February 10, 2015

Dear Mayor Lehman and Members of Council

Re: Expediting Construction of The Harvie Road Crossing

The Harvie Road Crossing Coalition is a group of Barrie employers, landowners and taxpaying companies that have come together to impress upon governments at all levels that the construction of the Harvie Road Crossing is long overdue. As you begin your Business Plan and Budget deliberations for 2015 and beyond, we urge you to expedite construction of the Harvie Road Crossing over Highway 400 to alleviate the traffic congestion that has characterized south Barrie. This crossing is a critically important piece of urban infrastructure that has been in the City’s Master Transportation Plan for at least 15 years - and its necessity has been apparent for almost as long. In fact, the City’s Multi-Modal Active Transportation Plan (January 27, 2014) shows this crossing as complete by 2016, with the interchange done by 2021.

The traffic gridlock on Mapleview Drive and Essa Road in the vicinity of Highway 400 presents a quality of life issue for residents, threatens local businesses and negatively impacts public transportation. This congestion impedes commerce, stymies business expansion and facility location considerations, hampers production and employee scheduling, diverts truck traffic to inferior routes and generally neuters new investment in an underdeveloped employment zone in the middle of an existing urban area. We contend that immediate action is required to complete the long-planned road network in south Barrie to improve the movement of goods and people throughout our City.

Investment and Growth

Several south Barrie companies have expressed disappointment with their current location as a result of access and mobility issues and have reconsidered planned-expansions and begun to look elsewhere to locate any new or larger facilities. Many of our businesses must rely on just-in-time delivery to be competitive and it is increasingly difficult to schedule vehicles when access to and from our facilities is currently a complicated and uncertain exercise. Re-routing trucks and altering production and employee schedules because access to a highway less than a kilometre away is time-consuming and unpredictable negates any advantage assumed by proximity to major roads and the highway. Supporting existing employers with a reliable transportation network should be a top priority for all levels of government.
Investing in Transportation

Since the Harvie Road Crossing was identified as a necessary infrastructure priority 15 years ago, the City has collected millions of dollars in development charges from area landowners. There is little evidence that those dollars have been invested in the local transportation network to address current needs or facilitate further private growth and investment decisions. At the same time, by not proceeding with the crossing and delaying the long-planned road network in south Barrie, the City is foregoing millions of dollars more in potential development charges and taxes because landowners are not willing or able to invest in their holdings. The vacant and underutilized lands in the vicinity of Harvie/Big Bay Point are a testament to that scenario and contrary to city and provincial policies meant to intensify land uses in already-serviced urban areas. This project is a prime opportunity to grow the City’s tax base and improve the quality of life for residents that exist in south Barrie today.

It is encouraging that much of City Council have publicly stated that you support the construction of the Harvie Road crossing and that Council essentially approved the project three years ago. Through the 2014 municipal election unlocking south end grid lock was a common theme in many successful campaigns. It is time to complete the Environmental Assessment initially started five years ago, get on with final design, expedite utility and land acquisition requirements and get the Province to understand a rational growth plan that accommodates current Barrie priorities and provincial growth plan objectives. It is time to get this project on the fast-track.

We realize that this is an expensive undertaking and we want to work with you to convince the other levels of government to commit funds to this project in the current infrastructure program. If the City of Barrie identifies this project as a top priority and commits to its share of this project, together we can convince them to join us in investing in a vibrant Barrie where quality of life matters and businesses thrive.

Sincerely,

Keith Strachan, Campaign Coordinator
On Behalf of
The Harvie Road Crossing Coalition