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**From:** Switzer, Barbara <Barbara.Switzer@york.ca> **On Behalf Of** Regional Clerk  
**Sent:** March 24, 2021 1:50 PM  
**Subject:** Regional Council Decision - GTA West Transportation Corridor Project - Regional Response to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

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On March 18, 2021 Regional Council made the following decision:

1. Council endorse the proposed response (Attachment 1) to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada as the Region's input to inform the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada's analysis of the designation request for the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project under the federal Impact Assessment Act.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Ontario Minister of Transportation, the Regions of Peel and Halton and the local municipalities.
3. That York Region Council request a Federal Impact Assessment (IA) for Highway 413 (GTA West Transportation West Project).

The original staff report is attached for your information.

Please contact Brian Titherington, Director of Transportation and Infrastructure Planning at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75901 if you have any questions with respect to this matter.

Regards,

**Christopher Raynor** | Regional Clerk, Regional Clerk's Office, Corporate Services

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The Regional Municipality of York | 17250 Yonge Street | Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1  
**O:** 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71300 | [christopher.raynor@york.ca](mailto:christopher.raynor@york.ca) | [york.ca](http://york.ca)

Our Mission: **Working together to serve our thriving communities – today and tomorrow**

# **The Regional Municipality of York**

Regional Council  
Transportation Services  
February 25, 2021

Report of the Commissioner of Transportation Services

## **GTA West Transportation Corridor Project Regional Response to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada**

### **1. Recommendations**

1. Council endorse the proposed response (Attachment 1) to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada as the Region's input to inform the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada's analysis of the designation request for the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project under the federal *Impact Assessment Act*.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Ontario Minister of Transportation, the Regions of Peel and Halton and the local municipalities.

### **2. Summary**

On February 3, 2021, Ecojustice, on behalf of Environmental Defense, submitted a request to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Canada to designate the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project under the federal *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA) (Attachment 2). On February 12, 2021, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (Agency) requested input from municipalities on the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project to inform the Agency's analysis of the designation request (Attachment 3). The Agency has requested municipal input by March 3, 2021.

#### Key Points:

- The GTA West Transportation Corridor Project supports York Region's Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan (2016) and is an important component of servicing planned growth in the Region
- The Region has long-supported the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project and has been consulted by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation since the beginning of the provincial Individual Environmental Assessment (EA) process in 2007
- Under Provincial legislation the Individual Environmental Assessment process is the appropriate mechanism to address technical requirements in terms of environmental, social, economic or health needs as well as required consultation of all community stakeholders

- The Region, local municipalities and community stakeholders could be negatively impacted by prolonged processes that lead to continued uncertainty related to the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project

### 3. Background

#### **The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada has invited affected municipalities to provide input**

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation is planning a GTA West Transportation Corridor that will include a new provincial highway and protection for a future transitway. The proposed new highway will connect Highway 400, between Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road in the east, to the Highway 401/407 interchange area in the west. The corridor extends through the municipalities of Vaughan, Caledon, Brampton and Halton Hills in the Regions of York, Peel and Halton.

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada has invited affected municipalities to provide input on the GTA West Project to inform the Agency's analysis of the designation request submitted by Ecojustice, on behalf of Environmental Defense. In particular, the Agency is seeking input on:

- Whether any York Region requirements apply to the Project?
- Would any of those involve consultation with the public and Indigenous groups?
- What environmental, social, economic or health issues would those address?
- Whether the Ontario Ministry of Transportation is addressing the interests and issues of importance to York Region?

#### **The federal *Impact Assessment Act* regulates projects that are required to undergo a federal impact assessment process**

The *Impact Assessment Act* became law in 2019 and outlines two ways a project may be required to undergo a federal impact assessment process. The first is the project contains an activity that matches a description contained in the federal *Physical Activities Regulations* (Project List). The second is that a request be made to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to exercise their discretion to require a federal impact assessment process for a project that is not on the Project List, but due to the potential for the project to cause adverse effects on matters within federal jurisdiction, or adverse direct or incidental effects (due to a federal decision) or due to public concerns related to those effects. With the IAA in effect only since 2019, staff has not been able to identify any instance of the Minister exercising their discretion in this manner over a project that would otherwise only be regulated by a provincial environmental assessment process.

## 4. Analysis

### **Council has long-supported the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project**

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation began the terms of reference phase of the provincial Environmental Assessment process for the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project in 2007 and has consulted the Region throughout the process. Staff have reported to Council at key milestones throughout the provincial EA process, and Council has consistently supported the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project as summarized below:

York Region Council [May 2007](#) resolved:

*The Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of the Environment be requested to expedite the GTA West Corridor and other environmental assessments that are needed to meet the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.*

York Region Council [March 2016](#) resolved:

*Council request that the Ministry of Transportation resume the GTA West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment and define the preferred alignment as soon as possible.*

York Region Council [June 2019](#) resolved:

*Council support a robust highway network to move people, goods and services and achieve provincial Growth Plan population and employment objectives in York Region and encourage:*

- a. The resumption of Environmental Assessment for GTA West Highway for near-term inclusion in the Southern Highways Program*
- b. The inclusion of the Highway 400-404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension to Highway 12 in the next Southern Highways Program*

York Region Council [January 2020](#) resolved:

*The Province of Ontario be advised that York Region supports the decision to resume the Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment and requests that the highway be constructed as soon as possible.*

### **The GTA West Transportation Corridor Project supports York Region's Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan**

The York Region Official Plan 2010 describes how York Region plans to accommodate future growth and development while meeting the needs of existing residents and businesses in York Region. It provides directions and policies that guide economic, environmental and community planning decisions.

The GTA West highway is identified as a planned new transportation corridor in the York Region Official Plan ([Map 12 Street Network](#)) and included in policy 7.2.56:

*To work with the Province and local municipalities to plan and protect for the following corridors and facilities:*

- a. Highway 427 north to the GTA West Corridor*
- b. Highway 404 north beyond Ravenshoe Road*
- c. the Bradford Bypass (Highway 400-404 Link)*
- d. the GTA West Corridor*

The York Region Transportation Master Plan 2016 establishes the vision for transportation services, assesses existing transportation system performance, forecasts future travel demand and defines actions and policies to address road, transit and active transportation needs in York Region to 2041.

The GTA West Transportation Corridor Project is identified in the Transportation Master Plan as an integral component of the transportation network required to service York Region residents and businesses ([Map 8 - Proposed 2041 Road Network](#)).

## **The Ontario Ministry of Transportation has consulted the Region throughout the GTA West Project**

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation has consulted the Region throughout the planning for the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project. At key milestones, staff have reported to Council highlighting issues for consideration in the provincial EA process, including those relating to alignment alternatives and interchange locations. References to previous Council reports for various GTA West project-related issues are referenced above.

The Region anticipates the current provincial EA process will continue to address environmental, social, economic and health issues as well as necessary public consultation to balance the needs of all community stakeholders.

## **Council recently received communications and deputations from residents raising concerns about the GTA West Project**

On [February 11, 2021](#), Council received 19 written communications and six deputations from residents raising concerns relating to various aspects of the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project. The Region anticipates the provincial EA process will recognize and address concerns raised by community stakeholders including those raised at the February 11, 2021 meeting.

## **5. Financial**

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

## 6. Local Impact

The Region and the local municipalities benefit from provincial investment in the highway network in the Greater Toronto Area. The planned GTA West Transportation Corridor Project is identified as an important component of the transportation network required to service the Region's residents and businesses.

## 7. Conclusion

This report seeks Council endorsement for staff to submit the proposed response to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada to inform the Agency's analysis of the designation request under the federal *Impact Assessment Act* for the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project.

Staff anticipate the current provincial Environmental Assessment process for the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project will continue to address issues raised by the Region, local municipalities and community stakeholders. The Region, local municipalities and community stakeholders could be negatively impacted by prolonged processes that lead to continued uncertainty related to the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project.

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For more information on this report, please contact Brian Titherington, Director of Transportation and Infrastructure Planning at 1-877-464-9675 extension 75901. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by:



**Paul Jankowski**  
Commissioner of Transportation Services

Approved for Submission:



**Bruce Macgregor**  
Chief Administrative Officer

February 24, 2021  
Attachments (3)  
12592136

March 3, 2021

Ms. Anjala Puvananathan, Director  
Impact Assessment Agency of Canada  
Ontario Region  
600-55 York Street  
Toronto ON M5J 1R7

Dear Ms. Puvananathan,

**Re: Designation Request for the Proposed GTA West Project under the *Impact Assessment Act***

Thank you for your February 12, 2021 correspondence regarding the designation request submitted on February 3, 2021 by Ecojustice on behalf of Environmental Defense. The Ecojustice submission has requested the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Canada designate the proposed Ontario Greater Toronto Area (GTA) West Transportation Corridor Project under subsection 9(1) of the *Impact Assessment Act*.

