

Attitudes of GTA Residents to the Proposed Highway 413

Full Report

*Submitted to Nature Canada
December 23, 2021*



Methodology

- » This study was conducted online using EKOS' probability-based research panel, *Probit*
- » The field dates for this survey are December 10-20, 2021
- » In total, a random sample of 1,000 residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) aged 18+ responded to the survey
- » The margin of error associated with the total sample is ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20
- » All the data have been statistically weighted by age, gender, region, and educational attainment
- » This study was commissioned by Nature Canada

Solutions to highway congestion (i)

- » Overall, the public do not see highway construction as a particularly effective means of reducing congestion
 - Just four in ten (39%) believe expanding existing highways would be an effective tool for reducing congestion, while even fewer (34%) are optimistic about the construction of new highways
 - Indeed, highway expansion and construction rank sixth and seventh, respectively, out of the seven potential solutions tested
- » In sharp contrast, two-thirds of respondents believe that encouraging working from home and expanding light rail infrastructure would be highly useful in reducing overcrowding on existing highways (67% and 66%, respectively)

Solutions to highway congestion (ii)

- » Reducing tolls on Highway 407 is also seen as a highly effective solution, with more than half of respondents rating it as very effective (59%)
- » Respondents are more divided when it comes to the impacts of limiting urban sprawl (43% say urban densification would be an effective tool)
- » Results show little enthusiasm for congestion pricing
 - Just 27% say congestion pricing would be effective, while 48% say it would be of little to no use

Solutions to highway congestion (iii)

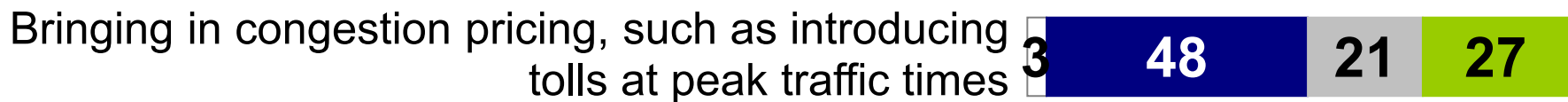
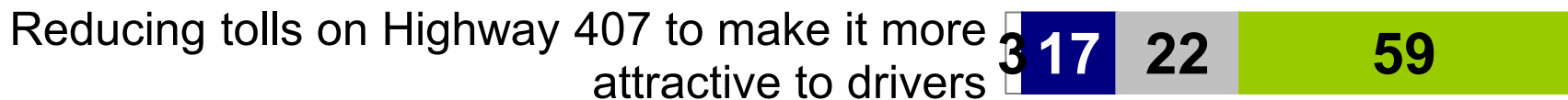
- » Results are sharply divided by partisan affiliation
 - Investments in light rail transit are a clear favourite among Liberal and NDP voters, but receive a more muted response from PC voters
 - PC voters, meanwhile, are much more optimistic about the impacts of new highway construction and the expansion of existing highways
 - However, PC voters also react more favourably to reducing tolls on Highway 407, while encouraging working from home holds broad appeal across the political spectrum

Solutions to highway congestion (iv)

- » Results also reveal a regional divide between those who live in the City of Toronto and those who live in the surrounding areas
 - New highway construction is widely dismissed by those who live within 10 kilometres of Queen's Park, while these respondents overwhelmingly extol the benefits of expanded light rail
 - Those who live farther away – particularly those in the York region – are more apt to say highway construction would be an effective solution; however, these respondents are also more enthusiastic regarding the impacts of toll reduction
 - Again, encouraging working from home holds broad appeal across the GTA

Views on highway congestion solutions

Q. To what extent do you believe each of the following solutions would be effective in reducing congestion in the long-term?



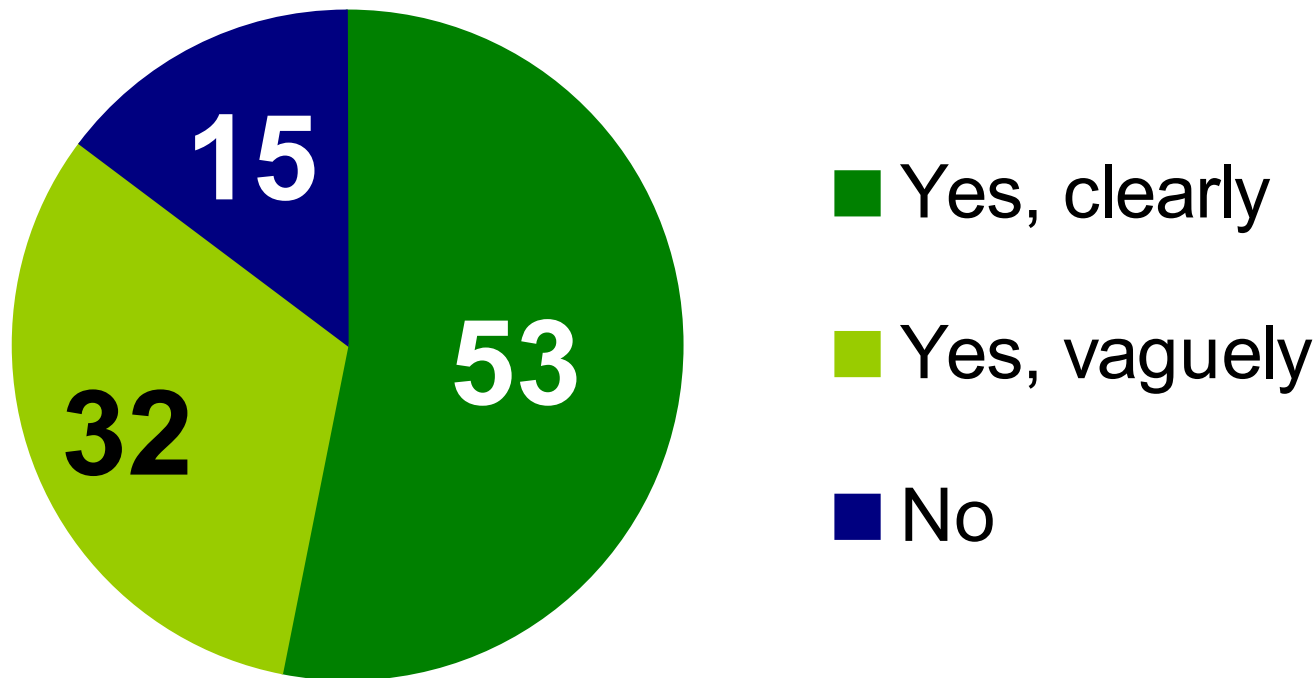
DK/NR
 Not effective
 Somewhat
 Effective

