

Possibility of a new highway concerns city residents

Kim Arnott, SPECIAL TO BURLINGTON POST | Jul 02, 2010 - 3:12 PM

**“People are concerned about the environment, they’re concerned about the potential for the expansion of the city’s urban boundary and they’re concerned that our rural way of life will be threatened by this highway.”
- Councillor John Taylor**

It's not always easy to attract people to public meetings — especially ones scheduled for sunny evenings in June.

However, Burlington councillor John Taylor says he wasn't surprised to see more than 70 people show up at a meeting on Tuesday night, despite the fact they were there to hear about plans for a possible highway that won't likely be built for 25 years.

Held at the Brant Hills Community Centre, the meeting outlined the details of a provincial transportation analysis that concluded Ontario should eventually build a new highway to link Hwy. 403 with Hwy. 407.

While the analysis doesn't identify any specific highway routes, it outlines a corridor running roughly between Hwy. 403 near Hwy. 6 in Ancaster, through Flamborough and north Burlington, to link up with Hwy. 407 in the area of Walker's Line.

“People are concerned about the environment, they’re concerned about the potential for the expansion of the city’s urban boundary and they’re concerned that our rural way of life will be threatened by this highway,” said Taylor, who organized the Ward 3 public information meeting.

Taylor says he opposes any new highway crossing on the Niagara Escarpment because of the environmental impact, and noted the similarity of the new proposal to the proposed mid-peninsula highway that Burlington vehemently resisted about eight years ago.

In its analysis, the province concludes that significant growth in the Niagara-GTA area will create severe traffic congestion without expansion of existing roads and the creation of new highway corridors.

The plan calls for the province to begin by optimizing existing highway networks, and developing transit and non-road infrastructure, but suggests that construction is also required.

While limited details are currently available, the province is expected to release a full report for comment by September.

At Tuesday's meeting, city transportation staff outlined the details of the provincial study, then took comments from the public.

People expressed concern about the impact on the escarpment environment and rural farmland, skepticism about the connecting highway leading traffic to Hwy. 407, rather than the toll-free Hwy. 401, and doubt about the need for a new highway at all.

“What's going to happen to all that traffic flow at \$4 a litre?” asked one man. “The whole transportation premise is ill-founded.”

With obvious frustration, a woman wearing a Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE) T-shirt echoed his sentiments, noting, “We're talking about building a highway in 30 years when we have a climate crisis now.”

Mayor Cam Jackson expressed his doubts about the ability of the provincial plan to reduce traffic congestion on the QEW, suggesting that traffic crossing over from the American border simply won't be prepared to take the detour up the escarpment and then back down it, in order to get to Toronto.

Unlike the previous mid-peninsula plan, the current provincial report doesn't call for a new highway from the border through to the 403, but will funnel traffic onto expanded lanes on the QEW.

“This report makes no sense to me at all,” said Jackson.

City staff to report back

Burlington city staff is currently studying the province's analysis and will make an information report to the Community Services committee on July 14, as well as another one in September when a full report is released by province.

In the meantime, concerned residents are being encouraged to make their comments on the proposal to the city, which will then forward them along to the provincial government.

Additional information on the province's transportation proposal is available online at www.niagara-gta.com.