan for the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe that would align with provincial policies and explicitly consider uncertainty.

Even as far back as the Stage 1 EA study in 2012, it was recommended that investments be made first in public transit and rail, optimizing the existing transportation network and widening of existing highways, which the Panel also supported. These recommendations are additionally supported by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in its recent report *Moving Forward*.⁵

The Panel also calculated that the proposed new highway would deliver only about 30-60 seconds travel time savings per vehicle trip. The Panel also modeled four specific promising alternatives and recommended they be considered before committing to a new highway:

- Consider and prioritize planned and constructed extension and expansion of existing highways. These are Highways 400, 401, 407ETR, 410 and 427.
- Consider congestion pricing (offers much larger travel time saving than an new highway).
- Consider providing truck priority on Highway 407ETR.
- Consider slower population growth and more compact land use patterns than assumed in the EA, consistent with recent actual growth.



4. RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVES TO HIGHWAY 413

4.1 PUBLIC TRANSIT INVESTMENT

Currently, investment in public transit, particularly GO Train service, is not keeping pace with rapid population growth in the study area, resulting in increased reliance on existing highway infrastructure. Highway 413 will do nothing to connect Milton residents to the large employment centres in Peel Region and downtown Toronto. This will become increasingly problematic as Milton moves forward with plans to develop lands along the Trafalgar corridor, an area envisioned as a denser, more compact development with less reliance on car use.

The 2041 Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan, finalized in 2016, identifies numerous rapid transit projects and concepts in or near the study area, including:

- Regional Express Rail (RER) on the Kitchener and Milton GO Train lines
- New GO commuter rail service between Bolton and Union Station
- Pearson Airport Regional Transportation Centre
- Additional Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail Transit in Vaughan, Brampton and Mississauga

FIGURE 2. GTA-WEST STUDY AREA WITH EXISTING AND PROPOSED PUBLIC TRANSIT LINES



Figure 2 (above) shows the proposed locations of these public transit projects.

4.1.1 REGIONAL EXPRESS RAIL (RER) ON THE KITCHENER AND MILTON GO TRAIN LINES.

No other public transit project in the western GTA has a greater ability to reduce reliance on existing highway infrastructure than the creation of all-day, two-way GO Train service along both the Kitchener and Milton lines.

Both these lines currently share track and right-of-way with CN and CP freight services for considerable distances. Governments have been studying ways to separate freight and passenger service for years, to enable electrified, two-way, all-day service every 15 minutes, as envisioned by RER.

In 2015, the municipalities of Cambridge, Milton, Mississauga and Toronto commissioned a report by IBI Group, “Feasibility Study and Business Case of Constructing the Missing Link”.⁶ This ambitious project proposed to remove freight from the CP corridor between Milton and Scarborough, and from the CN corridor between Georgetown and Bramalea. It involved construction of a new 15 km shared freight corridor from west of GO Lisgar station on the CP line to east of GO Bramalea station on the CN line (the “Missing Link”). It also involved significant new trackage, grade separations and CN/CP connections across the entire 75 km study area. The capital cost was estimated at \$2.0 Billion for the Missing Link and \$3.3B for the other improvements, for a total of \$5.3 Billion. This approach would have removed virtually all freight traffic from both the GO Milton and GO Kitchener corridors, readily allowing electrification and the high service levels in the RER plan.

The report stated that the costs were comparable to a Widening Option, which was described as “adding additional tracks to both the Milton and Kitchener lines so that these can carry both the through freight traffic and the expanded numbers of GO Transit trains running with implementation of the RER concept”. The report estimated the capital costs of the Widening Option to be \$3.5 Billion for the Milton Line and \$1.5 Billion for the Kitchener Line, for a total of \$5 Billion.

Although the initial reaction of Metrolinx was positive, the Missing Link concept was dropped, likely due to challenges in getting CN and CP to work together, and due to strong opposition from York Region on the prospect of more freight traffic through southern York.



