Barrie’s Harvie and Big Bay Point roads are just that much closer to being married.

City council will consider final approval Monday of a motion to connect the two south-end roads, crossing Highway 400 with six through lanes (three each way) and one turning lane. Whether the crossing is over or under the highway has not been determined. But the city is also hedging its bets by protecting land for a future, potential highway interchange.

"More than any other project in the city, it will alleviate traffic in the south end," Mayor Jeff Lehman said.

"It will be a critical east-west connection in the city," said Coun. John Brassard, chairman of Barrie’s transportation and economic development committee.

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 around the ramps. Both off-ramps at Mapleview Drive and the 400 have been widened to four lanes and there will be additional turning lanes on Mapleview.

There are also 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.

Coun. Michael Prowse said council cannot stumble in the decision about connecting Harvie and Big Bay Point roads. "My concern stems from our historic inclination to under-build many of our infrastructure projects, especially roads and interchanges, to only have to rebuild them again in a very short time," he said.

Prowse said a staff report addresses some of his concerns, but not all of them.

"I worry that as additional interchange work is undertaken at Essa Road and Mapleview, the lack of a pressure valve or outlet at Harvie Road and Big Bay Point will cause gridlock at the other two interchanges," he said.

"If we can clearly see that issue coming, I believe we have a responsibility to address it now and not wait until it happens," Prowse added. "I would hope that we can make this good plan even better."
This Harvie/Big Bay Point project, however, is not on the immediate horizon.

There's $1.85 million in Barrie's capital plan for design in 2013, and $5.45 million in 2015 for utilities and property for transportation improvements.

When the work would actually begin hasn't been determined.

"That's beyond our five-year capital plan, which details 2012-2015," said Ralph Scheunemann, the city's infrastructure planning engineer. "Normally, it would happen the following year, but I can't say for sure."

Council is considering phases one and two of the project on Monday.

Phases three and four look at design alternatives associated with the crossing and confirm the land requirements that might be needed for a highway interchange.

"There is a difference in cost, depending on whether you go over or under," Scheunemann said of the connection.

The cost for a highway crossing is estimated at $15.2 million, while it's $30.1 million for a highway interchange.

Development charges or development contributions will pay for about half of these costs, while additional funding will 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.

Prowse, chairman of the city's finance department, also expressed concerns about how development charge amounts would be affected by whichever alternative council chooses to connect Harvie and Big Bay Point roads.

At a November 2010 public information meeting, residents expressed concerns about this project - from the effects of more traffic on Harvie Road, the negative impact on wildlife and construction effects to intersection safety and the project's timing.

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