Awareness of Highway 413 proposal

- » The vast majority of GTA residents are familiar with the proposal to construct of Highway 413
 - Fully 85% say they are aware of the proposal, including 53% who say they are 'clearly' aware
 - Familiarity with the project is somewhat higher among men, while it is somewhat lower among residents of Durham

Awareness of Highway 13 proposal

Q. As you may know, the Government of Ontario has recently proposed the construction of Highway 413, a roughly 60-kilometre route across the northwestern part of the Greater Toronto Area that would link the northern edge of Vaughan to the interchange of highways 401 and 407, where Mississauga, Brampton and Milton converge. The estimated cost of project ranges between \$6 billion and \$11 billion. Before this survey, had you heard of this announcement?

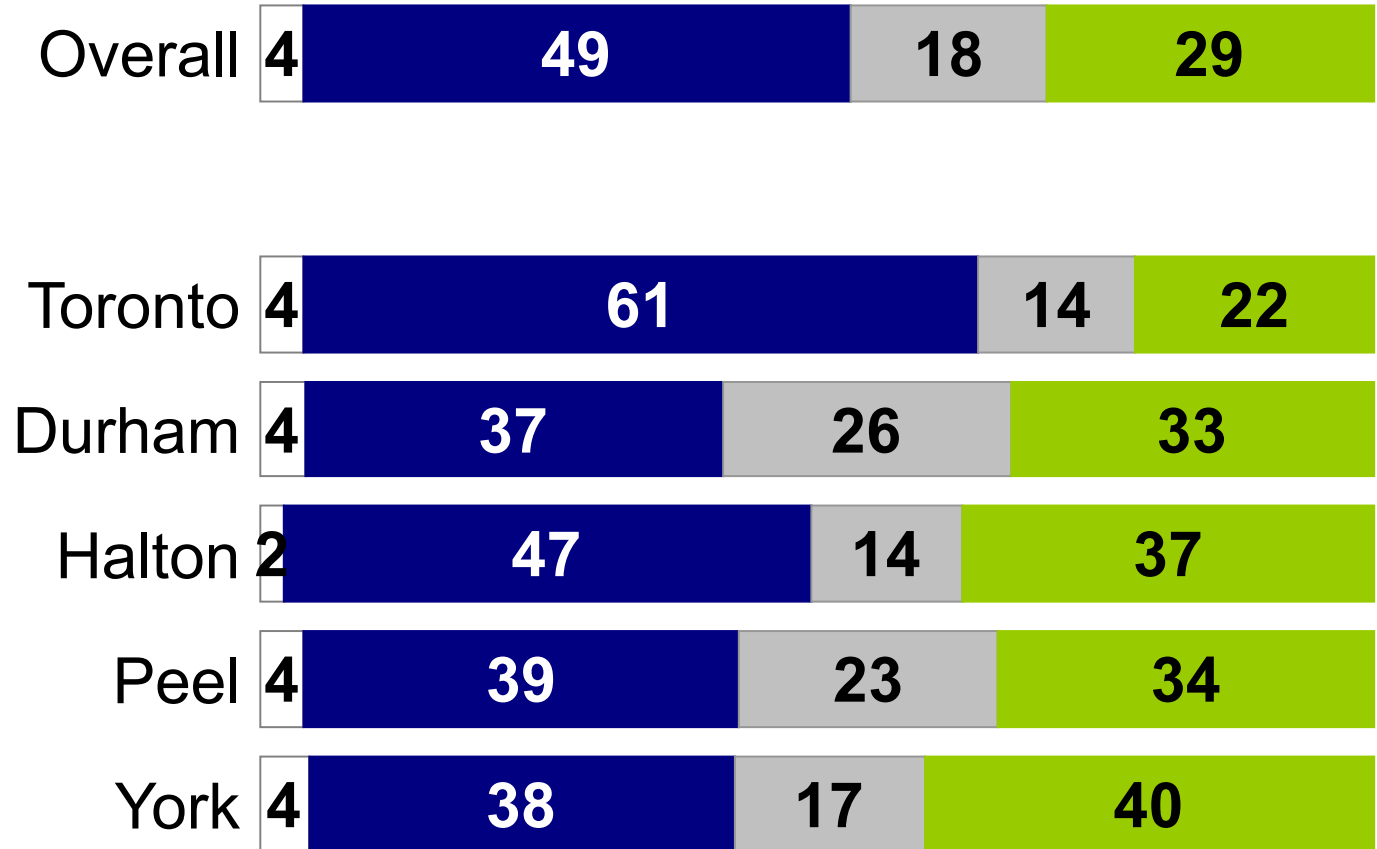


Support for Highway 413

- » Survey results reveal that GTA residents are generally opposed to the construction of Highway 413
 - Half of respondents (49%) oppose Highway 413, compared to just 29% who support it
 - One in five (18%) neither support nor oppose the project
- » Regionally, Toronto residents reject the proposal by a margin of nearly three to one
 - Likewise, a clear plurality of Halton residents are opposed to the project
 - In the regions of Durham, Peel, and York, however, respondents are fairly evenly divided between those who support the project and those who oppose it
- » In terms of partisanship, a clear majority of PC voters support construction (64%), while the plan receives little to no support among Liberal, Green, and NDP voters (16%, 14%, and 10%, respectively)