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation is proposing a new GTA West Transportation Corridor which will include a new provincial highway and protection for a future transitway. The proposed new highway will connect Highway 400 between Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road in the east to the Highway 401/407 interchange area in the west. The corridor extends through the municipalities of Vaughan, Caledon, Brampton and Halton Hills in the Regions of York, Peel and Halton.

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada has invited affected municipalities to provide input on the GTA West Project to inform the Agency's analysis of the designation request. In particular, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada is seeking input on:

- Whether any York Region requirements apply to the Project?
- Would any of those involve consultation with the public and Indigenous groups?
- What environmental, social, economic or health issues would those requirements address?
- Whether the Ontario Ministry of Transportation is addressing the interests and issues of importance to York Region?

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada has requested municipal responses by March 3, 2021.

York Region has long supported the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation started the Terms of Reference phase of the Provincial EA process for the GTA West Project in 2006 and has consulted York Region throughout the process. York Region staff have reported to Council at key milestones throughout the Provincial EA process and York Region Council has consistently supported the GTA West Transportation Corridor Project as highlighted below.

York Region Council May 2007 resolved:

*The Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of the Environment be requested to expedite the GTA West Corridor and other environmental assessments that are needed to meet the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.*

York Region Council March 2016 resolved:

*Council request that the Ministry of Transportation resume the GTA West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment and define the preferred alignment as soon as possible.*

York Region Council June 2019 resolved:

*Council support a robust highway network to move people, goods and services and achieve provincial Growth Plan population and employment objectives in York Region and encourage:*

- a. The resumption of Environmental Assessment for GTA West Highway for near-term inclusion in the Southern Highways Program*
- b. The inclusion of the Highway 400-404 Connecting Link and the Highway 404 Extension to Highway 12 in the next Southern Highways Program*

York Region Council January 2020 resolved:

*The Province of Ontario be advised that York Region supports the decision to resume the Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor Environmental Assessment and requests that the highway be constructed as soon as possible.*

The GTA West Highway is integral to managing the movement of goods and people to support the magnitude of growth forecasted by the Province.

With a population of 1.2 million residents, The Regional Municipality of York is one of Canada's largest municipalities and the second largest business centre in Ontario. Ranked as Ontario's fastest growing large municipality, managing growth over the coming decades is important. In accordance with the Growth Plan, York Region is required to plan for Provincially-forecasted growth. York Region is forecast to reach approximately 2.02 million people and 990,000 jobs by 2051, representing population growth of over 800,000 people and approximately 345,000 jobs.

The York Region Official Plan describes how York Region plans to accommodate future growth and development while meeting the needs of existing residents and businesses in the Region. The Regional Official Plan, currently under review to address 2051 population and employment, provides directions and policies that guide economic, environmental and community planning decisions.

The GTA West Project is identified as a planned transportation corridor in the York Region Official Plan (Map 12 Street Network) and included in policy 7.2.56:

*To work with the Province and local municipalities to plan and protect for the following corridors and facilities:*

- a. Highway 427 north to the GTA West Corridor*
- b. Highway 404 north beyond Ravenshoe Road*
- c. the Bradford Bypass (Highway 400-404 Link)*
- d. the GTA West Corridor*



The York Region Transportation Master Plan 2016 establishes the vision for transportation services, assesses existing transportation system performance, forecasts future travel demand, and defines actions and policies to address road, transit and active transportation needs in York Region to 2041.

The GTA West is identified as an integral component of the transportation network required to service York Region residents and businesses (Map 8 Proposed 2041 Road Network) and described in section 5.2.1 Provincial Infrastructure Plans:

*GTA West: The GTA West highway corridor would extend from Highway 401 in Halton Region to Highway 400 in York Region. While Provincial route planning and Environmental Assessment work on the corridor has been put on hold, it remains an important project for York Region. Its benefits would include better access to employment areas in the City of Vaughan, alleviate pressure on east-west Regional roads and provide an alternate route to Highways 400 and 401. This TMP assumes that GTA West will be in place by 2041. [Note that the EA process was put on hold by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation in December 2015 during preparation of the York Region Transportation Master Plan 2016. The EA was restarted in June 2019],*

Both York Region's Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan were developed with extensive consultation, including the public, stakeholders, government agencies and Indigenous groups.

#### The Ontario Ministry of Transportation has consulted York Region throughout the GTA West Project

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation has consulted York Region throughout the planning for the GTA West Project. Through the Individual EA process, the highest level of Provincial Environmental Assessment, York Region has been consulted and actively engaged. At key milestones, York Region staff have reported to Council, including highlighting issues or concerns for consideration in the Provincial EA process, including issues related to impacts of alignment alternatives and interchange locations. A recent example including the following:

In January 2020, York Region Council requested the Ministry of Transportation assess, as part of the Environmental Assessment, a highway route that reduces impacts to existing and approved community areas in the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area. In June 2020, the Ministry of Transportation consulted Regional staff on additional route options between Highway 50 and Highway 27 in the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan area. Taking into consideration input received on the draft highway alignment from various stakeholders, in August 2020 the Ontario Ministry of Transportation identified a preferred highway route. The identified preferred route included an improved alignment between Highway 50 and Highway 27, with less impact to the North Kleinburg-Nashville Secondary Plan as compared to the original fall 2019 preliminary alignment.

The Provincial EA process provides for the highest level of environmental assessment and stakeholder consultation. York Region is satisfied with the current Provincial process and would be negatively impacted by a lengthy delay in constructing the Project which would be likely if the GTA West Project were designated for the purpose of commencing a new Federal EA process.

### Specific Input to the Federal Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

Specific responses for the input questions posed by the Federal Impact Assessment Agency are summarized in the table below:

Impact Assessment Agency Question	Regional Response
Whether any York Region requirements apply to the Project?	The Region requires conformity with the Region's Official Plan as well as the Transportation Master Plan.
Would any of these involve consultation with the public and Indigenous groups?	The Region consulted extensively for the Official Plan and the Transportation Master Plan and would expect the Province to duly consult all stakeholders as required in the Provincial Individual Environmental Assessment process.
What environmental, social, economic or health issues would those requirements address?	The Region would expect the Provincial Individual Environmental Assessment process to address all relevant environmental, social, economic or health issues as raised by community stakeholders.
Whether the Ontario Ministry of Transportation is addressing the interests and issues of importance to York Region?	The Ontario Ministry of Transportation is addressing the interests and issues as identified by the Region including issues related to alignment alternatives and interchange locations.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Brian Titherington, Director of Transportation and Infrastructure Planning at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75901.

Sincerely,

Paul Jankowski  
Commissioner of Transportation Services

12596054

**Laura Bowman**

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File No.: 3860051

February 3, 2021

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson  
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6  
[Jonathan.Wilkinson@Canada.ca](mailto:Jonathan.Wilkinson@Canada.ca)

Dear Minister Wilkinson,

**Re: GTA West – Request for designation under s.9 of the *Impact Assessment Act***

I am writing on behalf of my client Environmental Defence, to request that the GTA West Project and associated transmission infrastructure be designated for a federal Environmental Assessment pursuant to s.9(1) of the *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA). This request is also supported by Ontario Nature, Transport Action Ontario, Sierra Club Peel, Halton Environmental Network, Oakvillegreen, Sustainable Vaughan, and Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. The GTA West Project and associated transmission infrastructure will result in adverse environmental effects within federal jurisdiction as well as adverse and incidental effects and meets the criteria for public concern. The GTA West Project is proposed to be partially exempted from the provincial EA process.<sup>1</sup>

Under subsection 9(1) of IAA the Minister may, by order, designate a physical activity that is not prescribed in the Regulations. The Minister may do this, if, in the Minister's opinion, the physical activity may cause adverse effects within federal jurisdiction or adverse direct or incidental effects, or public concerns related to those effects warrant the designation.

The GTA West Project has not substantially begun nor has a federal authority exercised a power or performed a duty or function that would permit the Project to be carried out, in whole or in part, and therefore the Minister is not prohibited from designating this Project pursuant to subsection 9(1) of IAA.

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<sup>1</sup> Proposed Regulation for a streamlined environmental assessment process for the Ministry of Transportation's GTA West Transportation Corridor Project (July 8, 2020) <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882>.

## Overview of the project

The GTA West Project is a proposed fully separated 400 series highway in the northwest Greater Toronto Area. The proponent is the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO). The highway would have freeway-to-freeway connections at Highways 401, 407, 410, 427 and 400. The GTA West Project also includes highway widenings and expansions along existing highway corridors.

