

September 14, 2024

Health Not Highways

Dear Premier Ford and Honourable Member of Provincial Parliament Gallagher-Murphy,

This letter addresses the ill-advised allocation of Ontario's budget and taxpayer dollars towards the Highway 413 and Bradford Bypass projects. At a time of rising costs for taxpayers, it's crucial that government projects are grounded in science-based solutions and are economically sound, benefiting all Ontarians.

Investing in these highways, which will cost between \$6-14 billion, is a misallocation of resources. Instead, Ontario should focus on reducing emissions and enhancing healthcare.

Ontario has the lowest hospital bed rate in Canada at 2.33 per 1,000 people, compared to the national average of 3.2, and spends only 9.17% of its GDP on healthcare, below the national average of 10.51% and Nova Scotia's at over 12%. The money this government plans to spend on highways through the Greenbelt and precious farmland would be better spent hiring thousands of nurses and building new hospitals. As examples, the cost of Highway 413 alone could potentially fund 20,000 nurses for over four years. For \$1.15 billion, Ontario could hire 11,000 registered nurses, and for \$650 million, 9,000 registered practical nurses.

Additionally, Ontario could build 11 more hospitals for the cost of these highways, given one hospital in Brampton is costing around \$700 million and now Whitby for \$2.7 billion.

On its own, the proposed highway 413 would contribute over 17.4 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with even the best-case scenario resulting in nearly 13 million tonnes. Environmental Defence research estimates \$1.4 billion in damages from pollution and health issues. Transportation is a major source of nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide, and Ontario, the second-highest emitter of air pollutants after Alberta, would see worsened emissions with new highways. This increases the risk of life-threatening health issues, especially for children, for those caught in the highways' trap zones as well as undermines Canada's progress in meeting international obligations on air quality and climate emissions reductions targets.

Instead of pouring billions into highways that exacerbate environmental and health crises, Ontario must redirect its resources to build a healthier, more sustainable future - prioritizing healthcare and emission reduction over destructive infrastructure that ultimately undermines the well-being of all Ontarians and future generations.

Sincerely,