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**Linking Barrie roads means jobs, investment, new coalition says**

Forcing delivery trucks and residents to go south to Mapleview Drive to cross Hwy. 400 is costing time and money, the Harvie Road Crossing Coalition says.

Just as Barrie begins talking about its 10-year capital plan, a group of concerned businesses has launched a campaign to encourage the city to put money where its mouth has been for more than a decade and get moving on a new east-west link in what’s the new geographic centre of the city.

“It’s important for the city,” said Warren Patterson, owner of Barrie’s Garden Centre on Bayview Drive. “You drive in here and it’s bare in the centre of the city. We’re missing investment and development because we don’t have the roads.”

He bought his site on Bayview Drive in 1987 and development in the area has been slow.

“We find a lot of residents on the west side of Hwy. 400 don’t come to the garden centre because it’s so difficult. The only way they can get here is along Mapleview Drive.” - Warren Patterson
He understands why businesses hesitate to move into the area. “It sometimes takes me 25 minutes to get onto the 400. Traffic backs up on Bayview between the new McDonalds and Mapleview on most nights and it takes so long to get through there.”

North American Development Group managing partner Terry Coughlin said Barrie has talked about linking Harvie Road with Big Bay Point for years, even before it was presented with the first Park Place plans in 2002.

In fact, a 1999 transportation study first recommended joining the two roads. “They kept taking it out of their capital budgets. We made all the improvements to Mapleview to fix the traffic there. Now, with all the new residential that will be coming in from Innisfil, it will put more pressure on Mapleview at the interchange,” Coughlin said. “Business in the area and people want to get back and forth across the highway without going down to Mapleview,” Coughlin added, noting the link will be important to a new primary care campus.

Coughlin sold 5.5 acres to NorthWest Property Corporation, which is planning a medical centre on the corner of Bayview Drive and Big Bay Point Road. It will feature an after-hours clinic and it is expected to serve 1,000 patients each day. “This needs to be fixed as much for the residents as for the businesses,” Coughlin said.

The highway will be a barrier to health care, just as it is a barrier that costs Patterson customers and time. “We find a lot of residents on the west side of Hwy. 400 don’t come to the garden centre because it’s so difficult. The only way they can get here is along Mapleview Drive,” Patterson said.

A delivery to an address on the west side of the highway can take an hour, he added, and suppliers also can get frustrated with the east-west traffic jams. The only other alternative is to go up Essa Road, then take Fairview Road up to Big Bay Point Road. But that clogs, too, especially in the late afternoon.

Barrie began an environmental assessment in late 2010 to look at a highway crossing. The plan envisioned a new six-lane east-west link, plus turn lanes on either side of the highway. It would have begun with a $15-million underpass, followed later by a $15-million interchange.

But in December 2013, city staff cut the project, slated to start in 2015, from the capital plan.

Now, Barrie is talking instead about McKay Road, upgrading the bridge and planning for an interchange. “Before they start planning new (projects), they should be fixing Barrie first,” Coughlin said.
SIDEBAR

WHAT'S NEXT

Barrie says the Harvie-Big Bay Road crossing is a top priority, but construction for the $15.7-million road connection isn’t planned until 2020/21.

Although that seems far away, here’s what has to happen before shovels hit the ground:

• April: Open house on how the road will cross Hwy. 400. It will identify properties that must be acquired not only for the road, but for a potential interchange.

• 2016/17: road design

• 2018: property acquisition

• 2019: utility relocation

• 2020/21: construction

How we’ll pay for it:

• Development charges: $10.2 million

• Taxes: $5 million