The new highway corridor will extend from Highway 400 (between Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road) in the east to the Highway 401/407 ETR interchange area in the west, and will feature a 400-series highway and transitway. The project would consist of 8.8 million square metres of new paved surfaces. The paved surface would be approximately 170 metres wide (110 m for vehicle lanes, 60 for transit lanes) and approximately 52 km long. The GTA West Highway would stretch across four municipalities from Highway 401 northeast to Highway 400 including from west to east: Halton Hills, Brampton and Vaughan. It would bisect the sensitive headwaters of four watersheds from west to east, including the easternmost Sixteen Mile Creek, a stretch of the Credit River, the entire width of Etobicoke Creek, and the Humber River.<sup>2</sup>

The GTA West Project is also proposed to be co-located with a Northwest Greater Toronto Area Electricity Transmission Corridor.<sup>3</sup> The proponent of the associated transmission corridor is the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (ENDM). The proposed corridor would potentially include a 60 metre or wider right of way with two double-circuit 239kV transmission lines. No environmental assessment for the transmission corridor has been undertaken to date.

## Overview of environmental effects

The GTA West Project would cause significant adverse environmental effects because of its location and environmental setting. The highway will develop a rural area including a number of areas protected under the Greenbelt Plan. It would bisect a number of features such as significant woodlands, endangered species habitat and wetlands which are designated as protected “natural heritage features”. It will bisect and seriously compromise a number of major river corridors in and outside of the Greenbelt Plan that provide critical wildlife connections north to the major natural areas of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. These include a major twin crossing of the Humber River and the adjacent East Humber River valleys, another three crossings of East Humber valleys, four crossings of West Humber valleys, two crossings of Etobicoke Creek and a major crossing of the main Credit River valley.

The GTA West Project would have “extensive and widespread impacts on the natural heritage system,” including significant loss in the number, form and function of natural features and

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<sup>2</sup> GTA West at a glance (February 2015) [https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/GTA-West-at-a-Glance\\_February-2015.pdf](https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/GTA-West-at-a-Glance_February-2015.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> ERO posting 019-1503 <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1503> also see attached map [https://prod-environmental-registry.s3.amazonaws.com/2020-03/2.%20MTO%202019%20Focused%20Analysis%20Area%20vs%20Proposed%20Tx%20Narrowed%20Area%20of%20Interest\\_0.png](https://prod-environmental-registry.s3.amazonaws.com/2020-03/2.%20MTO%202019%20Focused%20Analysis%20Area%20vs%20Proposed%20Tx%20Narrowed%20Area%20of%20Interest_0.png)

species. There will be significant fragmentation of valleylands, conservation lands, and the few remaining natural corridors in the eastern portion of the project area.<sup>4</sup>

The proposed highway and its corridor will destroy a combined 5.95 km length of forests that support many sensitive forest bird species, and other wildlife and plants. This includes destroying seven entire woodlots, portions of other woodlots, and bisecting numerous forested valleys. The single biggest loss will be a 1.5 km stretch of forests around the twin valleys of the Humber and East Humber Rivers in Vaughan.<sup>5</sup>

Over 1,000 ha of land identified as important for local wildlife movement, some of which is also important at a regional scale, will either be removed or intersected by the proposed highway. Of note is the section located to the east of Bramalea Road, through an area classified as important for regional wildlife movement.<sup>6</sup>

The exact number of affected stream crossings involved in the GTA West Project and associated transmission infrastructure is not specified in the EA. The Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has estimated 85 crossings are required.<sup>7</sup> Although some assessment documents include higher estimates of 93-118 water courses depending on the alternative that is under discussion.<sup>8</sup> Of these crossings, TRCA ranks 10 as “high priority” locations ecologically, as they are in deep valleys with relatively high quality existing or potential habitat, high regional connectivity, or high local connectivity. Of the remaining crossings, 58 are ranked as “medium priority” locations located in shallow valleys that have high quality existing or potential habitat, high regional connectivity, or high local connectivity.<sup>9</sup> Details are not known for crossings in Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) or Halton Conservation (HC) jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup>

## Public Concern

There has been significant public concern about the GTA West project. During the first provincial review process, there was so much public concern that the project was halted and the proponent hired an advisory panel to advise on alternatives. Ultimately that panel recommended

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<sup>4</sup> TRCA, Staff Report: GTA West Transportation Corridor Individual EA – Stage 2 Update (January 24, 2020) [“TRCA Jan 2020 Report”] <https://pub-trca.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=5418>, p.7-9.

<sup>5</sup> AECOM, GTA West Natural Environment Existing Conditions Map <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Section-04-Natural-Environment-Existing-Conditions-Map.pdf> Also derived from MNR Natural Heritage Mapping tool: [https://www.gisapplication.lrc.gov.on.ca/mamnh/Index.html?site=MNR\\_NHLUPS\\_NaturalHeritage&viewer=NaturalHeritage&locale=en-US](https://www.gisapplication.lrc.gov.on.ca/mamnh/Index.html?site=MNR_NHLUPS_NaturalHeritage&viewer=NaturalHeritage&locale=en-US).

<sup>6</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, p.7-9; also AECOM map of NH features located at <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Section-04-Natural-Environment-Existing-Conditions-Map.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, p.7-9.

<sup>8</sup> AECOM, Assessment of Group 3 and Group 4 Transportation alternatives (Chapter 4) November 2018 [“AECOM alternatives assessment”] <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Chapter3NaturalEnvironment.pdf>, p.53.

<sup>9</sup> TRCA 2020 <https://pub-trca.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=5418> p.7-9.

<sup>10</sup> Credit Valley Conservation Authority, Board of Directors Meeting Agenda (October 16, 2020) [https://cvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Agenda-Package-Redacted-BOARD-OF-DIRECTORS-MEETING\\_Oct16\\_2020-1.pdf](https://cvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Agenda-Package-Redacted-BOARD-OF-DIRECTORS-MEETING_Oct16_2020-1.pdf) p.24-29.

against the project. The project has received considerable media coverage particularly regarding opposition to the project.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, over 6000 people have requested that the GTA West project be cancelled. A recent letter opposing the project was signed by the David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defence, the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods, Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet, Gravelwatch, Halton Environment Network, National Farmer's Union - Ontario, the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, Sustainable Vaughan, Transport Action Ontario and the Wilderness Committee.

The municipality of Halton Hills, which lies along the western portion of the route, has passed a resolution opposing the highway.<sup>12</sup> The City of Brampton has unanimously endorsed a local boulevard option instead through its portion of the corridor/route through "heritage heights." However to-date the MTO has refused to consider this alternative. Concerns about effects turn on the destruction of natural heritage areas, climate change, and moving away towards single occupant passenger vehicle transportation models to enhance complete communities. The City of Orangeville also passed a motion opposing the project.

The TRCA, which is normally the regulatory authority for developments in floodplains, wetlands and valleylands has objected to the potential impact of the highway and the proposed streamlined regulatory process for early works (described in more detail below). As recently as September 2020 it was still awaiting responses from the proponent on how the project would impact TRCA managed protected areas and natural heritage features within TRCA jurisdiction.

### **The project is near a threshold set out in the project list**

Section 51 of the *Physical Activities Regulations* (SOR/2019-285) designates "The construction, operation, decommissioning and abandonment of a new all-season public highway that requires a total of 75 km or more of new right of way. "New right of way" is described as land that "is not alongside and contiguous to an area of land that was developed for an...all season highway".

The length of the new corridor portion of the GTA West highway is approximately 52 kilometres with a new 110-metre right of way. The associated transitway is another 52 kilometres in length and would be a separate corridor with a new 60-metre right of way. The width of the associated transmission right of way is unknown but also extends for 50 km. Both the highway and transitway portions of the GTA West Project independently meet the definition of a new right of

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Webster, "Highway 413: The Opposition Reloads" *In the Hills* (Nov 24 2020) <https://www.inthehills.ca/2020/11/highway-413-the-opposition-reloads/> ; Tabitha Wells, "GTA West does not align with Orangeville's Priorities: council opposes Highway 413 through Caledon, Vaughan, Milton" *Orangeville Banner* (Nov 13, 2020) <https://www.orangeville.com/news-story/10265191--gta-west-does-not-align-with-orangeville-s-priorities-council-opposes-highway-413-through-caledon-vaughan-milton/> ; Laura Broadly "It's just going to ruin everything" *King Connection* (Oct 15 2020) <https://www.yorkregion.com/news-story/10217411--it-s-just-going-to-ruin-everything-king-vaughan-groups-team-up-to-fight-hwy-413/> ; Opinion "Highway plan raises many questions" *Independent Free Press* (Oct 1 2020) <https://www.insidehalton.com/opinion-story/10212505-highway-plan-raises-many-questions/> ; Isaac Callan "Halton leaders are fighting against Ford's GTA West Highway" *Toronto Star* (Oct 3 2020) <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/10/03/halton-leaders-are-fighting-against-fords-gta-west-highway-bramptons-refuse-to-condemn-it.html>

<sup>12</sup> Isaac Callan, *Toronto Star* (October 3, 2020) "Halton leaders are fighting against Ford's GTA West Highway; Brampton's refuse to condemn it"

way, for a total of approximately 100 kilometres. The transmission corridor also requires a new right of way. The right of way runs through a rural, undeveloped area for most of its route.