Support for Highway 413 by region

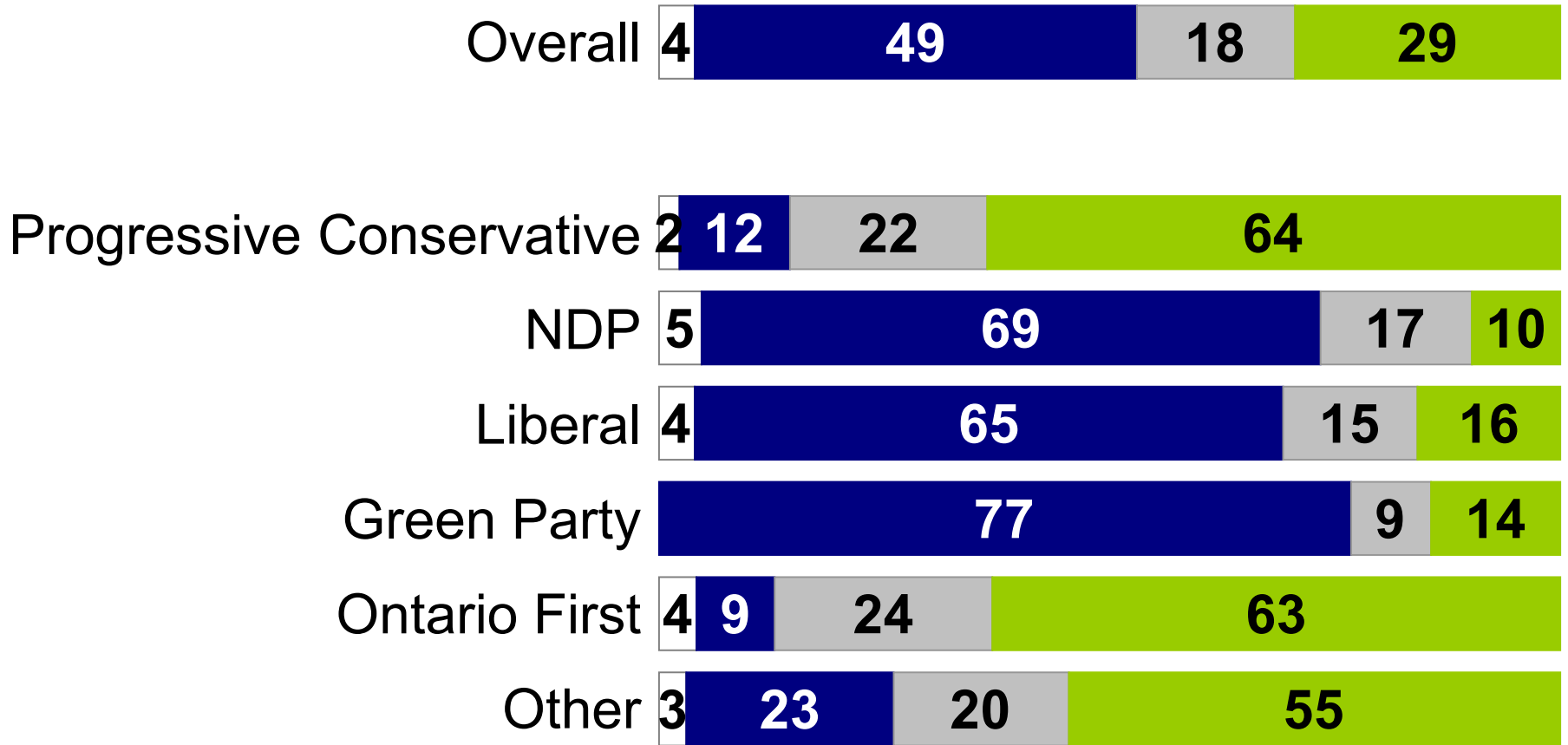
Q. Based on what you know, to what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?



□ DK/NR ■ Oppose (1-2) ■ Neither (3) ■ Support (4-5)

Support for Highway 413 by party support

Q. Based on what you know, to what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?



□ DK/NR ■ Oppose (1-2) ■ Neither (3) ■ Support (4-5)

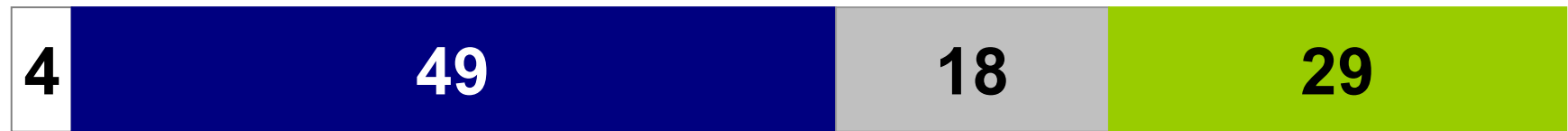
Impacts of tolls

- » Respondents were asked to what extent they would support the construction of Highway 413 if it were funded primarily through tolls instead of tax dollars
- » Interestingly, the prospect of tolls appears to put off GTA residents
 - Opposition to Highway 413 rises to 59% when it is presented as a toll-funded project (versus 49% when presented as a tax payer-funded initiative)
 - Notably, support among PC voters drops 22 points (from 64% to 42%) when tolls become a feature of the project

