

# Ford spotlights Highway 413 as top priority

Don Wall May 3, 2024

The Ontario government is emphatically signalling that the province's next major roadway, the six-lane, 52-kilometre Highway 413 northwest of Toronto, is right near the top of its list of project priorities.

On April 30 the Doug Ford-led government gathered construction stakeholders at a site in Caledon to discuss next steps leading to early works on the billion-dollar project as early as next year. The assembly took place 15 days after the announcement of an environmental assessment breakthrough with the federal government.

"Highway 413 will help meet the needs of our growing province as a prosperity corridor that will create thousands of good-paying union jobs during the construction phase and make life easier and more convenient for millions of drivers in the GTA and across Ontario," said Ford, standing with trade union leaders near a bulldozer.

"We're getting it done."

For a decade the project has been a lightning rod for opponents, citing sprawl and induced traffic, destruction of farmland and disruption of an endangered environment.

Soon after the Caledon presentation, Environmental Defence issued a statement urging the federal government to enact an updated Impact Assessment Act and to re-designate the highway for assessment under the new statute.

## **Contractors 'very, very careful'**

International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793 business manager Mike Gallagher was on hand for the Caledon presentation.

"I care about the environment," he said in an interview. "I live in the same world as everybody else...but we've been building for a long time and we are very, very careful and our contractors are very careful to ensure that we don't disturb the natural world any more than we have to. Then we put things back."

"Having said that, I do believe it's very important for the economy of the province of Ontario. As a society, if we want to be successful, we have to have the infrastructure to support that."

Highway 413 and an adjacent transitway 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, connecting the regions of York, Peel and Halton. The project includes a four-kilometre extension to Highway 410 and a three-kilometre extension to Highway 427 for a total of 59 kilometres.

Other features to be built include 11 interchanges at municipal roads, bridge infrastructure, stormwater management infrastructure, maintenance yards and carpool lots. The price tag has been variously estimated at over \$5 billion.

The government is currently undertaking fieldwork, including borehole drilling and engineering, to evaluate soil composition and bedrock depth. By mid-May, the province will be hosting a market sounding event to discuss procurement and project acceleration strategies.

“Our understanding is that a procurement model for this project has not been finalized,” said Stephen Crombie, senior director of public affairs for the Ontario Road Builders’ Association. “ORBA is very much going to be at the table during that consultation.”

### **ORBA members’ ‘wealth of experience’**

Crombie said ORBA members are being encouraged to become engaged early in the process.

“Sometimes our members bring such a wealth of experience that...can actually save owners a tremendous amount of money on projects,” he said.

The government will be meeting with property owners to acquire land and following the enactment of the Get it Done Act it will begin expediting land acquisitions this fall. The province is planning for the release of the first early works construction contracts to begin construction in 2025, subject to approvals.

The status of a potential federal environment assessment is unclear following an announcement April 30 by federal Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland that changes to the Impact Assessment Act would be included in the Budget Implementation Act; the revisions are intended to ensure constitutional conformity.

On April 15, a Memorandum of Understanding had been announced between the governments of Ontario and Canada, with the parties committed to “working together to protect the environment and give Ontario greater regulatory certainty to advance Highway 413.

“Through the agreement announced today, both Ontario and Canada have agreed to a collaborative process to assess and manage the issues around federal species at risk throughout Ontario’s planning of the project,” a release stated.

Environmental Defence executive director Tim Gray said he expects federal Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault to quickly re-designate Highway 413 for federal

impact assessment under an updated Impact Assessment Act, despite the government's commitments of April 15.

"Nowhere in the MOU does it say, we'll never do another impact assessment or that we're going to give you a pass on all these federal responsibilities," said Gray.

An inquiry to the federal environment ministry on the matter was referred to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. No response was immediately issued.

### **Addressing gridlock**

In essence, Gray claimed, the 413 project is about extending low density or estate residential development to benefit developers who are "very close to this government.

"If we actually wanted to address gridlock on highways, then the government could very quickly move the trucks off the 401 and put them on the 407, it could happen tomorrow morning. It would save us all billions of dollars over building a destructive highway."

Others issuing statements of support for the highway included Nadia Todorova of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, Raly Chakarova of the Toronto and Area Road Builders Association, Walid Abou-Hamde of ORBA, Stephen Laskowski of the Ontario Trucking Association, Neil MacDonald of the Ironworkers Union and Joseph Mancinelli and Jack Oliveira of LIUNA.

A poll conducted by the RCCAO found two-thirds of respondents support Highway 413.

"The GTA is one of the fastest growing regions in North America," said Todorova. "We really need to be continuing to build the appropriate infrastructure to address that growth and Highway 413 is a big piece of that."

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