The “project” as defined in the EA also includes associated highway widenings along unknown lengths of other 400 series highways. Associated highway expansions along the 410 and 427 corridors to connect them with the new GTA West highway would bring the GTA West highway project to over 60 kilometres of new, undeveloped right of way.

When all components are included, the project is at or approaching the Project list threshold of 75 kilometres under the *Impact Assessment Act*. To the extent that it does not meet this threshold, this relates at least in part to project-splitting of the main corridor from the connections between the GTA West to other 400 series highways and widenings of other public highways. There is also project splitting as between the highway and the associated transmission corridor, and the highway and associated transitway, each of which requires an entirely new 50 km long right of way.

**There are proposals for multiple activities within the same region that may be a source of cumulative effects.**

The GTA West Project has the potential to exacerbate the cumulative effects of sprawl and climate change, as well as to create cumulative effects with other highway proposals along the same vulnerable natural corridors. This includes the extension of Highways 410 and 427 to the GTA West Highway, as well as widening and expansion projects impacting major north-south natural waterways and corridors along the 401 and 407 corridors.<sup>13</sup> These related projects will impact 129 watercourses in the same region and on the same natural corridors such as the Humber River and Credit River along existing highway crossings.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to this the Regions of York (City of Vaughan) and Peel (Town of Caledon) clearly intend to expand settlement and employment area boundaries in the vicinity of 400 series highways, including the GTA West corridor. Peel is considering official plan amendments to this effect, including approval of developments in Mayfield in Caledon which would expand urban areas north from Brampton up towards the GTA west through prime agricultural lands.<sup>15</sup> Peel also contemplates expanding areas of Bolton westward towards the Humber River along the GTA West corridor.<sup>16</sup> York Region recently requested that the province allow development in protected greenbelt lands along all 400 series highways.<sup>17</sup> There has been no examination of the

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<sup>13</sup> AECOM Assessment of alternatives report, p.53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>15</sup> Caledon official plan Schedule A [https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Documents/business-planning-development/Official\\_Plan\\_Schedule\\_A.pdf](https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Documents/business-planning-development/Official_Plan_Schedule_A.pdf). Also see “Highway 413 opposition reloads” cited above <https://www.inthehills.ca/2020/11/highway-413-the-opposition-reloads/>

<sup>16</sup> Region of Peel Official Plan.

[https://www.peelregion.ca/planning/officialplan/pdfs/ropdec18/ROPConsolidationDec2018\\_TextSchedules\\_Final\\_SCHEDULES\\_Part12.pdf](https://www.peelregion.ca/planning/officialplan/pdfs/ropdec18/ROPConsolidationDec2018_TextSchedules_Final_SCHEDULES_Part12.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Report, York Region Council (October 8, 2020).

<https://yorkpublishing.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=16293>.



cumulative effects of the development of the highway along with other anticipated development of rural/agricultural and natural heritage areas adjacent to the Highway.

Additionally, the associated transmission corridor would entail an unknown number of additional crossings of watercourses and disruption of natural corridors. The cumulative effects of the transmission corridor and the GTA West Project have not been considered, nor are they included within the scope of the current provincial EA processes.

### **Adverse effects cannot be adequately managed through other existing legislative or regulatory mechanisms**

#### The provincial regulatory process is grossly inadequate

In Ontario until 2020 the strategic planning of highways was subject to a full environmental assessment but the site specific impacts of individual projects are not fully assessed. Individual highway projects are assessed under the Ministry of Transportation Class Environmental Assessment Process.

As described below, the GTA West Highway proposal was subject to an EA process that was heavily criticized on need and alternatives by the proponent's own Advisory Panel. As a result, the EA was terminated in 2015. An Advisory Panel was appointed by the proponent to review the EA. The Advisory Panel concluded that the EA was fundamentally flawed, particularly on need and alternatives. Despite these critiques the EA was recommenced in 2019 and a preferred route was identified. Now, the Ontario Government proposes to exempt the project from completing the EA process.

#### Proposed exemption from Provincial EA

In July 2020, the Ontario Government proposed to exempt the GTA West highway from completing its environmental assessment before commencing what it referred to as "early works." The nature of these early works were not defined. As noted by other regulatory agencies, it remains unclear how natural heritage features including Fish and Migratory Bird habitat will be identified and protected before early works commence under the proposed exemption. The proposal suggested that early works could include bridges over water courses.<sup>18</sup> Despite proposing to rapidly develop water crossings there have been no communications with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans regarding potential fish habitat destruction. Ontario also proposes to exempt all highways less than 75 kilometres from provincial individual EA under recent legislative changes.<sup>19</sup>

TRCA has expressed concerns with this exemption, noting that in its view, the usual environmental development permit requirements for floodplains under s.28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* does not apply to this proponent and that the proposed exemption would fail to protect natural heritage features (i.e. significant wetlands, woodlands, species habitat):

As MTO is exempt from the regulatory requirements of the CA Act, TRCA has significant concerns **there is no mechanism in place for the protection of life and**

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<sup>18</sup> Proposed Regulation for a streamlined environmental assessment process for the Ministry of Transportations' Greater Toronto Area West Transportation Corridor project (July 8, 2020) <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882>

<sup>19</sup> Proposed Project List for comprehensive Environmental Assessment <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-2377>



**property or the management of natural resources at the detailed design stage of the GTA West**, which fails to fulfill the objects of the EA Act. The mandate of CAs strongly aligns with provincial objectives for resilient public infrastructure and meeting the intent of the EA Act to provide for the protection, conservation and wise management of Ontario's environment. Accordingly, TRCA's Board of Directors have recommended that MTO commit to receiving VPR signoff at the design stage as it relates to TRCA's regulatory and policy interest, as well as provincially delegated responsibilities. ...

...This project will have significant, unavoidable and permanent impacts to the existing natural heritage system and the Humber River and Etobicoke Creek watersheds and could exacerbate risks to natural hazards, and negatively impact drainage patterns, wildlife habitat and the surrounding landscape.

...Early works, including bridge works drive many impacts on the natural environment. It is not appropriate to allow construction to proceed prior to the completion of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. This, in effect would render the EIAR ineffective as it would not have an opportunity to identify and avoid impacts.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly the Credit Valley Conservation Authority has commented that: "it is unclear how the proposed streamlined approach [to the GTA West EA] allows for an appropriate level of regulation of the proposed project components..."<sup>21</sup> The full implications of the proposed exemption are not yet clear because no draft regulation was provided for public consultation.

#### Other provincial regulatory processes are inadequate

The Ontario *Endangered Species Act* does not adequately protect species at risk from the project. Under Regulation O.Reg 242/08, the laying down of highways and activities authorized under the Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities are exempt from the prohibitions under ss.9 and 10 of the Act pursuant to s.23(1) of the Regulation. Further, s.23.1(1) may exempt the GTA West project from permitting requirements under the *Endangered Species Act* to the extent that it is carrying out an undertaking under the Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities. This exemption applies specifically to the protections in ss.9 and 10 of the Ontario *Endangered Species Act* for Redside Dace, the species at risk that is affected by a large number of proposed watercourse crossings. There are a variety of other regulatory exemptions which may reduce or eliminate protections for a variety of other federally listed species at risk (for example Bobolink) within the project area.

TRCA takes the position that the usual permits for development and site alteration under section 28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* are not applicable to projects undertaken by MTO. Accordingly, the usual environmental protections of that permitting process, which applies to regulated lands (typically valleys and water crossings) is not likely to be applied to protect sensitive natural heritage features such as fish habitat and migratory bird habitat.

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<sup>20</sup> TRCA, letter to Ministry of the Environment on proposed exemption for GTA West (August 21, 2020). <https://pub-trca.escrimetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=6188> (emphasis added).

