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Nov 19, 2010 - 2:10 PM

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**"It was bad enough when it was below No. 1 Side Road, but you can imagine if it is up to Britannia Road, we might as well kiss the rural area goodbye." - Councillor John Taylor**

Ward 3 Councillor John Taylor is hosting a public meeting next month about the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area corridor after the provincial government released a map showing a different proposed route for a new highway.

The provincial government, however, said that the map is conceptual as it has not been confirmed yet if a highway is even needed.

The Burlington stretch identified in a map produced by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing depicts a highway route stretching from approximately Tremaine Road near Highway 407, northwest to just above Britannia Road before continuing on along an unidentified route through Flamborough, ultimately connecting to Highway 403 in Ancaster.

Taylor said that previous proposals from the Ministry of Transportation suggested that the route would run more south, closer to No. 1 Side Road. This means the route could affect residents in areas like Lowville and Kilbride.

"Everyone in the north rural area has been under the impression that this was all below No. 1 Side Road and they were interested and concerned, but now it is in their backyard," Taylor said. "We are going to hold this meeting... because all of a sudden we've got a whole new group of people who've never heard of any route close to them in 10 years. We're going to inform them and get their responses so that staff can consider their response when they write their report."

The meeting is scheduled for Monday, Dec. 13 at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium in the Mainway Recreation Centre, 4015 Mainway. Invited guests include Burlington MPP Joyce Savoline and Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The map came from a Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing report sent to the Region of Halton on Oct. 27 regarding the region's Official Plan.

The author of the report, Larry Clay, told the Post that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing created the map in consultation with the Ministry of Transportation.

He stressed that it is conceptual only, reminding residents that nothing is set in stone.

"The arrow that folks are interested in is a conceptual arrow and we say that quite clearly on the map," said Clay, regional director with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "It is just conceptual right now and as MTO (Ministry of Transportation) continues on with their investigation and concludes their transportation study and gets any Environmental Assessment work done, the map will obviously be amended as we go forward and decisions will be made. It is designed to indicate in a very broad sense that the Official Plan needs to think about corridor protection in going forward."

The Ministry of Transportation has been conducting the first phase of an Environmental Assessment study for the Niagara to GTA corridor since 2007. A recommended transportation development strategy is due out in December, which will be followed by a 90-day review. The final document of phase one of the Environmental Assessment study will be released sometime in 2011.

Roger Ward, team leader of the Niagara to GTA study with the Ministry of Transportation, also echoed Clay's sentiment that the route outlined by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing was not concrete, especially since the need for the highway has not yet been confirmed.

"Right now, it is very conceptual — through this EA (Environmental Assessment) process, first off, we're determining the need and justification for a corridor and the next phases will look at the actual route alignment," Ward said. "Anything that is shown, even on our website for the Niagara to GTA study, we're showing a very wide band for the next phase of study, where they will determine the study area."

Taylor said he is very concerned about preserving north Burlington's rural character and the Niagara Escarpment.

"As far as I'm concerned, a new crossing of the Niagara Escarpment is environmentally undesirable, but it gives a new build-to line for the city of Burlington," he said. "It was bad enough when it was below No. 1 Side Road, but you can imagine if it is up to Britannia Road, we might as well kiss the rural area goodbye."

Aline Tso, a member of Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment (COPE) told the Post that while she hadn't heard about the new 'conceptual' route, the bigger issue is the highway itself.

"All of this road-building is going to cut into and damage ecosystems," she said. "In some ways, wherever the road is, that is not really the point. It is still going to have the same effect."

A spokesperson for Protecting Escarpment Rural Land (PERL) agreed.

"PERL is strongly against a highway cutting through the Niagara Escarpment and destroying our agricultural land and natural heritage systems and all that goes with this beautiful countryside," said Isabelle Harmer of PERL. "The Ministry of Transportation and all of the other agencies need to focus on transit, on railways and not on roads. We don't need any more major highways crossing the Escarpment; we don't need any more major highways anywhere."