Barrie pushes ahead for Harvie link to get traffic moving

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BARRIE- A plan coming forward Monday isn’t going to give Barrie residents what they may be shopping for: a Bryne Drive connection. A public meeting will be held on an application to create a 13-lot business park on the west side of a new section of Bryne Drive, north of Caplan Ave and south of Harvie Road. Bryne, however, would end in a cul-de-sac south of Harvie.

But city officials say what they need to get south-end traffic moving is already in the works: Connecting Harvie Road to Big Bay Point Road. Rather than linking the two dead-ends of Bryne Drive – a project that requires several developments to come online – Barrie is focusing on pushing ahead with a Highway 400 overpass or underpass.

“What’s in the capital plan is the (highway) crossing for Harvie/Big Bay, around 2015. That’s not too far away,” said infrastructure planning engineer Ralph Scheunemann, who added the project would take two years to complete.

In March, city council approved a long-term plan for an interchange, but it would be done in two phases: first an underpass for $15 million, then an interchange several years away for an additional $15 million. The plan calls for a seven-lane highway crossing, which would ease pressure on Mapleview as drivers would not have to go as far south to Mapleview to go under the highway, Scheunemann explained. “It’s the east-west congestion on Mapleview that’s causing the issues. It’s not all about Bryne Drive,” said Scheunemann, who lives in the south end.

Ward 7 Coun. John Brassard agreed traffic jams on Mapleview at Highway 400, because of the interchange design and the width of the underpass. “(The Mapleview underpass) should have been built wider than it was,” Brassard said. “Everyone acknowledges the interchange was built incorrectly. Everything bottlenecks at that bridge.”

The councillor added although connecting Bryne would have an impact, the city can’t afford to front-end the costs of pushing Bryne through the undeveloped area. “I’m happy to see Smart Centres coming in. They have some development interests and it will spur on other developments and finally get Bryne Drive extended,” said Brassard.
Bell Media has plans that date back to the late 1990s on its 38 hectares of land on the proposed Bryne Drive link, but north of Harvie. However, the commercial and industrial plans need to be revised to take into account Barrie’s plan to connect Harvie and Big Bay, said the company’s planning consultant Gary Bell. “The next critical piece will be the determination of the master plan location of Bryne Drive,” said Bell, who noted the interchange – and how it’s designed – will affect the alignment of Bryne.

Barrie’s infrastructure and development general manager Wendell McArthur said the Harvie/Big Bay interchange is pushing Bryne further west than originally planned. The transportation ministry and Barrie continue to work on that. “It takes a long time to approve traffic information and finalize environmental assessments,” he said. “It’s not a quick and easy process.”