<sup>21</sup> CVCA, letter to Ministry of the Environment on proposed exemption for GTA West (August 21, 2020) [https://cvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Agenda-Package-BOARD-OF-DIRECTORS-MEETING\\_Sep11\\_2020\\_Redacted.pdf](https://cvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Agenda-Package-BOARD-OF-DIRECTORS-MEETING_Sep11_2020_Redacted.pdf)

## Predicted adverse effects on core areas of federal jurisdiction

### Federal Approvals

The project has the potential for direct and incidental effects arising from the exercise of a federal power or authority. Based on the project description to date the project would likely require authorization by Fisheries and Oceans Canada under the *Fisheries Act*. It may also require authorization by Environment and Climate Change Canada under the *Species at Risk Act* and the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. There may also be navigable waterways and rail infrastructure permits required. The full suite of approvals required is not known as the project is at an early stage of design.

### Fish and Fish Habitat

The project would cause adverse effects on fish and fish habitat as well as aquatic species and species at risk. The 2018 Natural Environment Report indicates that the highway corridor study area includes numerous locations representing high quality cold water habitat for fish, including federal species at risk such as Redside Dace.<sup>22</sup> The assessments conducted to date note that the project has the potential to impact fish communities along existing corridors as well as 24 water crossings containing species at risk.<sup>23</sup> Approximately 85-100 stream crossings are implicated in the preferred route. Accordingly, the project would also cause adverse effects that are directly related or incidental to a federal authority to authorize harmful alteration, destruction or disruption of fish habitat under s.35(1) of the *Fisheries Act*.

The highway will destroy or partially destroy 75 wetlands, 28 of which are designated by the Province as provincially significant. These wetlands are critical to the ecological health of the Humber, Etobicoke and Credit River Watersheds. They support numerous breeding amphibian ponds, significant swamps and marshes and many rare plant and animal species. TRCA predicts that approximately 220 wetlands covering 130 ha, will be impacted.<sup>24</sup>

According to TRCA, the proponent's Comparative Evaluation of Net Effects and Ranking of alternatives does not appear to consider the significance, sensitivities, or quality of all the natural heritage features within the alternative routes, which significantly diminishes the weighting of individual natural features. All natural heritage features should be evaluated using these criteria so that the review of alternatives considers natural heritage features equally and ensures overall impacts for each evaluation criterion is weighted appropriately.

- Some unevaluated wetlands may in fact be Provincially Significant Wetlands (PSW) but may not have been classified as such in the table. Once they have been evaluated, the significance of each natural feature can better inform the Route Evaluation.
- Woodlands should be assessed using standardized criteria for significance in such a way that they are compared on equal footing. Many of the unevaluated woodlands may in fact prove to be significant, particularly the larger features connected to valleys.

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<sup>22</sup> AECOM alternatives assessment, pp.36-42.

<sup>23</sup> AECOM alternatives assessment, p.53.

<sup>24</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, p.7.

- There are several locations where natural features have not been identified. For example, there are extensive riverine wetlands located adjacent to Airport Road where segments 6-1 and 6-2 are located. The proposed intersection 6-1 will remove a large proportion of these wetlands.<sup>25</sup>

The project would also traverse several key natural aquatic habitat features including but not limited to the Humber River, Credit River, Sixteen Mile Creek, Fletcher's creek, Mullet Creek, Spring Creek, Levi Creek and Etobicoke Creek. It would also impact Greenbelt Plan areas and the Niagara Escarpment as well as significant prime agricultural lands.<sup>26</sup> The project would also traverse a large conservation area, the Nashville Conservation Area managed by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).<sup>27</sup>

In July 2020, the Ontario Government proposed to exempt the GTA West highway from completing its environmental assessment before commencing what it referred to as "early works." The nature of these early works were not defined. As noted by other regulatory agencies, it remains unclear how natural heritage features including Fish and Migratory Bird habitat will be identified and protected before early works commence under the proposed exemption. The proposal suggested that early works could include bridges over water courses.<sup>28</sup> Despite proposing to rapidly develop water crossings there have been no communications with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans regarding potential fish habitat destruction.<sup>29</sup> While the proposed exemption would require the proponent to prepare a "draft" Environmental Conditions Report, this would just be a collection of documentation already completed up to the preliminary design phase. Detailed design would entail preparing a draft EIA only for those components of the project that are not subject to early works approvals.<sup>30</sup> The exemption appears to permit construction of early works such as bridges before these reports are completed.

### Migratory Birds

Highways cause significant adverse impacts to birds in four ways: direct mortality, indirect mortality (such as habitat loss and habitat sinks), habitat fragmentation and disturbance.<sup>31</sup> No mitigation can remove the impacts of highways to wildlife.<sup>32</sup> The well-known direct effects of

<sup>25</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> AECOM, GTA West Executive Summary, <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Executive-Summary-November-2012-1.pdf>, p.xx; AECOM, GTA West Existing Conditions Report, [https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA\\_West\\_Env\\_Existing\\_Conditions\\_Report\\_Jan\\_27\\_11-Appendices.pdf](https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA_West_Env_Existing_Conditions_Report_Jan_27_11-Appendices.pdf); AECOM, GTA West Chapter 2 – Natural Environment, <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Chapter3NaturalEnvironment.pdf>, pp.33-36

<sup>27</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, pp.10-13

<sup>28</sup> Proposed Regulation for a streamlined environmental assessment process for the Ministry of Transportation's GTA West Transportation Corridor Project (July 8, 2020) <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882>

<sup>29</sup> Ceasar Kagame, DFO to Charlotte Ireland, Ecojustice (Oct 7, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Proposed Regulation for a streamlined environmental assessment process for the Ministry of Transportation's GTA West Transportation Corridor Project (July 8, 2020) <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882>.

<sup>31</sup> Sandra L Jacobson, Mitigation Measures for Highway-caused impacts to birds, (2002) <https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/jacobsen2005highwaymeasures.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.; also see A V Kociolek et al, "effects of road networks on bird populations" *Conservation Biology* (February 2011); and see US Environmental Protection Agency *Evaluation of Ecological Impacts From Highway Development*

roads on birds include habitat loss and fragmentation, vehicle-caused mortality, pollution, and poisoning. Nevertheless, indirect effects may exert a greater influence on bird populations. These effects include noise, artificial light, barriers to movement, and edges associated with roads. Moreover, indirect and direct effects may act synergistically to cause decreases in population density and species richness. Of the many effects of roads, it appears that road mortality and traffic noise may have the most substantial effects on birds relative to other effects and taxonomic groups.<sup>33</sup> The project also has the potential to cause cumulative effects when considered in relation to the transmission line which is proposed for the corridor.

The project would likely cause adverse effects to migratory birds. The project would traverse large areas of significant woodlands including important ravine corridors and protected areas (for example the Nashville Conservation Area). It does not appear that breeding bird or other terrestrial wildlife surveys have been completed. The preferred alternative impacts numerous evaluated wetlands, five along existing corridors that would be widened and eight along the new corridor. The project would traverse approximately 17 linear km of woodlots that are each over 40 hectares in size.<sup>34</sup> The area of Nashville Conservation Area which contains the Humber River Valley that would be traversed by the project includes two e-bird birding “hotspots” in proximity to the proposed corridor. Another birding hotspot is located at the proposed 413/400 highway interchange. At these birding hotspots, e-bird reports contain approximately 100 species of migratory birds.<sup>35</sup> Wildlife surveys have been requested from the proponent, however the proponent has not produced any wildlife surveys for the preferred route. As noted elsewhere in this submission, the province proposes to exempt the proponent from completing the environmental assessment before commencing work that would adversely affect migratory birds. No beneficial management practices have been incorporated into the project and no mitigation measures have been proposed to address potential significant adverse effects on migratory birds.

### Species at Risk

A complete list of species at risk in the project area is not available from the proponent. It appears that no terrestrial or aquatic wildlife surveys are available.<sup>36</sup> No known mitigation measures have been proposed for fish or fish habitat, species at risk or migratory birds.

However, TRCA predicts that over 110 occurrences (representing 10 different species) of federal and/or provincial species at risk have been found in the study area: these species are found in a variety of habitat types including meadow (e.g., Bobolink), forest (e.g., Eastern Wood-Pewee, Butternut), wetland (e.g., Snapping Turtle) and within specific watercourses.<sup>37</sup> The project would impact 35 different fauna species of local concern (with approximately 240 separate occurrences) have been found inhabiting the project study area.<sup>38</sup>

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(April 1994) [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-08/documents/ecological-impacts-highway-development-pg\\_0.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-08/documents/ecological-impacts-highway-development-pg_0.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Kociolek et al, Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> AECOM alternatives assessment, p.54.

<sup>35</sup> E-Bird hotspot listing, Nashville Conservation Reserve, Vaughan-Huntington Road Bridge, Highway 400 storm water ponds.

<sup>36</sup> These were requested from the proponent but not provided.

<sup>37</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, pp.7-9

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.7-9

In the three birding hotspots on e-bird that would be destroyed by the proposed route, there are numerous migratory birds that are also species at risk including Chimney Swift, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Loggerhead Shrike, Wood Thrush and Grasshopper Sparrow. No terrestrial wildlife surveys have been prepared for the location and no mitigation measures have been proposed for the protection of these species.