In 2016, the Province announced an Agreement in Principle with CN to pursue a 30 km “CN Freight Bypass” project, involving CN only. Although details were scarce, this would remove CN freight traffic from the GO Kitchener line, but obviously do nothing for GO Milton. More details became available in November, 2019 when Metrolinx published its Updated Initial Business Case for Kitchener GO Rail Service Expansion.⁷ Capital costs were estimated at about \$3.7 Billion. The Initial Business Case found that an alternate case, involving incremental improvements to the existing corridor, such as bypass tracks, signals, station modifications and road crossing upgrades, as well as collaborative negotiations and capacity workshops with CN, had a better benefit-cost ratio. The capital cost for this option, termed the “Minimal Infrastructure” option was \$1 Billion.

In December, in a letter to Mississauga Mayor Crombie and other GTHA Mayors⁸, Metrolinx revealed it was no longer pursuing the CN Freight Bypass for the Kitchener corridor and would indeed focus on the Minimal Infrastructure option. This option does provide two-way all-day frequent services, with, for example, 2 (diesel) trains per hour in peak periods from Kitchener, 3 (diesel) trains per hour from Georgetown and 9 (diesel + electric) trains from Bramalea. Off-peak service would be similar.

The Metrolinx letter indicated that it is engaging in promising conversations with CP on the GO Milton corridor, and is optimistic that there will be good news to share on improved two-way service. No details were offered. Our organizations support this approach, and believe that a Widening Option comparable to Kitchener is indeed feasible on this corridor, with a capital cost likely similar to that cited in the “Missing Link” report, i.e. \$3.5 Billion.

4.1.2 NEW GO TRAIN LINE TO BOLTON (CALEDON)

In 2010, Metrolinx prepared a business case⁹ for adding commuter rail service along the CP Mactier Subdivision to Bolton. The CP rail line travels north from Summerhill through the west of Toronto, continuing up through Vaughan, Caledon and beyond.

Built in the late 1800’s, The Toronto Grey and Bruce Rail Line as it was known, once provided commuter and freight service from Toronto all the way north to Owen Sound. The villages that once housed stations along this line still exist today – Emery Village, Woodbridge, Kleinberg, Bolton and others further north. The TG&B rail line shaped the western GTA over a hundred years ago and could help shape its future again.

The 2010 Bolton Commuter Rail Service Feasibility Study, initiated by Metrolinx, is a comprehensive review of the technical requirements to implement commuter rail service between Bolton and the City of Toronto. The study found that introducing the service is feasible. Of four options studied, the preferred one (option 4) involved a route from Bolton along the Mactier sub, then connecting with the CN Halton and York subs (just south of Highway 407) and then connecting with the GO Newmarket line to Union Station. This route is shown in the Figure 2 (page 10). Four new stations were proposed – one in Bolton and three in Vaughan.

A second option (option 1) also scored well. It involved remaining on the Mactier sub south to where it would join the GO Kitchener line near Mt. Dennis. Five stations were proposed – Bolton, Vaughan (3) and at Finch Ave. This route is also shown in the Figure 2 (page 10). Implementing this option would be easier today than originally planned, as some of the costs associated to make this project feasible have already occurred. The creation of the UP Express train line and expansions along the southern part of the GO Kitchener corridor in the 2015 timeframe resulted in upgrades to many level crossings and bridges in Toronto that were outlined as required in the Metrolinx study.

Since this study was completed in 2010, plans to implement commuter service on this rail line have not progressed. This is a lost opportunity. Projected ridership and capital cost information (\$300 to \$400 Million) were encouraging – comparable to currently active GO extension projects to Bowmanville and Niagara Falls. York Region's Transportation Master Plan (2016) cited the Bolton line (option 1) in its recommended transit network.

By placing stations in Bolton, Vaughan and Toronto, the new train line would remove thousands of daily commuters off already congested Highways 27 and 427. Placing a station along Finch Avenue (as per option 1) allows a connection to the future LRT and helps remove commuters off Highway 400.

