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May 29, 2023

Hon. Ted Arnott and Hon. Matthew Rae,

The Township of Puslinch Council reviewed in depth, the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Report titled “Value for Money Audit - Highway Planning and Management” and respectfully request that the government and Ministry of Transportation return to an evidence-based infrastructure funding decision making model for major highway projects.

The Township of Puslinch Council encourages serious consideration for the construction of the Morriston Bypass which has a ranking of “high” priority on the Expansion Prioritization Framework (EPF). The Morriston Bypass has an EPF Score of 650, while 7 of the government priority projects have an average score of 468.

Importance of the Morriston Bypass to Transportation Planning in the Southwest and Greater Golden Horseshoe:

In the mid-1990s the Province of Ontario started to study the feasibility of expanding the Highway 6 corridor, including a Bypass around the community of Morriston in the Township of Puslinch. Since this time, the economic impact of this busy route to the cities of southern Ontario and the growing Port of Huron has ballooned. Over 50% of the soybeans and 70% of the wheat grown in Ontario is shipped via truck over the Highway 6 corridor to the Port of Huron for export to over 50 countries globally. Nearly 50% of the fertilizer utilized by Ontario farmers is offloaded at the Port of Huron and trucked to farmers throughout southwestern Ontario. Agricultural commodities account for nearly 30% of the total volume of shipments within the Port of Huron on an annual basis and are the fastest growing segment of the Port. The Port and associated trucking corridors are anticipated to become increasingly busy in the future. Not only is the Port itself planning for growth, the anticipated population growth in the



southwest and Greater Golden Horseshoe will inevitably increase traffic volume and the mixing large trucks and cars on the Highway 6 corridor.

The pressure on the area serviced by the anticipated Morriston Bypass will exponentially grow. Any delays due to safety or congestion have an enormous impact on business operations, profitability and public safety. This concern was anticipated in the Ministry's development of Transportation Plans throughout the province. In fact, the draft 2020 Southwestern Ontario Transportation Plan specifically references the Highway 6 corridor and the need to construct a bypass around the community of Morriston. Likewise, in the 2022 Transportation Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe the Morriston Bypass project is mentioned as a means to achieving the "2051 Vision" which includes fighting gridlock and improving road performance and efficiently moving goods.

Providing a safe and reliable transportation system that connects people and products and large centres with small rural communities is one of the keys to supporting growth in the southwest. As Minister Mulroney stated in the legislature on March 9, 2022, "The Morriston Bypass will make it easier for drivers to travel between Hamilton and Guelph. It will also reduce gridlock on local roads, especially in the communities of Morriston and Aberfoyle. Without strong action now, gridlock on Highway 6 will only get worse..."

Deferral of Morriston Bypass and the Auditor General's Report:

Understanding that there are competing demands for provincial funding of major highway expansion projects, the southwest has been waiting many years for the construction of the Morriston Bypass. The Township was, therefore, concerned with findings in the recent Auditor General's "Value-for-Money Audit – Highway Planning & Management Report", where the Township learned that the Morriston Bypass project received approval from the Treasury Board, only to be deferred (in 2019).

The Auditor's report states that the Ministry, at the direction of the Minister's Office, requested that the Treasury Board approve the addition of four (4) highway projects to the 2019 Infrastructure Plan. These projects were not recommended by technical and engineering staff and were not ranked "high" on the Ministry's Expansion Prioritization Framework (EPF) and priority ranking. Additionally, the 2021/22 Ministry's Infrastructure Plan included yet another three (3) not previously ranked government priority projects in addition to the Highway 413 GTA West project. To accommodate these eight (8) new projects in the budget, the Ministry



proposed deferring six (6) projects approved for construction and seven (7) projects approved for planning & design work.

According to the Auditor General's analysis, "unless the Board provides additional funding, the Ministry will not have sufficient funding to accommodate" the government priority projects plus those previously ranked and recommended by subject matter experts.

In a November 2022 interview with the Canadian Press, a spokesperson for Minister Mulroneu stated, "that while some projects may have been "deferred," they were all subsequently approved for completion, except a few that "remain on the table for completion in the future." The Auditor's report indicates that while some of the deferred projects have since received partial funding as part of the 10-Year Infrastructure Plan (including the Morriston Bypass - Planning/Design work), we understand that moving to the construction phase remains unfunded.

Conclusion:

The Township of Puslinch Council respectfully request that the government and Ministry of Transportation return to an evidence-based infrastructure funding decision making model for major highway projects. We encourage serious consideration for the construction of the Morriston Bypass and that all other deferred highway projects listed in the Auditor General's report proceed as initially planned

Yours very truly,

James Seeley
Mayor of Puslinch
Wellington County Councillor
Chair of Wellington County Planning Committee
Chair of Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario
Wellington County Administration Finance and Human Resource committee member
Accessibility Advisory Committee member



Enclosures:

Office of the Auditor General of Ontario - Value for Money Audit: Highway Planning and Management, dated November 2022

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