There are aquatic species at risk (Redside Dace) at 31 different watercourse crossings along the existing highway corridor and the new corridor section has aquatic species at risk along approximately 24-31 water crossings.<sup>39</sup> According to the proponent's documentation Middle Sixteen Mile Creek within the new corridor may potentially support several species at risk (Bridle Shiner, Deepwater Sculpin). As well as recently species such as American Eel and Western Chorus Frog, Atlantic Salmon and Lake Sturgeon with recent COSEWIC assessments.<sup>40</sup> Nashville Conservation Area is also reportedly home to Eastern Milksnake (SARA Special Concern).<sup>41</sup>

There has not been a public assessment of the potential impacts on species at risk (either aquatic or terrestrial) along the preferred route. Given the proposed exemption, this will likely not be required prior to construction. There are no proposed mitigation measures and there may not be any prior to construction.

The project threatens to extirpate Redside Dace, a species listed as endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. The project impacts stream crossings and adds impervious surfaces in some of the last remaining potential Redside Dace habitat in the northern reaches of the Greater Toronto Area, the region where most Canadian Redside Dace habitat is located. Redside Dace is found primarily in heavily populated regions of Ontario. The provincial Recovery strategy for the Redside Dace identifies headwaters such as those found extensively in the GTA West project area as essential for survival and recovery.<sup>42</sup> It identifies urban development as the primary cause of habitat loss and population decline.<sup>43</sup> In particular, the cumulative effects of development adjacent to the highway along with the highway itself could destroy what few healthy Redside Dace populations remain.

The integrity of headwater areas upstream of reaches currently occupied by Redside Dace is also extremely important. Headwater streams, groundwater discharge areas and wetlands play an important physical role in augmenting and maintaining baseflows, coarse sediment supply and surface water quality, and the protection of headwater systems should be given a high priority in freshwater conservation efforts (Saunders et al. 2002). It is recommended that headwater streams, groundwater discharge areas and wetlands that physically support the reaches occupied by Redside Dace also be regulated as habitat of the species.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> AECOM alternatives assessment, p.53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>41</sup> Inaturalist reptile and amphibian atlas: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/50445025>.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Redside Dace Recovery Strategy (2010) <https://www.ontario.ca/page/redside-dace-recovery-strategy>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



The provincial Redside Dace recovery strategy recommended that all upstream headwaters (natural heritage features and supporting functions) be protected.<sup>45</sup> There has been no assessment of the cumulative impacts of stormwater from the highway and associated infrastructure and development on the Redside Dace. The GTA West project is incompatible with the provincial Recovery Strategy recommendation to maintain impervious cover at less than 10% of a stream's catchment area.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, TRCA has indicated that 35 different fauna species of local concern (with approximately 240 separate occurrences) have been found inhabiting the proposed study area. 74 different flora species of local concern (with approximately 275 separate occurrences) have been found inhabiting the proposed study area.<sup>47</sup> Because we do not have access to TRCA's full assessment, it is not known how many of these may be listed federal species at risk.

The habitat impacts of the proposed project suggest that species at risk may be more broadly affected. Approximately 220 wetlands, many of which have never been evaluated, covering 130 ha, will be impacted. Approximately 680 ha of habitat representing 224 separate habitat patches (forest, wetland, meadows) will be directly removed or indirectly impacted. This includes 240 ha (representing 40 separate habitat patches) of high-quality habitat (based on TRCA's landscape analysis model assessing size, shape and surrounding land use) and over 300 ha (representing 206 separate habitat patches) of habitat deemed highly vulnerable to impacts of climate change.<sup>48</sup>

### **Lack of need and alternatives assessment**

The GTA West Highway stage 1 environmental assessment commenced under the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act* in 2008 and was completed in 2012 with the release of a Transportation Development Strategy. A notice of commencement for Phase 2 was released in February 2014.<sup>49</sup> In December 2015, the Ministry of Transportation temporarily suspended the EA due to public concerns. An independent panel, the 2017 GTA West Advisory Panel appointed by the Ministry of Transportation to peer review the environmental assessment documentation that was prepared to that date.<sup>50</sup>

The Advisory Panel recommended that the GTA West EA be discontinued and that the Ministry of Transportation look at transportation alternatives on a regional basis.<sup>51</sup> The Advisory Panel found that the EA's recommended alternatives did not conform to provincial policies for the optimization of existing infrastructure, protection of valuable lands, and encouragement of transit use and complete communities.

The Advisory Panel found that the EA also did not demonstrate that a new highway corridor which crosses protected agricultural lands, key natural heritage and hydrologic features was the only option to address regional transportation needs. The Advisory Panel found that other alternative actions were capable of providing benefits equivalent or greater than a new highway

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, executive summary.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report.

<sup>48</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, pp.7-9

<sup>49</sup> Ontario Government, Notice of commencement – GTA West Transportation corridor Route Phase 2 Study.

<sup>50</sup> GTA West Advisory Panel Report (May 29, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> GTA West Advisory Panel Report (May 29, 2017).

including congestion pricing, better use of existing highway infrastructure and growth management.<sup>52</sup> More specifically, the Advisory Panel concluded that “In the Panel’s view, the GTAW EA considered but did not apply the complete policy test requiring demonstration of need and no reasonable alternative/alternative location in order to cross key natural heritage and key hydrological features (Greenbelt Plan 2005) and in order to exclude prime agricultural areas from long-term agricultural use (Provincial Policy Statement 2005).”<sup>53</sup> The Advisory Panel Report also criticized the EA for using an inconsistent and unclear approach to the evaluation of need, which it conflated with opportunity and that the EA failed to evaluate the do nothing alternative.<sup>54</sup>

The Panel also found that the EA reached different conclusions in different sections about the same topics and did not follow a clear logic.<sup>55</sup> The report 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). With the advent of COVID-19 and increases in people working from home, the need to re-evaluate proceeding with large highway expansions that was originally identified by the Advisory Panel is only increased.

These critiques have not been addressed. In June 2019, the GTA West EA was recommenced and proceeded to identify a preferred route for a new highway corridor relying on the prior analysis that the Advisory Panel was critiquing. A preferred route was identified in August 2020. The Provincial assessment is not yet complete.

## Climate Change

The potential greenhouse gas emissions associated with the project may hinder the Government of Canada’s ability to meet its commitments in respect of climate change, including in the context of Canada’s 2030 emissions targets and forecasts.

Under the Paris Agreement, Canada committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emission by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. This requires a reduction in emissions of 142 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e. Current projections rely on a reduction of transportation emissions. For example, to meet the Paris Agreement targets, Ontario must reduce transportation emissions by 26 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e by 2030 and by 63 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e by 2050.<sup>56</sup>

The environmental review of the project to date has not considered the potential for the project to cause significant increases in greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>57</sup> Climate change was not a factor in the identification of preferred alternatives, although the assessment of alternatives noted that the

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<sup>52</sup> GTA West Corridor Advisory Panel Report (2017).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 5, “policy context”.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2018 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report, p.116 [ECO 2018] <http://docs.assets.eco.on.ca/reports/climate-change/2018/Climate-Action-in-Ontario.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> GTA West April 2020 Meeting Minutes, <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/02-GTAG-Meeting-Minutes-November-14-2019.pdf>, p.4.

chosen alternative resulted in higher vehicle kilometres travelled.<sup>58</sup> The 2017 Advisory Panel Report found that the proposed highway would not have a significant impact on reducing congestion and would only save drivers 30-60 seconds per trip.<sup>59</sup>

Transportation emissions are the largest greenhouse gas emissions sector in Ontario and the fastest growing source of greenhouse gases in Ontario. Ontario is the second-largest greenhouse Gas emitter jurisdiction in the country.<sup>60</sup> From 1990 to 2018, greenhouse gas emissions from transportation grew from 40.8 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub>e to 57.4 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub>e.<sup>61</sup> Much of this was fueled by increases in both passenger and freight transportation.<sup>62</sup> Transportation accounts for approximately 33% of all emissions in the GTA. York and Halton Regions, through which the proposed highway would pass, have the highest proportion of their emissions from transportation at 47% each.<sup>63</sup> Nearly 98% of all transportation emissions in Ontario were sourced to fossil fuel use in vehicles.<sup>64</sup>

GHG emissions can be roughly estimated by multiplying additional vehicle kilometres travelled by an average emissions factor per vehicle.<sup>65</sup> The increase in vehicle kilometres travelled can be estimated using the “fundamental law of road congestion”.<sup>66</sup> Vehicle kilometres travelled is known to increase “in exact proportion to” percent increase in additional lane kilometres on highways.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, building roads “elicits a large increase in vehicle kilometres travelled,”<sup>68</sup> in addition to generating significant construction-related greenhouse gas emissions.