Bolton is planning an urban boundary expansion along its western boundary. As the urban centre of Caledon, it will accommodate 10,300 people and 2,500 jobs on 185 hectares by 2031. One of the distinguishing features of Caledon is the lack of any higher order transit such as a commuter rail line.

There is no better way to grow and shape our suburbs and alleviate car dependency than commuter rail infrastructure. Building Bolton's future around a new train station would help shape its future growth from sprawling, car-dependant subdivisions to a more vibrant mixed use and walkable community. In fact, Peel Region would be able to allocate higher growth numbers within Bolton and alleviate pressures to expand in other more environmentally sensitive areas.

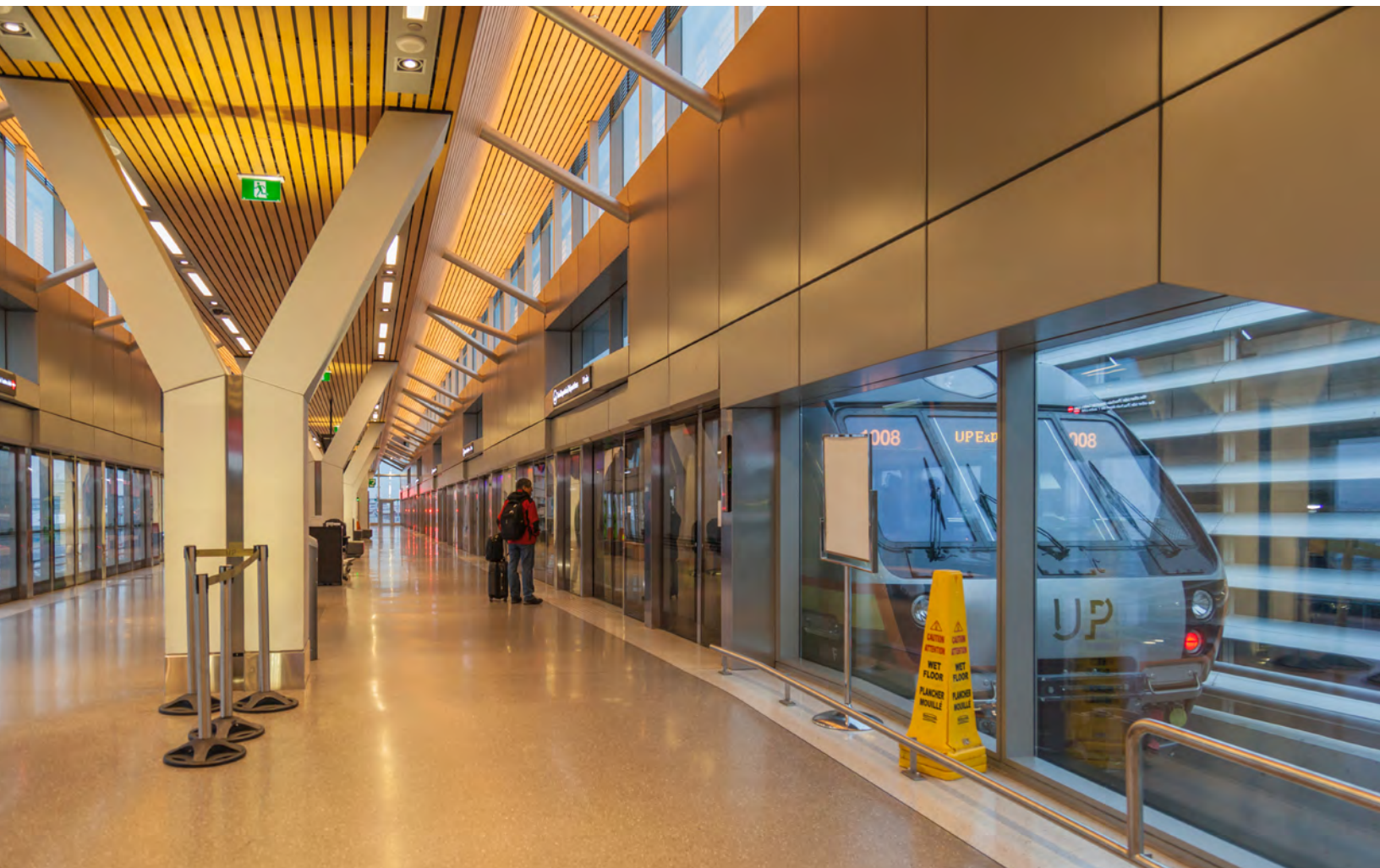


4.1.3 PEARSON AIRPORT REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CENTRE

In their recent report, Union Station West¹⁰, the Greater Toronto Airport Authority indicated that the Airport Employment Zone (AEZ) has roughly 300,000 employees, the second largest employment zone in Canada. The AEZ generates almost 1 million trips each day, but 94 percent of these are by car, due to the lack of public transit. The airport itself serves an average of 130,000 passengers daily and provides work to nearly 50,000 airport employees. However, only 13 percent of passengers and 14 percent of airport employees use solely public transit to get to the airport.

Currently only the Union Pearson Express train provides rapid transit service to the airport. It only boards about 1.6 million riders a year at Pearson¹¹, or 4,400 per day, a small fraction of the daily passenger and employee volume. Much more connectivity is needed to meet regional growth needs. The Greater Toronto Airport Authority has committed to connecting to the planned Eglinton Crosstown West Extension and studies are underway to connect the Finch LRT line and GO Transit Kitchener line. However, there is no funding commitment for either of these connections. The GO Transit Kitchener line shares tracks with VIA trains for its entire route from Toronto Union Station to Kitchener, making a VIA Rail connection with the Airport possible with a short track extension into the airport area.

