

Environmental assessment on Escarpment highway plans won't be released until 1st Q of 2013. Minister doesn't like what he has.

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By Pepper Parr

BURLINGTON, ON October 25, 2012 Turns out the Minister of Transportation doesn't like the idea of a highway through the Escarpment either but he isn't sure what the next step should be.

He has the document on his desk – he doesn't like what's in it but he isn't going to release the document until sometime in the first quarter of 2013. Given that the government isn't sitting right now – there isn't much anyone can say to the Minister in the Legislature.

The Liberal Party will have a new leader at the end of January and our Escarpment isn't going to be at the top of that leaders agenda unless the Burlington provincial Liberal Association makes a big stink during the leadership race.



Regional chair Gary Carr on the left with Mayor Rick Goldring of Burlington beside him – drove to Queen’s Park Thursday morning and heard the Minister of Transportation say he was not happy with the recommendations coming from some of his staff. However, the public will not get to see just what those recommendations are until sometime early in 2013.

All we can do now is wait it out – knowing that they won’t be doing all that much until there is a decision by the Minister who will take it to Cabinet and they will decide. We are looking at some time in the fall of 2013 – by which time the pier will be open – or so they say.

Burlington Mayor Rick Goldring and Regional Chair Gary Carr met with Bob Chiarelli this morning and spent 40 minutes reviewing the recommendations. The Minister is not happy and he looks to the Region and the city of Burlington for some input, comment and feedback – and he apparently doesn’t want to hear more “we don’t want the highway here” – he wants to hear what people think about just how we are going to handle all the traffic that is going to be generated with the population growth the province faces.

Mayor Goldring felt Chiarelli was upset with what he had before him and had apparently engaged in a vigorous debate with the engineers and planners who prepared the document.



Minister of Transportation Bob Chiarelli doesn't want a highway busting across the Escarpment and is said to be unhappy with the recommendations his planners and engineers have given him. That's good news – but we need better news.

“He (Chiarelli) is basically a very decent guy and he doesn't want to see a highway going through the Escarpment nor through part of the Green Belt either – but he doesn't have any solutions at this point.” And so he wants feed back.

The Stop Escarpment Highway Coalition (SEHC) know what they want and that is an end to the Phase 2 part of the study. Goldring was not able to say if the Minister was prepared to say that there would not be a Phase 2 section to the current Environmental Assessment. All he appeared to want to say was that he wasn't happy with the recommendations he was getting.

So the demonstrations and the protests are working.

Geoff Brock, SEHC spokesperson has concerns with the mandate the EA people were given in the first place. “They are highway people, they build roads – it was unrealistic to expect them to even suggest transit.

Brock points out that the transit portion of the traffic along the routes being discussed is now 6% and they see that possibly going to 12%. Brock wants them to determine what I would take to get that number up to 20% or higher.

Brock feels the transit people need to get away from the “hub and spoke” system we have now where everything goes to Union Station.

The solution of course is the electrification of the Lakeshore West GO line. By electrifying the service we would see a train every five minutes. Metrolinx has a plan to electrify the line – it will cost \$10 billion and the funding hasn't been made available to them.



These 600 people did not want a highway through the Escarpment – and the Minister of Transportation just might be hearing what we have to say.

As for ideas coming from the public, Brock thinks the idea not to go forward is the best one the public has and they've done a very good job of getting that message across.

“It would help too” comments Brock “if the terms of reference for the EA were changed to include a serious look at rail”.

Pete Zuzek, SEHC spokesperson, said at the community meeting on Tuesday that this situation needed an independent peer level review. SEHC might offer to do just that for the Ministry – put forward a proposal for some funding and see where that gets them. If the Minister wants outside opinions – help finance them. SEHC would do a much deeper, more comprehensive report – and for a lot less than the province would.