

# MTO still looking only to Major Mack for 427 extension, But Peel wants them to look north to Highway 9

By Bill Rea

Ministry of Transportation (MTO) staff recently announced they were suggesting the current study for the proposed extension of Highway 427 should end at Major Mackenzie Drive.

Caledon councillors were presented with this information last month, and Peel Regional councillors received basically the same presentation last week.

But the Regional councillors want to see something of a more long-term nature considered soon, such as all the way north to Highway 9.

Councillors, sitting in committee last Thursday, passed motions to that effect, but those resolutions still have to be ratified by council, and that's slated to take place today (Thursday).

One of the motions, moved by Brampton Mayor Susan Fennell and seconded by Mayor Marolyn Morrison of Caledon, pointed out the study of the 427 transportation corridor is closely linked other studies, namely the MTO's GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment (EA) Study; the Joint Peel Municipal Study; and York Region's Western Vaughan EA Study. Councillors agreed it's important to develop the highway 427 long-term plan beyond Major Mackenzie and called on the province to get to work on planning for this

northern extension immediately.

Councillors also called on the province to move on designating a corridor for the GTA West Economic Study.

Dean Kemper, senior project engineer with MTO, outlined the context of the study being conducted, pointing out it was focused on areas from Highway 7 north, limited by the provincial Greenbelt. He added the object of the exercise is to improve truck access to the Canadian Pacific Intermodal Terminal on the east side of Highway 50, between Major Mackenzie and Rutherford Road, as well ease traffic problems along Highways 50, 27 and 7. He also said this will allow proposed developments to proceed in the western portion of Vaughan. As well, Kemper said they are trying to avoid predetermining future corridors.

Kemper told councillors the environmental assessment process is about two-thirds complete, with more engineering and field work being required. There are two public information sessions planned for later this month. One of the centres will be in Bolton, May 15 at Caesar's Events Centre at 12495 Highway 50, from 4 until 8 p.m. The other will be May 13 at Le Jardin Events Centre, at 8440 Highway 27 in Vaughan.

He said they will be back before the public, probably early in 2009 with finalized documents being forwarded to the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and the federal authorities around that time. He thought it would take the other two levels of government about a year to go through all the material, so approvals for the work likely won't be granted until sometime in 2010.

Michael Chiu, a consultant with McCormick Rankin Corporation, told councillors public reaction to the study has been positive, according to the feedback received from previous sessions. He added that input has resulted in some changes to the proposal. For example, he said there were calls for a western option that had not been previously included when looking at proposed routes, and that has since been added.

He repeated the point that Major Mackenzie is still considered the preferred terminus of the study, since it accomplished all the study set out to do. "We don't gain a whole lot more" extending things to Mayfield Road, he added, pointing out it could do too much to predetermine future corridors.

There were nine potential routes mapped out, divided into east, central and west alternatives. One of the central routes is favoured. A creek and associated protected green area runs through the site, and Chiu said the the proposed route crossed that creek at a right angle, thus reducing the environmental impacts. An eastern alternative would mean the Rutherford interchange would have to

go in the protected area, while a western choice would result in a long stretch of road running right next to the creek.

Caledon Councillor Richard Whitehead repeated his concerns that people at the upcoming public information centres are clearly told about the implications for the Bolton Arterial Road (BAR) network, "informally called the Bolton bypass," as the western component (Coleraine Drive) meets Highway 50 at the end of Major Mackenzie.

"We're terminating at Major Mackenzie Drive," Kemper told him. "We're not terminating at the BAR."

Whitehead countered people are going to raise this issue at the information centres, adding it could be used as a reference point, since the BAR is already approved.

Morrison said she had been at a meeting in Vaughan the previous week, where there had been calls to shift the proposed alignment to the west, to avoid interfering with plans already in place for the City. Kemper told her there is room to shift it a bit, although there will be some environmental concerns associated with that they have to be aware of.

He added a similar presentation had been made to York Regional councillors the day before, and there was a commitment made to "take a look as a westerly shift to some degree."

Morrison commented on the desire to protect lands for an economic corridor in the western portion of the GTA, hoping the province was thinking along those line too. She added the Town is working on needs

studies for employment lands, and wants the province to step up as a partner and provide information on future plans. She said if that doesn't happen, nothing will be protected and the result will be an "absolute nightmare."

Kemper agreed that's a challenge affecting all land-use planners, adding MTO staffers want to wait and see where the GTA studies go before moving north of Major Mackenzie with the extension.

Morrison was concerned that if the province doesn't step up in time, opportunities will be lost.

"I guess we all lose," Kemper replied. "If you make a decision that precludes something, then we're all losers."

Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri commented the sensible thing would have been for MTO to take the study north to Mayfield. He added he had understood the province's plan was to have the 427 eventually extended north to Highway 9, or possibly 89.

Kemper said a lot of work has been done since those days. Such an extension would have had to cross the Oak Ridges Moraine. He added the provincial Growth Plan has caused those ideas to be shelved. The work now is looking at a shorter extension with different objectives, pointing out the desire to go further north is not as strong as it was a couple of years ago.

Sprovieri wondered what kind of process could get the study extended to Mayfield, but Kemper said the current goal is to get through the EA process. "The story of further, I think, is for another day," he remarked.

Sprovieri observed this

will have implications for development plans in Brampton. Stopping at Major Mackenzie will mean lands will be frozen because there will be questions about where future alignments are to go. Meanwhile, Vaughan will be able to go ahead with its industrial commercial planning. "Our City's planning is completely thrown off," he charged.

Kemper told him they are trying to get a corridor established so development can proceed. But he added there are limits on what can be done. They can't plan a highway to Barrie, he observed, pointing out that would take decades.

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion commented she had heard no mention in the discussion of Metrolinks, the body the province set up to deal with transportation issues in the GTA. She wanted to get them involved.

She also stressed the need to have the corridors so municipalities can get on with their planning.

Fennell observed there have been discussions about the 427 extension for about 20 years, as she stressed the need to plan beyond the current terminus. Long-term thinking in transportation planning is essential, she commented, reminding her colleagues that Highway 410 had to be connected to Highway 410 while growth was going in.

"When you do things after the fact, you don't do them properly," she observed. "Phasing roads is just the worst way to do things."

Kemper said he agreed, but he was limited in what he could do.

"I'm just a soldier," he said. "It's the general we need to get to."

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