Support for a toll-funded Highway 413 construction

Without toll prompt

Q. Based on what you know, to what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?



With toll prompt

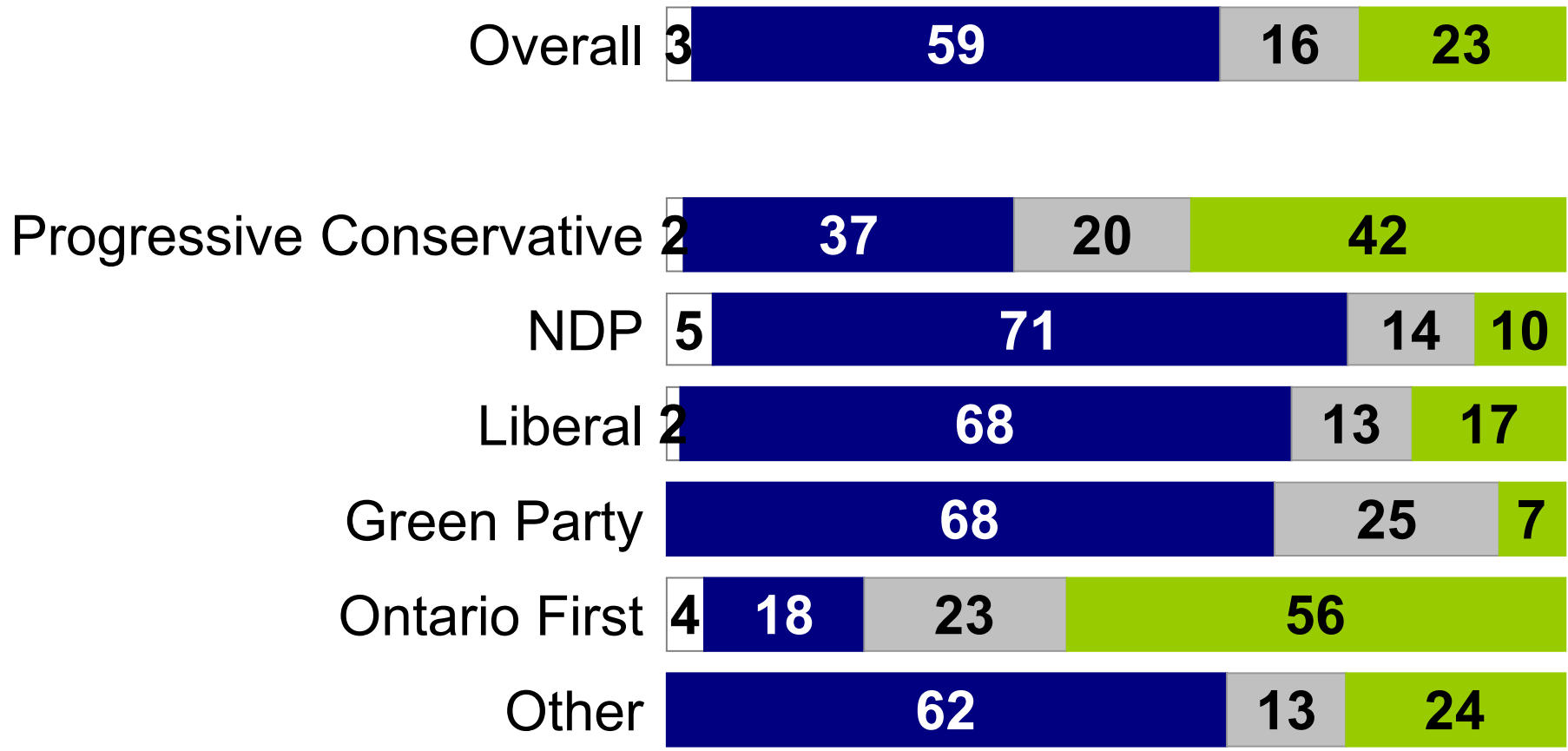
Q. To what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413 if it were funded primarily through tolls instead of tax dollars?



DK/NR Oppose (1-2) Neither (3) Support (4-5)

Support for a toll-funded Highway 413 construction

Q. *To what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413 if it were funded primarily through tolls instead of tax dollars?*



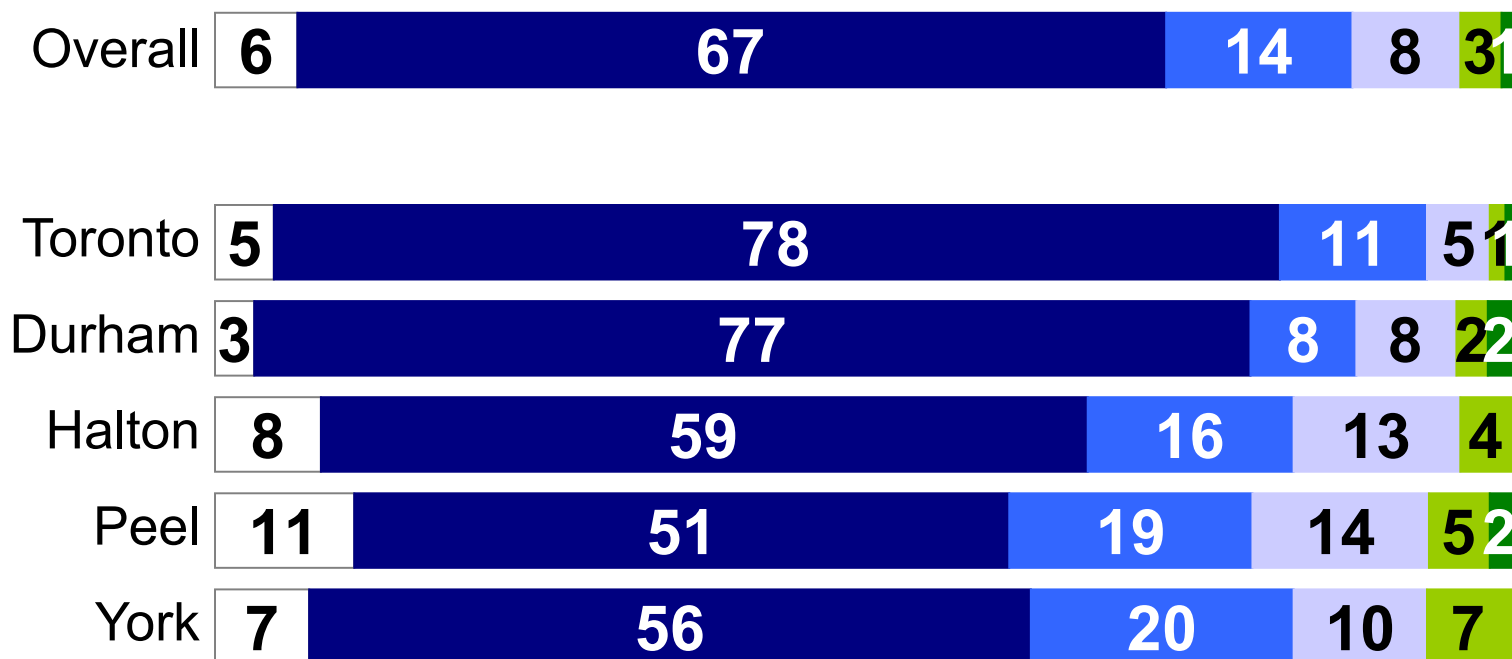
DK/NR
 Oppose (1-2)
 Neither (3)
 Support (4-5)

