



News Release

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Ontario is Ignoring Its Own Experts When Ultimately Deciding When and Where to Build Highways: Auditor General

(Toronto) The Ontario government decided to build four highways at the cost of not building six others that the Ministry of Transportation's subject-matter experts rated as more important. Those six had already secured funding.

"Highway construction projects are some of the most expensive and time-consuming building projects the province undertakes," said Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2022 Annual Report*. "But we found that the government made a number of changes on highway priorities, without reviewing all the relevant facts from their own experts."

Two of the deferred projects are in Northern Ontario, resulting in a re-allocation of \$158 million to Southern Ontario projects. The government recently prioritized additional projects that Ministry experts would not have recommended be built yet, including Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass.

The report also found that Ministry staff were directed by the government to prepare business cases for eliminating tolls on highways 412 and 418 by June 2023 before costs for the highways had been recovered. The Ministry also did not provide a rationale in its subsequent business case for why it sought to expedite the removal of tolls by April 5, 2022. The government also asked for a business case to drop licence plate sticker fees. The Ministry's business cases for these proposals were not provided to decision-makers on a timely basis to provide adequate time for their review, and did not include all relevant information.

In 2021/22, the Ministry of Transportation spent nearly \$2 billion on highway expansion and repair projects across its 17,000-kilometre network.

"Decisions about building priorities and financing should be made only after a rigorous and objective review of information and evidence," said Lysyk. "Changing direction without going through the sound procedures the province already has in place for this could result in highways that are needed sooner being delayed, perhaps indefinitely."

The Auditor also noted that the Ministry of Transportation's highway rehabilitation capital planning program has led to good results for Ontario. According to Statistics Canada, Ontario has some of the most well-maintained highways in Canada. According to Transport Canada, the rate of traffic fatalities in Ontario is the lowest in Canada.

The audit report includes 12 recommendations for improvement.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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