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Infrastructure

Ontario attaching too many conditions to York-Durham sewer construction, association says

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New provincial conditions attached to the approval of the Southeast Collector Trunk Sewer for the York-Durham Sewage System could create unnecessary delays, say some industry stakeholders.

“We are happy that things are moving forward but we are concerned that too many conditions were implemented, considering a full EA (environmental assessment) has been completed,” said Joseph Accardi, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association. “We are worried about the fact that York Region has a set of requirements they need now but what does that mean 10 years down the line?”

The Ministry of the Environment stated that new “strict conditions” will ensure that sewer systems built and operated in the area will protect “human health and the environment.”

The York and Durham regions will be required to monitor and report every year to show the project is meeting all conditions of approval. They include:

- monitoring for potential impacts on ground and surface water as well as air quality during construction and operation of the sewer
- implementing and reporting on measures to conserve and use water efficiently and to reduce inflow and infiltration of water into the sewer
- implementing and reporting on odour control measures including a protocol for dealing with odour complaints
- setting up an advisory committee to review and give advice on required monitoring and reporting plans

The existing Southeast Collector Trunk Sewer is 30 years old and operating close to maximum capacity. The proposed new sewer will run approximately 15 kilometres from Markham to Pickering. Accardi noted that there were experienced licensed professional engineers, environmentalists and hydrologists who worked many years to create the proposed new system’s EA.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, thinks the new conditions imposed on the trunk sewer project could result in project delays.

Some officials, close to the regions, remain uncertain of the full implications the new conditions will have when projects go out to tender and when contracts will be awarded to the construction sector.

“Considering that a full EA has been undertaken, we are into somewhat new territory here with the number of conditions being imposed and the requirement for a monitoring committee,” added Manahan.

Requirements in the approval conditions for York Region and local municipalities to work together are meant to reduce inflow and infiltration throughout the entire southeast collector, say stakeholders.

Accardi added that development plays a major role as it designs and constructs the majority of the sewers in the building out of new subdivisions.

“They play a key role in adopting improved design, construction and commissioning standards to ensure new communities achieve better performance beyond the new requirements,” he said. “Additionally, local municipalities and the region will be looking for opportunities to work in partnership with development and construction industry leaders to come up with innovative ways to reduce infiltration and inflow.”