To make Pearson Airport Regional Transportation Centre into Union Station West, creating these connections needs to be a priority.



4.1.4 URBAN BUS RAPID TRANSIT OR LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT SYSTEMS

Urban BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) or LRT (Light Rail Transit) typically runs in urban areas on arterial roads in their own right of way. The 2041 Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan proposed four BRT/LRT systems in or near the study area: Brampton Main Street LRT (\$300 Million), Dundas Connects BRT (\$500 Million), Brampton Queen Street BRT (\$600 Million) and Vaughan Major Mackenzie Drive BRT/LRT (\$600 Million), for a total capital cost of about \$2 Billion. If they go ahead, these lines will form part of a complete rapid transit network that will connect to the RER system.

4.1.5 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC TRANSIT INITIATIVES VERSUS HIGHWAY 413

The table below compares the capital cost, people-moving capacity, and greenhouse gas emissions of the suggested transit option versus Highway 413. Clearly transit is much more cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

Project	Estimated Cost, \$ Billion	Capacity – People/hour in peak direction
GO Kitchener Service Expansion	1.0	2,000–9,000(a)
GO Milton Service Expansion	3.5	4,000(b)
GO Bolton	0.4	2,000 (c)
Brampton Main St. LRT	0.3	5,000(d)
Dundas BRT	0.5	3,000 (e)
Brampton Queen St. BRT	0.6	3,000 (f)
Major Mackenzie BRT/LRT	0.6	3,000 (f)
TOTAL TRANSIT	6.9	22,000–29,000
Highway 413	6.0	7,000 (g)

(a) As per Updated Initial Business Case

(b) Frequency unknown – assume 15 minute service

(c) Assume one train every 30 minutes, peak period and direction only

(d) 2-car trains every 3 minutes, per Hurontario/Main St Rapid Transit Benefits Case, Metrolinx , 2010¹²

(e) 1 bus every 2 minutes, per Dundas Bus Rapid Transit Benefits Case, Metrolinx, 2010¹³

(f) Assume same capacity as Dundas BRT

(g) Three lanes per direction. Average vehicle occupancy 1.25.