Expected use of Highway 413 (i)

- » Respondents were asked how often they believe they would use Highway 413 if it were built
- » Results suggest only a small portion of GTA residents would use the highway regularly, while two-thirds (67%) would rarely – if ever – use it
 - 14% say they would use the highway once per month or less, while 8% anticipate using it multiple times per month
 - 3% would use the highway several times per week and just 1% expect they would use it daily
- » Those who reside in Toronto and Durham are least likely to say they would use the highway (7% and 12%, respectively, would use the highway at least several times per month), while residents of Halton, York, and Peel are comparatively more likely to do so (17%, 17%, and 21%, respectively)

Expected use of Highway 413

Q. If Highway 413 were built, how often do you believe you would use it?



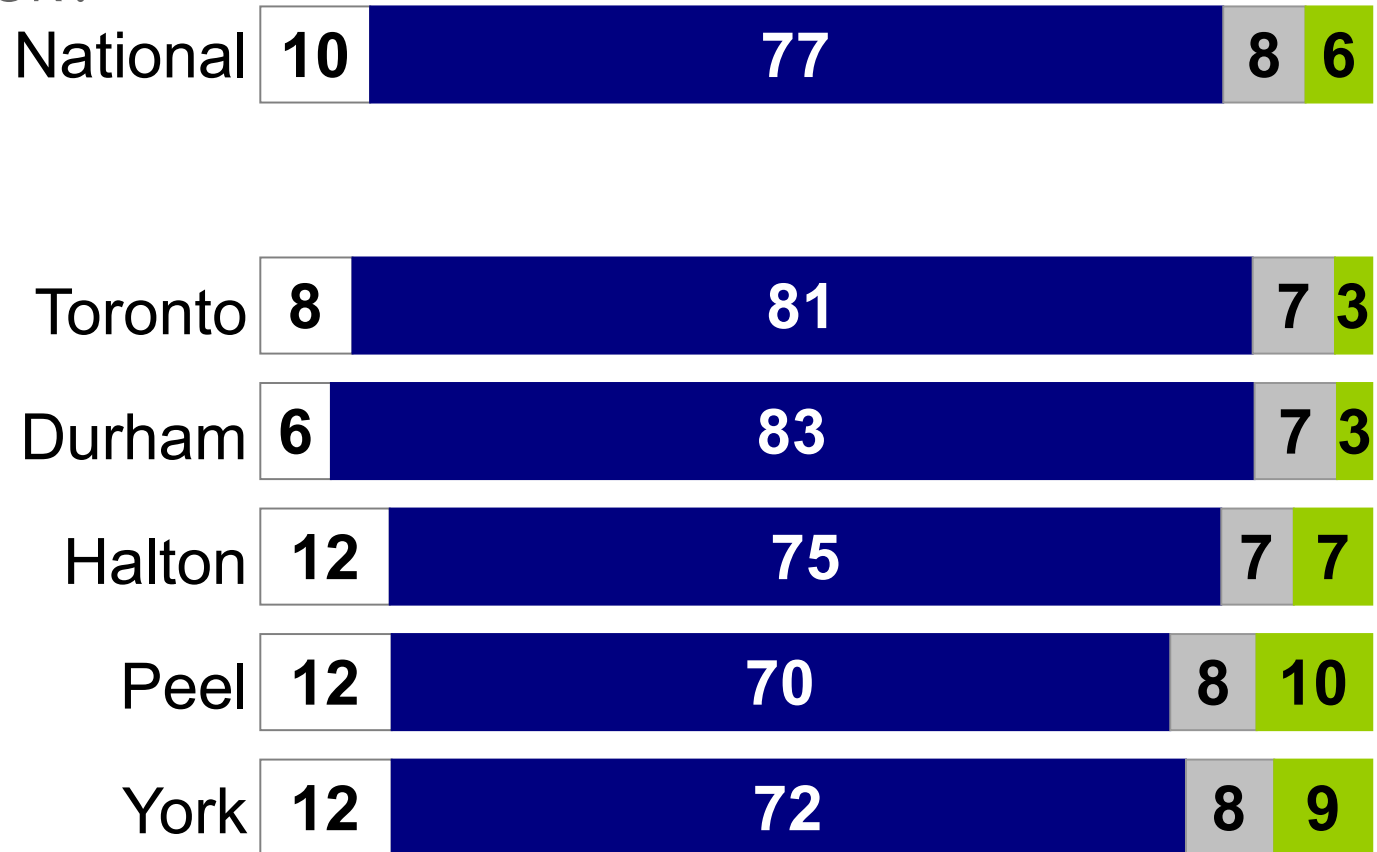
- DK/NR
- Never or almost never
- Once per month or less
- Several times per month
- Several times per week
- Daily

Expected use of Highway 413 (ii)

- » Few GTA residents expect any appreciable time savings in their day-to-day lives from the construction of Highway 413
 - Three-quarters of respondents (77%) anticipate little to no change in their commute time each week, while 8% expect a moderate reduction
 - Just 6% believe they will see a substantial drop in the amount of time they spend commuting each week
 - Results vary by region, with those in Peel, York, and Halton anticipating the greatest time savings (10%, 9%, and 7%, respectively, believe their commute will be reduced significantly)

