

Candidates participating in debates state opposition to Highway 413, Bypass

The Progressive Conservative Party's plan for Highway 413 might not come through Aurora, but its impacts might be felt in the community as if it was, according to Provincial candidates who took part in an all-candidates meeting held by the Aurora Public Library.

With neither Newmarket-Aurora PC candidate Dawn Gallagher Murphy or incumbent Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill PC candidate Michael Parsa participating in the debate, it was left to representatives from the Ontario Liberals, the NDP and the Greens to take on the topic ? and, they agreed, the highway cutting into York Region's southwestern tier needs to be scrapped.

?This is really a huge project that will damage the Oak Ridges Moraine,? said Marjan Kasirlou, Liberal candidate for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. ?It will damage [so much] land that should be agricultural spaces. It is so hard to believe the government is paving our farms and will [result] in food insecurity [and impact] the future of our kids. We will slash the Highway 413 and we will bring the money where it is supposed to be [in education].?

This was the position shared by fellow Liberal Dr. Sylvain Roy, the candidate for Newmarket-Aurora.

?We're going to cancel Highway 413 because it is not a good thing for the Province and we will reinvest that money in education,? he said. ?If elected, we would cancel Highway 413 just because of the impact it is going to have on the environment and the protected lands and sensitive areas in terms of the wetlands and so on. I agree with everybody here so far that that is a mistake. It is something that needs to stop quickly because once it is paved over, we're never going to get it back.?

Newmarket-Aurora NDP candidate Denis Heng said he agreed with the Liberal candidates on this issue and said his party too would scrap the highway proposal.

?I believe it is not the right choice,? said Heng. ?The idea that if we build more highways on land that is ecologically sensitive, I don't think that is the way we're looking at building our communities 20, 30, 40 years from now. I don't [agree] that the argument about how this is going to decrease commute times; as an epidemiologist, I know the pollution that comes from encouraging more traffic, encouraging more cars on the roads. I don't think we should be paving over this and at the same time I feel that the idea of urban sprawl is something we should be going up against with how we want our communities to look in the future. This goes against the whole idea of public transit and intensifying the population so that we can actually give public transit a chance outside of the downtown areas to succeed and, once again, I feel the Conservative government is pointing us in the wrong direction here.?

Strong opposition also came from Newmarket-Aurora Green Party candidate Carolina Rodriguez, who said she was ?unequivocally? against it.

?We don't need new highways and we would also be cancelling this plan for other unnecessary highways, like the Holland Marsh highway and the widening of Highway 417, as well as the Bradford bypass. The proposed Highway 413 will cut through 2,000 acres of prime farmland and it will crisscross two major GTA river systems, damaging 75 wetlands and cut across 85 waterways. The highway will not only cost \$10 million to save 30 ? 60 seconds of commute time, more time will actually be saved in investing in public transit and actually taking cars off the road instead of diverting them to other places. More highways also means more congestion. We are fully committed to stopping urban sprawl as well and building liveable, affordable, connected communities instead of sprawling outwards, building within. We don't want any more hours spent on expensive, soul-crushing commutes; we want to live and work in our own communities and highways will not help us do that.?

The Bradford Bypass also received a universal thumbs-down from Newmarket-Aurora candidates taking part in a debate hosted by the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce on Thursday night ? again from Mr. Heng, Ms. Rodrigues and Dr. Roy, as well as New Blue party candidate Iwona Czarnecka.

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