4.2 TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The “optimize existing networks” measures recommended in the Stage 1 EA, and also recommended by the Advisory Panel, are good initiatives and should be implemented. These include:

- Ramp metering, where a traffic signal is used on entrance ramps to expressways, to regulate vehicle access and maintain optimum highway traffic flows. Some entrance ramps to the QEW use this technology.
- Bus-supportive lanes/shoulders or HOV lanes
- Expanded COMPASS system. The COMPASS system uses sensors along a highway to transmit traffic data to the Ministry Operations Centre for incident management and congestion management functions. Motorists are informed about issues on the COMPASS signs, thereby providing opportunities to seek alternate routes or anticipate slowdown.
- Speed harmonization, where a traffic management system similar to COMPASS is used to automatically adjust speed limits when congestion thresholds are exceeded, thereby maximizing vehicle throughput by maintaining a constant flow versus typical stop and go conditions.
- Expand Smart Commute program to Guelph and Wellington. This is a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program that reaches out to employers and employees to encourage car pooling, transit use and active transportation.
- Monitor Long Combination Vehicle (LCV) program. The LCV program permits a single tractor to haul two large trailers under restricted conditions. This improves fuel efficiency and traffic operations for goods movement.

4.3 OTHER RAIL INVESTMENT

To facilitate goods movement, both the EA and the Panel recommended studying removing freight rail/road conflicts by providing grade separations. Additionally, a study should be conducted on how to stimulate increased use of truck/train intermodal transportation. Intermodal transportation involves using trucks to carry shipping containers from a supplier to an intermodal terminal, such as the CN Terminal in Vaughan, then loading the container onto a flat-bed rail car, using rail to carry the container to the appropriate destination terminal for off-loading to a truck, and using a truck to deliver the container to the final customer. Thus trucking is only used for the “first and last mile” of the journey. This eases highway maintenance, traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.



4.4 SCOPE TRUCK PRIORITY ON HIGHWAY 407ETR

The Advisory Panel suggested this as a promising alternative, and we agree. This could include truck-only lanes, longer speed change lanes, designs to accommodate Long Combination Vehicles, automated weigh stations and toll subsidies for trucks.

4.5 WIDENING OF EXISTING HIGHWAYS

The Advisory Panel identified widening of existing highways within their current rights-of-way as worthy of consideration. This would involve Highways 400, 401, 407ETR, 410 and 427. All projects would be subject to their own environmental assessment to minimize environmental effects.

The Stage 1 EA in 2012 recommended widening about 16 road sections. Several of the key sections, such as additional lanes on Highway 407ETR between Highways 410 and 427, the extension of Highway 427 from Highway 7 to Major Mackenzie Drive, and the widening of Highway 401 between Regional Road 25 (Milton) and the Credit River (Mississauga) are either complete or under construction as of 2020.

In view of the theories of induced traffic demand, it is legitimate to question if providing more lane-km of expressways in this area is “worth it”. We believe that, in view of the large projected population increase in the study area and the fact that incremental environmental effects will be low, widening of existing highways makes sense to meet real demand based on growth, rather than induced demand. This is consistent with the Advisory Panel conclusion.



CONCLUSION – A CRITICAL DECISION NEEDS TO BE MADE

Without major tax increases, there is a limited pool of money in the Province to support the construction of the GTA-West Highway while also paying for the cost of the critical public transit infrastructure projects mentioned in this report. Focusing on public transit infrastructure allows the Province to share the capital cost of projects with their municipal and federal counterparts. This will help lessen the burden on a single government committing billions of dollars on one large project.

With future changes in transportation technology, working from home and climate change imperatives, a new expressway is not the right answer.

There is a critical decision to be made that will impact the future of the GTA. Will this Provincial Government support public transit infrastructure that gets residents out of their cars and to work in a convenient, traffic-free and environmentally sustainable way? Or will they condemn future generations to pay for an outdated model of transportation whose costs are too numerous?



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