Anticipated time saving using Highway 413

Q. To what extent do you believe Highway 413 would reduce the amount of time you spend commuting each week?



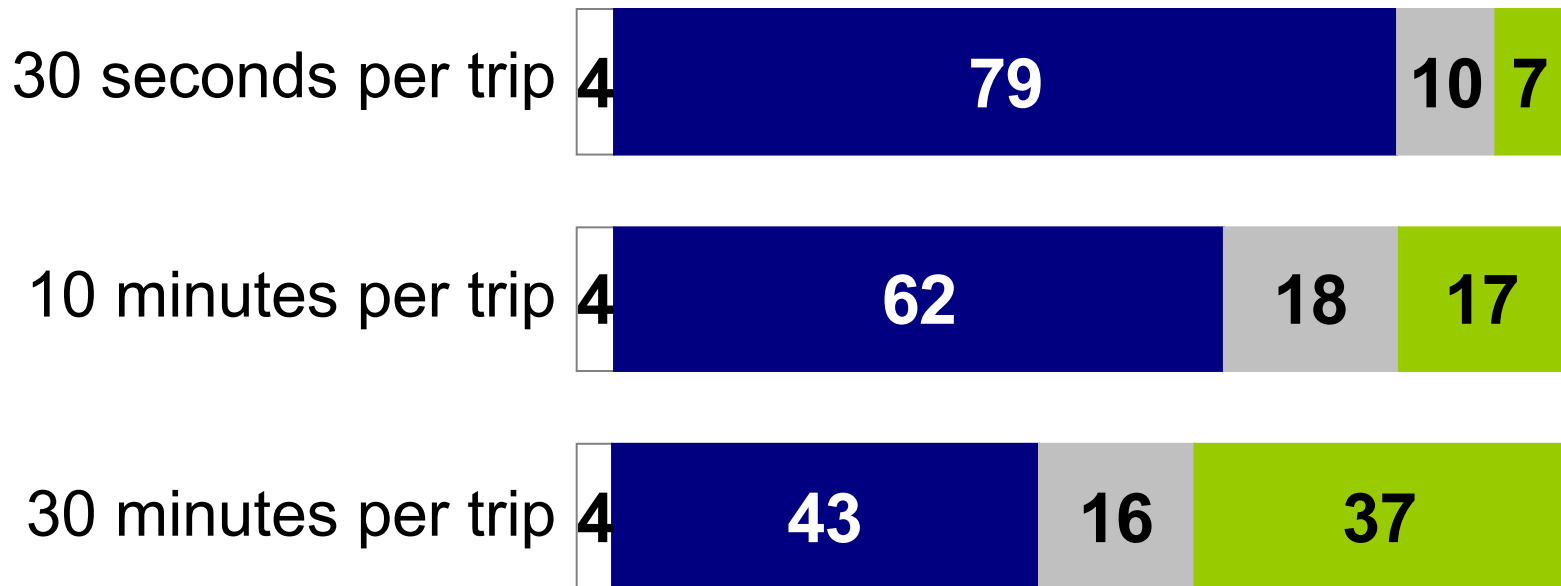
□ DK/NR ■ Low extent (1-2) ■ Moderate extent (3) ■ Great extent (4-5) 19

Elasticity with respect to time savings

- » Results suggest that the projected time savings for those travelling between York and Halton could be a deal-breaker
- » When respondents are presented with the Ford government's projections – that commuters could save up to 30 minutes per trip – support for the project jumps to 37%
- » When respondents are presented with the estimate of the previous government's experts panel (30 seconds), however, support plummets to just 7%
- » A middle-of-the-road estimate also yields relatively little support – just 17% would support the project if it saved 10 minutes per trip

Elasticity with respect to time savings

Q. The Government of Ontario claims Highway 413 will save commuters travelling between the York and Halton regions up to 30 minutes per trip. However, when the previous government had studied the issue, an expert advisory panel estimated the travel time savings to be closer to 30 seconds. To what extent would you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413 assuming each of the following time savings?



DK/NR Oppose (1-2) Neither (3) Support (4-5)

Arguments for and against Highway 413 (i)

- » Respondents were presented with a list of arguments both for and against the construction of Highway 413 and asked to rate the extent to which each one would make them more or less likely to support the project
- » Interestingly, many of the selling points touted by the Ford government do little to attract support
 - Just one-third of respondents say they are swayed by the need to link growing regions (34%), the need for expanded highway capacity to allow businesses to get their goods to market (31%), and the prospect of creating 3,500 jobs (31%)
- » Curiously, two of the highway's key features – its capacity to support up to 300,000 trips per day and attract needed investment in auto manufacturing – are actually seen as net negatives
 - In both cases, clear pluralities (41% in each case) say they are *less* inclined to support the project as a result of these arguments

Arguments for and against Highway 413 (ii)

- » In contrast, GTA residents see the ecological and environmental impacts of Highway 413 as major deterrents
 - Fully three-quarters (76%) see the need to pave over thousands of acres of farmland and Greenbelt as a disincentive to support the project
 - Seven in ten are put off by the prospect of adding 700,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year (69%) and opening up more farmland to development (69%)
 - A similar proportion (66%) say they are deterred by the likelihood of creating more congestion by incentivising the construction of low-density suburbs

Arguments for and against Highway 413 (iii)

- » Arguments that touch on the economic benefits of Highway 413 are particularly resonant with PC voters
 - Roughly six in ten of these respondents say they are enticed by the prospect of linking growing regions (63%), connecting businesses to markets (61%), and creating 3,500 jobs per year (58%)
 - The biggest deterrents for PC voters appear to be the impacts on farmland; 45% are deterred by the idea of paving over 2,000 acres of farmland, while 44% see the development of farmland as a cause for concern
- » Liberal and NDP voters appear entrenched in their opposition to Highway 413 and none of the arguments tested appear to be effective in dislodging these views

Arguments for and against Highway 413 (iv)

- » Regionally, residents of Halton and York are heavily drawn to arguments that touch on convenience and, to a lesser extent, economic benefits
 - Notably, 52% of Halton residents and 44% of York residents say they are more inclined to support the project given that it will provide better connections between work and home
 - The prospect of spurring investment in the automotive industry is a key selling point for Durham residents
 - However, results suggest that these respondents are just as concerned about the environmental impacts of Highway 413 as respondents from other regions

Arguments for and against Highway 413 (i)

Q. *There are many arguments both for and against the constructing of Highway 413. To what extent do each of the following arguments make you more inclined to support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?*

Highway 413 will link growing regions, providing better connections between housing and jobs **2** **33** **31** **34**

The expanded highway capacity is needed for businesses to get their goods to market **3** **36** **30** **31**

The construction of Highway 413 will support up to 3,500 jobs per year **3** **29** **38** **31**

