Work on long-awaited Harvie Road crossing in Barrie moving slowly

By Bob Bruton, Barrie Examiner

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Motorists make their way along Big Bay Point Road, Highway 400. City officials are attempting to quicken the process of a Harvie Road crossing. Mark Wanzel/Barrie Examiner/Postmedia Network

Last October city council approved the crossing's design - a bridge to connect Harvie to Big Bay Point Road across Highway 400, to reduce traffic congestion and support south-end growth.

But accelerating the 2020-21 completion time-line for the $33.6-million crossing has been difficult. “At this point at least I would say there has not been significant movement either way in having the project delivered on time,” said Coun. Michael Prowse.

This project touches the southern boundary of Ward 6, which he represents.

“The province is behind on their work and evaluation, however city staff have, as requested by council, looked for opportunities to explore parallel work that will not be jeopardized by changes from the MTO (Ontario's transportation ministry),” Prowse said.
“As noted, that work needs to be evaluated to ensure we don’t run a high risk of wasting money and having to re-do the work because of a change from the MTO we can’t anticipate nor control. “Given that context, the design work has been identified as a fairly safe option to move forward. While I’m not convinced this will advance the time-lines for the crossing, I believe it will help to ensure it is on time,” he said.

Jacqueline Weston, Barrie’s engineering director, said during the project’s design stage ($1.5 million) council has asked city staff to look into buying property there ($2 million) in 2017 and relocating utilities ($2.25 million) in 2018 – one year earlier than scheduled.

The city is also sending a letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, the ministries of transportation, infrastructure and health, along with Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth, asking them to work collaboratively to accelerate the province’s design and approval process for this project. “The city is 100% committed to accelerating the schedule as much as possible,” Weston said. “But you can’t get approval until you have a design.” “We won’t have (MTO) approvals until we have a design they can review.”

The MTO also has a project that could affect the Harvie Road crossing, its Highway 400 improvements from one kilometre south of Highway 89 to the junction at highways 400 and 11.

The complexities of the Harvie Road crossover project include property acquisition, utility relocation, working around a watercourse (Whiskey Creek), removing a secondary railway line, archeological sites, building five lanes that can eventually be widened to seven lanes, and dealing with the MTO.

The five-lane Harvie crossing over the highway is designed to be compatible with a potential, future seven-lane interchange and widened 400 – to eight or possibly 10 lanes - which likely wouldn’t happen for an estimated 20-30 years. That would increase the project’s total cost to an estimated $61-$71 million, which could also include MTO funding.

Two-thirds of the crossing’s cost will be funded through development charges, the remainder from local tax dollars. The crossing is just for the municipal road network. “The crossing itself is really a city driven project so we’re not anticipating a large amount of cost-sharing, except for where the two projects overlap,” Weston said. If it becomes an interchange, however, there is an expected level of MTO funding – since it would connect with a provincial highway.

The Harvie Road Coalition of landowners, businesses and some residents wants the project’s time-frame reduced to build the bridge faster. The coalition would like the crossing’s design done in one year, not two as scheduled, and the property for the bridge bought as it’s being designed, not afterward.

The Harvie Road crossing would also better connect city streets in that area with the Barrie Primary Care Campus, a medical facility scheduled to open in the spring of 2016.

It will be located at 370 Bayview Dr. and will accommodate a wide range of primary health-care services.

HARVIE ROAD/BIG BAY POINT ROAD CROSSING

• over Highway 400
• removal of the existing railway crossing on Big Bay Point Road between Bayview and Fairview drives
• buffered bike lanes and sidewalks on both sides
• 5 lanes in the interim and ultimately 7 lanes between Bryne and Bayview drives
• protection of land for a potential future highway interchange

SCHEDULE

• 2016–2017 - design
• 2018 - property acquisition
• 2019- utilities
• 2020/2021 - construction to begin