Barrie councillors pushing for Harvie Road crossing

By Bob Bruton, Barrie Examiner

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City of Barrie Map A map of the Harvie Road crossing.

Putting the pedal to the metal on Barrie’s Harvie Road crossing is easier said than done.

City councillors have approved the crossing’s design - a bridge to connect Harvie to Big Bay Point Road across Highway 400 - intended to reduce traffic congestion and support south-end growth.

But construction of the $33.6-million crossing isn’t scheduled until 2020-21, and councillors want to accelerate that time-line.

The $1.5-million design is scheduled for this year, but councillors asked Monday to have staff look into buying property there ($2 million) in 2017 and relocating utilities ($2.25 million) in 2018 – one year earlier than scheduled.

“Nothing is worse than over-promising and under-delivering,” said Coun. Arif Khan, who made the motion. “We’re still bound by time-lines imposed by other agencies.”

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To deal with that, the city would send a letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, the ministries of transportation and infrastructures, along with Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth, asking them to work collaboratively to accelerate the province's design and approval process for this project.

"I think everybody wants to get it done sooner rather than later," Mayor Jeff Lehman said. "We don't want to wait. We need this built in the south-end."

"The need for the crossing is for the businesses, the economy and the residents," said Coun. Sergio Morales. "That is why we continue to push this."

But there are also doubts the crossing can be completed faster than the staff time-line.

"Trying to advance it earlier that 2020-21 would be difficult," said Ralph Scheunemann, the city's senior infrastructure planning engineer.

He said the complexities include property acquisition, utility relocation, working around a watercourse (Whiskey Creek), removing a secondary railway line, archeological sites, building five lanes than can eventually be widened to seven lanes, and dealing with Ontario's Transportation Ministry (MTO).

"This is a complex plan that has a lot of stakeholders," said Barrie CAO Carla Ladd. "I don't want us to put ourselves in a position where we promise something we can't deliver."

Coun. Michael Prowse said there has been progress, regardless of the the time-table. "This has moved forward," he said. "But it is not the only infrastructure building we have to deal with in the city."

Essa Road was another overpass mentioned, as was Dunlop Street, Bayfield Street, Tiffin Street and even the Duckworth Street/Highway 400/Cundles Road project, currently under construction.

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.

"There are a lot of complex issues that have to be resolved with the MTO," Scheunemann said.

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," Lehman said.

If it becomes an interchange, however, there is an expected level of MTO funding – since it would connect with a provincial highway.

To maximize the new crossing's use, other city roadways need to be improved.

This includes Big Bay Point Road from Bayview Drive to Huronia Road, Harvie Road from Veterans Drive to Bryne Drive, and from Essa Road to Veterans, Bryne from north of Caplan Avenue to south of Essa, and Bayview from Big Bay Point Road to Little Avenue.

This would also reduce traffic congestion on Essa Road and Mapleview Drive.

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