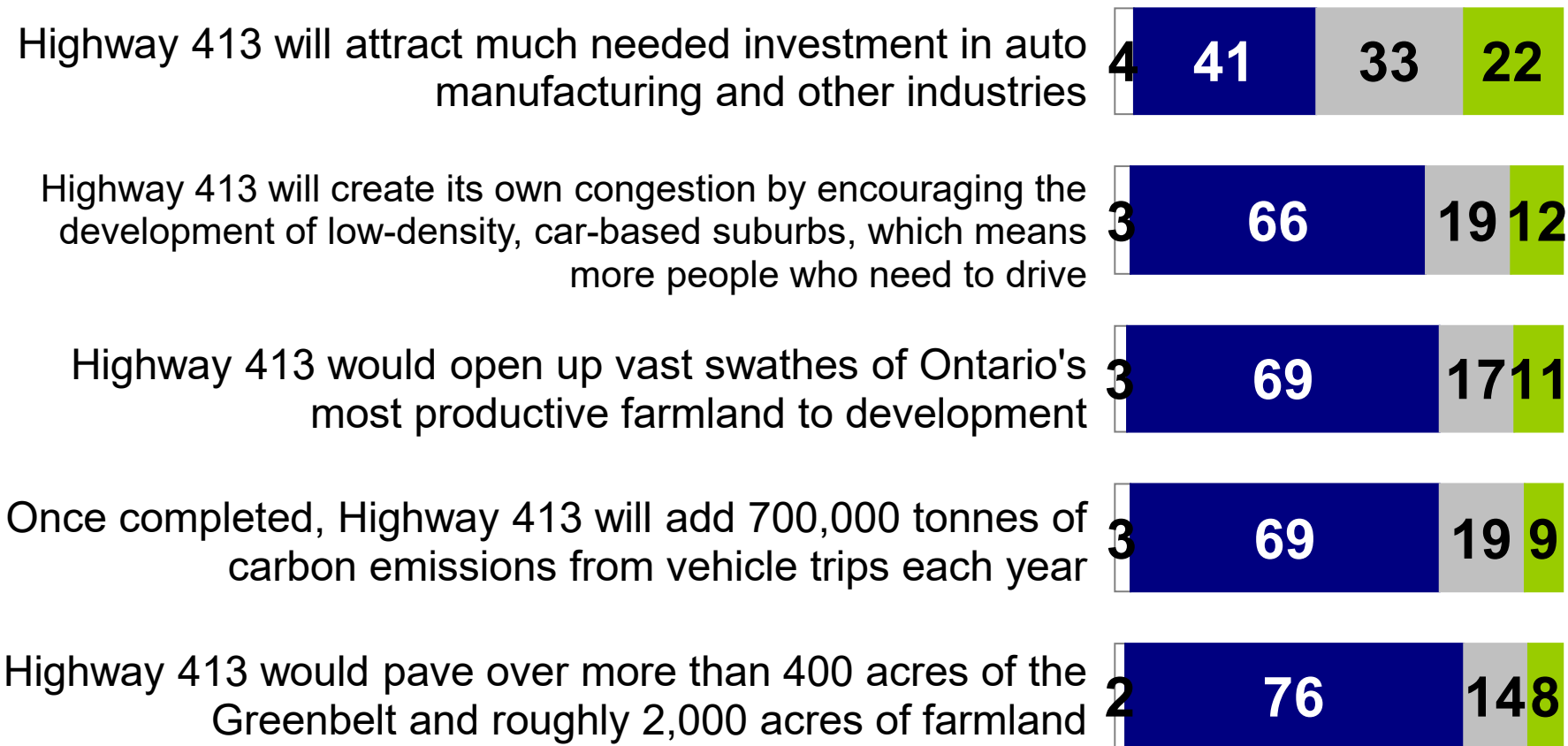
There are other, less expensive options for easing congestion, such as expanding existing highways, improving public transit and light rail, and simply not creating new commuters by adding to urban sprawl **3** **49** **19** **29**

Once completed, as many as 300,000 trips will be taken on Highway 413 each day **5** **41** **28** **27**

DK/NR Inclined to oppose (1-2) Neither (3) Inclined to support (4-5) **26**

Arguments for and against Highway 413 (ii)

Q. To what extent do each of the following arguments make you more inclined to support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?



DK/NR Inclined to oppose (1-2) Neither (3) Inclined to support (4-5) 27

Views on Highway 413 (i)