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<sup>58</sup> AECOM Alternatives assessment.

<sup>59</sup> GTA West Advisory Panel Report (May 29, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> ECO 2018, p.83.

<sup>61</sup> Government of Canada, National Inventory Report 1990-2018: Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada, 2020, Table A-12, [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2020/eccc/En81-4-2018-3-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2020/eccc/En81-4-2018-3-eng.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Natural Resources Canada, Energy Use Statistics, Transportation Sector (Ontario) GHG Emissions by Transportation Mode.

<https://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/statistics/neud/dpa/showTable.cfm?type=CP&sector=tran&juris=on&rn=8&page=0>.

<sup>63</sup> Environmental Defence, Is building highway 413 the best option? (August 2020)

[https://d36rd3gki5z3d3.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/IsBuildingHighway413TheBestOption\\_Report\\_Final.pdf?x38078](https://d36rd3gki5z3d3.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/IsBuildingHighway413TheBestOption_Report_Final.pdf?x38078), p.6.

<sup>64</sup> ECO 2018, p.43. <https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/reporttopics/envreports/env18/Climate-Action-in-Ontario.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> National Academies of Science “Modelling on-road transport greenhouse gas emissions under various land use scenarios, <https://trid.trb.org/view/1393792>; According to the EPA the average passenger vehicle emits approximately 0.25 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per 1 km see US EPA “Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle” <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle>

<sup>66</sup> G. Duranton and M. Turner, University of Toronto, Department of Economics, Working paper 370 “The fundamental law of road congestion: Evidence from US cities” (September 8, 2009). <https://www.economics.utoronto.ca/workingPapers/tecipa-370.pdf>; S. Handy and M. Boarnet (Sept 30, 2014) Impact of Highway Capacity and Induced Travel on Passenger Vehicle Use and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Policy Brief. [https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Impact\\_of\\_Highway\\_Capacity\\_and\\_Induced\\_Travel\\_on\\_Passenger\\_Vehicle\\_Use\\_and\\_Greenhouse\\_Gas\\_Emissions\\_Policy\\_Brief.pdf](https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Impact_of_Highway_Capacity_and_Induced_Travel_on_Passenger_Vehicle_Use_and_Greenhouse_Gas_Emissions_Policy_Brief.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



In the assessment of alternatives, the chosen alternative represented higher estimated network-wide vehicle kilometres travelled than some of the other alternatives.<sup>69</sup> The assessment does not provide the total estimate of increase to vehicle kilometres travelled. However, it estimates that the capacity of each of the six lanes is 2,200 vehicles per hour, and a daily capacity for the total of the six lanes of 120,000 vehicles.<sup>70</sup> Based on the 52 km road length and an average passenger vehicle emission factor of 0.25kg/1km VKT,<sup>71</sup> this results in a potential greenhouse gas contribution of approximately 0.57Mt of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year. Over the lifetime of the highway, this could represent a significant increase in Ontario's GHG emissions. Understood in the context of rapidly ballooning transportation emissions in Ontario the proposal represents a long-term entrenched policy decision to continue allowing transportation emissions to increase by continuing to increase road capacity which in turn induces further demand.

Both the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario and the proponent's own 2017 independent Advisory Panel recommended road pricing as an alternative that was more consistent with provincial and federal climate goals.<sup>72</sup> The City of Brampton has also proposed a boulevard alternative that is not currently under consideration by the proponent that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Without a Federal EA it will not be known if the project is compatible with Canada's climate change commitments or what the impact of the project would be on the long-term ability of Canada to meet its climate targets.

## Air Quality and Health

Traffic related air pollution from highways entails contamination from a variety of air pollutants including nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter and volatile organic compounds. The health effects of these pollutants include asthma, allergies and reduced lung function as well as lung cancer and heart disease. Children are more sensitive to air pollution than people in other age groups, because children breathe in more air in relation to their body weight and less developed lungs.<sup>73</sup> Emerging evidence links air pollution to pre-term births and low birth weight,<sup>74</sup> cognitive impairment and other illnesses,<sup>75</sup> as well as increased vulnerability to COVID-19.<sup>76</sup> Canadian studies have documented that the induced demand and

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<sup>69</sup> AECOM, 2012 GTA West Transportation Demand Study Report p.62

[http://madgic.library.carleton.ca/deposit/govt/ca\\_prov/on/on\\_mto\\_GTA\\_west\\_corridor\\_2012.pdf](http://madgic.library.carleton.ca/deposit/govt/ca_prov/on/on_mto_GTA_west_corridor_2012.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA-West-Travel-Demand-Backgrounder-v1-Chp-3-4-red.pdf>, pp.48-49.

<sup>71</sup> US EPA "Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle"

<https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle>

<sup>72</sup> ECO 2018 p.128; GTA West Advisory Panel Report (May 29, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> Health Canada, Road traffic air pollution <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/road-traffic-air-pollution.html>; Region of Peel, Effective Interventions to Mitigate Adverse Human Health Effects from Transportation-Related Air pollution (2015) <https://www.peelregion.ca/health/library/pdf/Rapid-Review-TRAP%20Mitigation.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Marie Lynn Miranda et al. "Proximity to roadways and pregnancy outcomes" *Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology* 23:32 (2013) <https://www.nature.com/articles/jes201278>

<sup>75</sup> Weiran Yuchi et al, "Road Proximity, air pollution, noise, green space and neurologic disease incidence: a population-based cohort study" *Environmental Health*, 9:18 (2020) <https://ehjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12940-020-0565-4>.

<sup>76</sup> Andrea Pozzer et al, "Regional and global contributions of air pollution to risk of death from COVID-19", *Cardiovascular Research*. doi:[10.1093/cvr/cvaa288](https://doi.org/10.1093/cvr/cvaa288)

higher vehicle densities from new highways result in increased nitrogen dioxide concentrations in close proximity to new highways and on arterials and access roads in the vicinity of a new highway.<sup>77</sup> A 2014 report estimated that traffic-related air pollution was responsible for approximately 700 premature deaths and over 2,800 annual hospitalizations due to heart and lung conditions in the GTHA each year with an annual economic impact of over \$4.6 billion.<sup>78</sup>

The Region of Peel has been experiencing an increasing number of smog days,<sup>79</sup> and Peel's numerous major highways and airport contribute to close to 200 estimated premature deaths every year – more than Halton, York, or Durham region.<sup>80</sup> Transportation is the most significant source of nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide emissions throughout Ontario.<sup>81</sup> Region of Peel staff have requested a health impact assessment of the GTA West project that would evaluate cardiovascular and respiratory health, cancers associated with traffic-related air pollution as well as other health issues.<sup>82</sup> Specifically, staff at the Region of Peel raised concerns that the air pollution impacts of the proposal were not clearly included in the streamlined EA process that was proposed by the Province, and asked for clarification that a traffic analysis and health impact assessment would be included.<sup>83</sup> Although the GTA West highway has been planned for many years, there is as of yet no analysis of potential health impacts. This is despite the location of the proposed highway adjacent to or even through significant planned residential areas, for example Heritage Heights in Brampton and Mayfield in Caledon, as well as areas in Bolton and Vaughan. The province has not made a clear commitment to addressing the health impacts of increases in vehicle kilometres travelled in terms of regional air quality nor has it committed to a health impact assessment on adjacent communities. The Ontario Public Health Association has raised concerns that traffic related air pollution causes 900 premature deaths annually in the greater Toronto area and that more information is needed about the potential health effects of the GTA West highway specifically, noting support for a health impact assessment.<sup>84</sup>

A preliminary estimate from modelling commissioned by Environmental Defence (but not yet released) calculated that, if the 2020 mix of vehicles does not change over the lifetime of the highway, the damage costs from air pollution could be approximately CAD\$8.8 billion, nominally. This modelling is expected to be released in full in April 2021.

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<sup>77</sup> Shohel Reza Amin et al, "Understanding Air pollution from Induced Traffic during and after the Construction of a New Highway: Case Study of Highway 25 in Montreal" *Journal of Advanced Transportation* (2017) <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/jat/2017/5161308/>

<sup>78</sup> Dr. David Mowat et al, *Improving Health by Design in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area - A Report of Medical Officers of Health in the GTHA*. 2nd Edition, May 2014, <https://www.peelregion.ca/health/resources/healthbydesign/pdf/moh-report.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Region of Peel, Air Quality Discussion Paper <https://www.peelregion.ca/health/library/pdf/Rapid-Review-TRAP%20Mitigation.pdf> p.5.

