A group of south-Barrie businesses want to accelerate the Harvie Road crossing.

Their coalition of employers, landowners and small businesses want all three levels of government to know constructing the Harvie Road/Big Bay Point Road crossing at Highway 400 is long overdue.

This project is identified in the city’s 2015-2019 capital plan, which council is still considering, but coalition spokesman Keith Strachan would like a firmer commitment. "It's in the five-year capital plan, identified now, but...they're putting the build-out all the way to 2020," he said. "As everyone knows, gridlock's a problem now and if you look at some of the capital plans that are immediate, some of them will actually put more pressure on Essa Road and Mapleview (Drive). "So our view is that this (Harvie) needs to be built first and prioritized before some of those other capital projects, that are actually going to put more of a strain on our existing infrastructure."

Strachan says it was identified as a need in 1999. "It's been in the capital plan before and then moved to the next capital plan," he said. "We just want to make sure that doesn't happen again."

Coun. John Brassard, chairman of Barrie's economic development and transportation committee, said he's been a strong advocate for the crossing and welcomes any help from the coalition.

He said the crossing is a top priority for the city, which is working toward completion of the environmental assessment (EA) process; that's needed to proceed to the design and construction phase.

“The city continues to work with the MTO (Ontario's Transportation Ministry) on that process,” Brassard said. “In fact, the Mayor (Jeff Lehman) and I as well as our director of engineering (Jacqueline Weston) met with Ontario Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca two weeks ago at Queen's Park, and we spent some time after that meeting with the minister's staff discussing the Harvie/Big Bay Point crossing and the importance of getting the EA done so the project can move forward.”

Strachan said his group plans to contact the province this week and has been in touch with Barrie MP Patrick Brown's office. The coalition was told that the feds would be third to the funding table, after the city and MTO. "Part of the holdup is the MTO," Strachan said. "Whether this will be a bridge, like an overpass, or an interchange. And if they can phase it. "The city can't plan for an overpass if the MTO wants an interchange, or vice versa."

Brassard says the three options are an overpass, underpass or full interchange. And there are still questions about who pays what. "The current source of funding doesn't assume any provincial or federal money being contributed to the project," he said. "If the group (coalition) that has formed is able to work in concert with the city and use political influence to help us secure funding from either the $40-billion Build Canada Fund or the $15-billion Ontario Transportation Fund rolling out this year, I'm certain that council, our residents and businesses would be appreciative of the effort."
Brassard noted that city council has made roadwork, and connecting roads to make it easier to get around Barrie, a strategic priority during this term of office.

The city's 2015-2019 capital plan includes the Harvie/Big Bay Point roads crossing of the 400. The cost is almost $3 million from 2017-2019.

And the city's capital outlook for 2020-2024 shows a new Big Bay Point Road, from Bryne Drive to east of Fairview Road. The estimated costs are $2.4 million in 2020, $4.7 million in each of 2021 and 2022.

It also shows the Harvie/Big Bay Point interchange – but in 2024, for $647,000 worth of engineering services.

These projects still require council approval, as part of the budget process, which wraps up in March.

Connecting Harvie and Big Bay Point roads across Highway 400 is to entail six through lanes - three each way - and one turning lane.

The cost for a highway crossing is estimated at $15.7 million, while it is $26.3 million for a highway interchange.

Development charges or development contributions would pay 65% of these costs, while additional funding would come from area developers which were negotiated as part of development approvals, or from trigger agreements between the city and developers, such as Park Place.

The city has two major Highway 400 interchanges in its south end, at Mapleview Drive and Essa Road. Both experience east-west delays during peak traffic times, particularly in the ramp areas.

There are plans to widen Essa Road to six lanes, from Anne Street to the Bryne Drive/Ardagh Road area, and widen the 400 underpass, for $30 million.

The Harvie Road Crossing Coalition can be reached through harvieroadcrossing.ca, www.facebook.com/HRCCoalition or twitter.com/HRCCoalition.

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