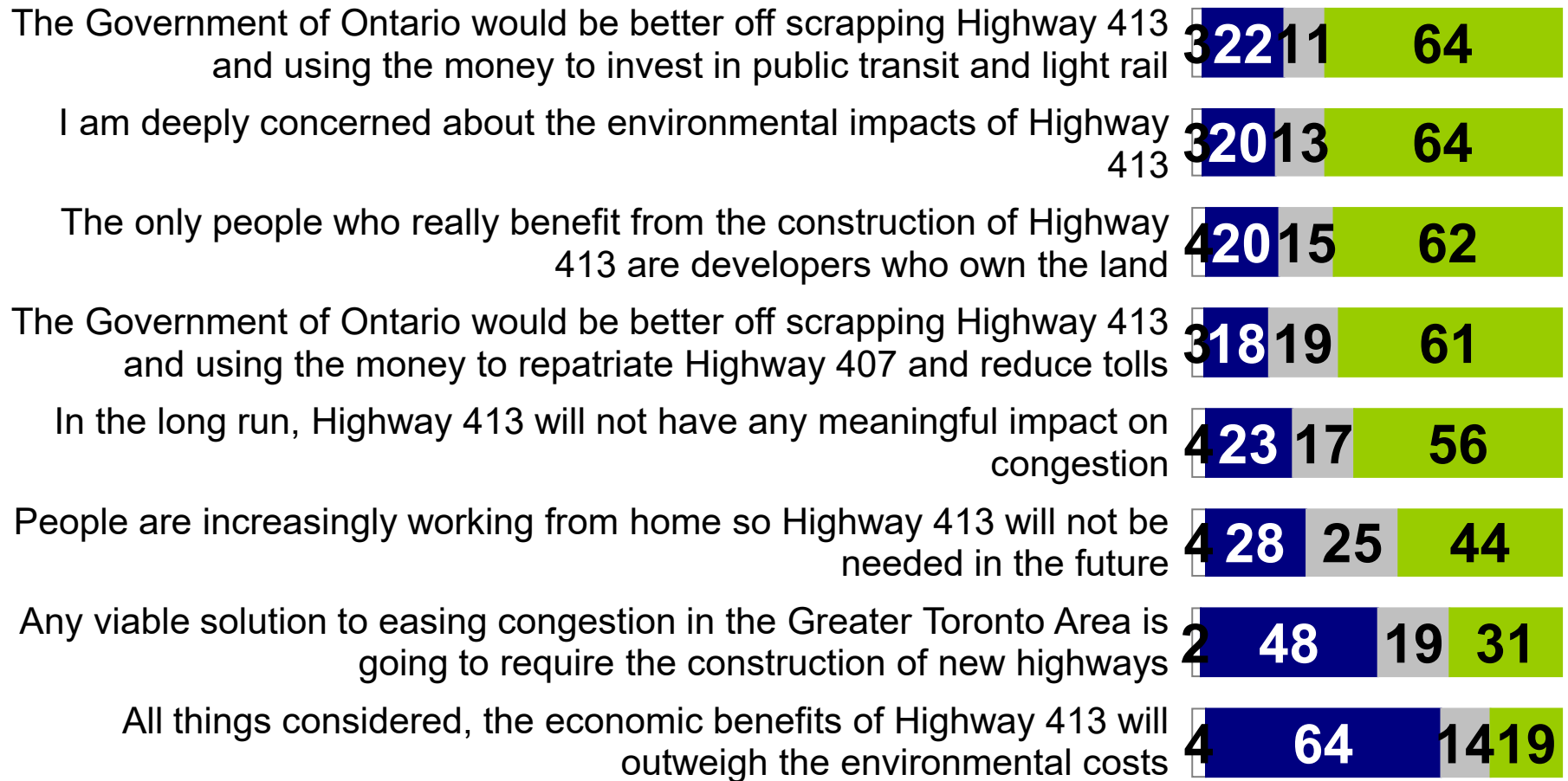
- » Respondents were presented with a list of statements regarding Highway 413 and asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each one
- » A clear plurality (48%) reject the notion that constructing new highways is a prerequisite for reducing highway congestion and results show a clear preference for pursuing other solutions
 - 64% agree that the Government of Ontario would be better off scrapping Highway 413 and investing in light rail instead
 - A similar proportion (61%) would sooner invest the funds in re-patriating Highway 407, an idea that receives plurality support from PC voters

Views on Highway 413 (ii)

- » Likewise, GTA residents are highly skeptical about the need for Highway 413
 - 56% agree that the highway will not reduce congestion in any meaningful way, while 62% say the only ones who truly benefit are the developers who own the land
 - A plurality (44%) also believe that the growing shift to remote work will ultimately render Highway 413 unnecessary
- » All in all, the costs of Highway 413 outweigh the benefits in the public's view
 - Two-thirds of respondents (64%) say they are deeply concerned about the environmental costs of Highway 413
 - Similarly, 64% disagree that the economic benefits outweigh the environmental consequences

Views on Highway 413

Q. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:



DK/NR
 Disagree (1-2)
 Neither (3)
 Agree (4-5)

Impacts of arguments about Highway 413

- » Lastly, respondents were asked – for a second time – whether they support or oppose Highway 413 as a result of the arguments they saw throughout the survey
- » When the issue is revisited, support for the project drops to 23% (from 29% at the outset of the survey), while opposition grows to 59% (up from 49%)
- » This finding suggests that the arguments against Highway 413 eclipse those in favour and that any prolonged discussion is likely to turn the public against the project

Impacts of arguments about Highway 413

Pre-arguments

Q. Based on what you know, to what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?



Post-arguments

Q. Based on these arguments you have seen, to what extent do you support or oppose the construction of Highway 413?



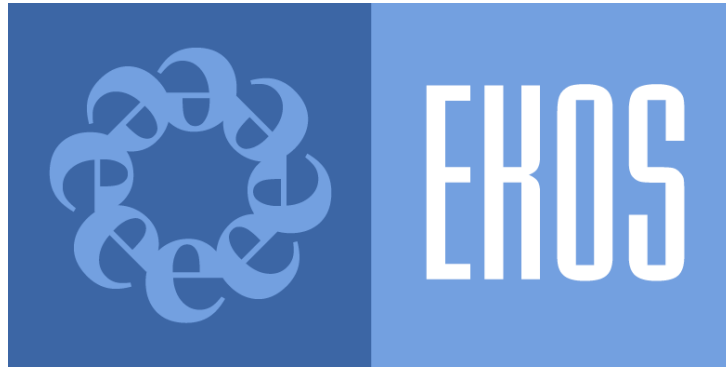
DK/NR Oppose (1-2) Neither (3) Support (4-5)

Conclusions (i)

- » GTA residents are generally opposed to the construction of Highway 413, though results vary by region and political affiliation
 - The highway is largely seen as an unnecessary and ineffective means of reducing highway congestion and the public show a clear preference for alternatives such as investing in light rail, encouraging remote work, and repatriating Highway 407
- » The environmental consequences weigh heavily on the public's mind, and touting the project's economic benefits does little to allay these concerns
 - Arguments that stress the environmental and ecological impacts of the project are likely to resonate well with the public
 - Notably, arguments that address the impacts on farmland seem to transcend political boundaries

Conclusions (ii)

- » Among those who are in favour of the project, support appears conditional on the 30-minute time saving promised by the Ford government
 - Anything short of 30 minutes is unacceptable in the public's view
 - Stressing the expert panel's finding that the time saving will be closer to 30 seconds is likely to be effective at blunting support for the project
- » Tolls appear to be a politically toxic issue – particularly among PC voters – and pitching congestion pricing as an alternative to Highway 413 is likely to backfire
 - On that note, support for Highway 413 and aversion to tolls are tightly linked; repatriating Highway 407 and reducing tolls could be the compromise necessary for reaching PC voters



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