<sup>80</sup> Environmental Defence & the Ontario Public Health Association, June 2020, "Clearing the Air: Stakeholder Report," (p.18), <https://clearingtheair.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Clearing-The-Air-Stakeholder-Report.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

<sup>82</sup> Region of Peel (undated) staff concerns on preferred route. <https://pub-peelregion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=6311>

<sup>83</sup> Region of Peel (Aug 21, 2020) Comments on Proposed regulation for streamlined environmental assessment

<sup>84</sup> Ontario Public Health Association, (Aug 22, 2020) comments on proposed streamlined EA for GTA West <https://opha.on.ca/getattachment/813cbc13-cd03-4688-a405-3973f00bf6be/ERO-019-1882-OPHA-Submission-GTA-West-Transportation-Project-Aug-22-2020.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf> p.2

## First Nation Consultation

Based on a TRCA analysis there is high potential for both Indigenous and Euro-Canadian archaeological sites and artifacts specifically in the Nashville Conservation Area, and potentially in other TRCA-owned lands.<sup>85</sup> The highway corridor traverses the Gunshot Treaty, Williams Treaties and Toronto Purchase specific claim. The area is historically home to a number of First Nations including Huron-Wendat, Mississauga, Chippewa, Six Nations and Haudenosaunee territory. At this time it is not known how the project may impact First Nations harvesting and Treaty rights or cultural claims.<sup>86</sup>

The Chiefs of Ontario and several individual First Nations and First Nations coalitions have publicly opposed Ontario's efforts to weaken provincial environmental assessments. These changes include Ontario's proposed exemptions for the GTA West Highway.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

In the absence of a Federal EA there will be inadequate assessment of water crossings and their impact on both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife including fisheries, migratory birds and species at risk. Such works may commence under the provincial regulatory system before proper surveys or mitigation are conducted related to impacts on these features. The same issue will arise if other elements of the project are exempted as "early works" as the scope of potential early works that would proceed without further assessment of environmental effects has not yet been defined.

In the absence of a Federal EA the need and alternatives defects in the EA identified by the proponent's 2017 Advisory Panel will not be addressed – particularly alternatives that would lower greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the need for land use change in protected areas.

In the absence of a Federal EA there will be no assessment of the cumulative effects of the project through any provincial or federal regulatory process.

In the absence of a Federal EA there will be no assessment of the impact of the project on Canada's climate change commitments.

Because of the proposed exemption it appears that there would never be a final report on the environmental impacts of the project carried out by Ontario prior to construction of early works and that a final report may never be required to assess fish habitat, species at risk, and migratory bird impacts. Mitigation measures have not been proposed for federal effects.

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<sup>85</sup> TRCA Jan 2020 Report, p.12.

<sup>86</sup> AECOM, GTA West Environmental Existing Conditions Report (Jan 27, 2011) Chapters 4-6. [https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA\\_West\\_Env\\_Existing\\_Conditions\\_Report\\_Jan\\_27\\_11-Chp-4.pdf](https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA_West_Env_Existing_Conditions_Report_Jan_27_11-Chp-4.pdf) And [https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA\\_West\\_Env\\_Existing\\_Conditions\\_Report\\_Jan\\_27\\_11-Chp-5-6.pdf](https://www.gta-west.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GTA_West_Env_Existing_Conditions_Report_Jan_27_11-Chp-5-6.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> CBC News "Ontario using COVID-19 as a 'smokescreen' to trample treaty rights, chiefs say" (Sept 5, 2020) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/bill-197-first-nations-1.5712623>

There has been no detailed public assessment of the potential impacts on species at risk, fish or fish habitat or migratory birds for the project along the preferred route.

We ask that you designate the GTA West project for a federal EA pursuant to the Minister's power under s.9(1) of the *Impact Assessment Act*. We would be pleased to provide you with any information or materials that we have available to us at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LB' with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Laura Bowman  
Staff Lawyer

cc: client, supporters

encl. <https://ln2.sync.com/dl/43236dcc0/waiaqqh7-kgbbsyx6-ew2purax-2cpzaiye>



Impact Assessment  
Agency of Canada

Ontario Region  
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d'impact du Canada

Région de l'Ontario  
600-55 rue York  
Toronto ON M5J 1R7

February 12, 2021

**Sent by email**

**Invitation for Input**

Henrik Zbogar, City of Brampton  
Kant Chawla, Town of Caledon  
Mark Vandersluis, City of Mississauga  
Shirley Kam, City of Vaughan  
Bill Andrews, Halton Region  
Christopher Raynor, Regional Municipality of York  
Gary Kocialek, Region of Peel  
Maureen Van Ravens, Town of Halton Hills  
Peter Angelo, Township of King

Dear Colleagues:

**Subject: Designation Request for the Proposed GTA West Project under the  
*Impact Assessment Act***

On February 3, 2021, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change received a request to designate the proposed GTA West Project under subsection 9(1) of the *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA). The designation request from Ecojustice, on behalf of Environmental Defense, is enclosed (Enclosure 1).

**The Proposed Project**

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation is proposing the construction and operation, including maintenance, of a new 59-kilometre all-season public highway in the northwest Greater Toronto Area. The proposed new highway, which would be named Highway 413, would connect highway 400 between Kirby Road and King-Vaughan Road in the east, to the highway 401/407 interchange area, near the northern end of highway 403, in the west. The highway would stretch through the municipalities of Vaughan, Caledon, Brampton and Halton Hills in the regions of York, Peel and Halton. The Project as proposed is not a designated project as described in the *Physical Activities Regulations*. The impact assessment process under IAA only applies to designated projects.

Further information on the Project can be found on the proponent's website (<https://www.gta-west.com/>).

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### **Provincial Process**

The Government of Ontario is proposing to create a new streamlined process for assessing potential environmental impacts of the Project, as well as consulting on it. More information on this is available at: [ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882](http://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1882)

### **Designation Request**

Under subsection 9(1) of IAA the Minister may, by order, designate a physical activity that is not prescribed in the *Physical Activities Regulations*. The Minister may do this, if, in the Minister's opinion, the physical activity may cause adverse effects within federal jurisdiction or adverse direct or incidental effects (resulting from a federal decision), or public concerns related to those effects warrant the designation. In accordance with subsection 9(4) of IAA, it is expected that the Minister will respond, with reasons, to the request by May 4, 2021.

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada will review information about the Project, any concerns expressed by the public and Indigenous groups, expert advice from federal authorities and input from provincial ministries and municipalities to prepare a recommendation to the Minister on whether to designate the Project. If the Project were designated by the Minister, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (the proponent) would be prohibited from carrying out the Project and would be required to submit an Initial Project Description, thereby commencing the planning phase of IAA. During the planning phase, the Agency would determine whether an impact assessment is required.

Additional information regarding the process for designation requests can be found at the following link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/services/policy-guidance/designating-project-impact-assessment-act.html>

### **Invitation for Input**

The Agency notes that the project assessment process by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation has included consultation with your municipality. However, to support the Agency's analysis of the designation request, we wish to invite the views and input from representatives of your municipality.

In particular, the Agency would like to confirm whether any bylaws or requirements of your municipality apply to the Project.

- If applicable, would any of those involve consultation with the public and Indigenous groups?
- If applicable, what environmental, social, economic or health issues would those bylaws or requirements address?

In general, please confirm whether the Ontario Ministry of Transportation is addressing the interests and issues of importance to your municipality. The Agency will be pleased to receive any other comments. Given the legislated timeline for the Minister to make a decision, your response is requested by **Wednesday, March 3, 2021**.

In the coming days, a Registry page for the Project will be available on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry Internet site at [iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/evaluations](https://www.iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/evaluations). Please use the *Submit a Comment* feature on the Project's Registry page to provide the Agency with information regarding this file. Letters can be uploaded using this feature. If you have difficulties using this feature, please immediately contact Owais Khurshid, Project Manager, at [owais.khurshid@canada.ca](mailto:owais.khurshid@canada.ca) or 647-262-8046.

**Important Note:**

All records produced, collected or received in relation to the designation request process – unless prohibited under the *Access to Information Act* or *Privacy Act*<sup>1</sup> – are considered public and may be released. The Agency's Submission Policy determines which submitted information can be shared publicly, and what should remain private. For further information on how we protect your privacy, please refer to the Privacy Notice<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/evaluations/participation/condition>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/evaluations/protection>

If you have any questions regarding the designation process or the response sheet, please do not hesitate to contact Owais Khurshid by telephone or email.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AP' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Anjala Puvananathan  
Director, Ontario Region

Enclosure      Designation request letter from Ecojustice on behalf of  
Environmental Defence

c.c.              Steve Mota, Regional Municipality of York  
Richa Dave, Region of Peel  
Ann Larkin, Halton Region