

Proposal to widen Industrial Parkway receives mixed reactions

By Brock Weir

Industrial Parkway was initially intended to be a way for trucks and other motorists to bypass Aurora's historic Yonge Street core, but Council could soon prove everything old is indeed new again.

Council is set to consider a notice of motion from Councillor Tom Mrakas calling on both ends of Industrial Parkway to return to this original purpose, to nip current and future traffic concerns in the bud.

In his Notice of Motion, the Councillor asks staff to report back to Council by mid-February on the feasibility and estimated costs of widening both Industrial Parkway North and Industrial Parkway South to four lanes. Such a move, he says, would avoid traffic problems created by the forthcoming Joint Operations Centre (JOC) on Industrial Parkway North, and traffic which could be diverted from Yonge Street if a plan to reduce Yonge Street to one lane with a dedicated parking lane gets off the ground.

Although it could be another couple of weeks before going forward with the report is discussed by Council, the proposal got an early airing at the Committee level last week as Council tentatively pulled the breaks on a different reconstruction proposal for the road.

‘That traffic is going to have to go somewhere,’ said Councillor Mrakas, referring to the Yonge Street parking proposal expected to be before Council this week. ‘Considering Industrial Parkway was built as a thru-way, I think it is the best place to divert all of that traffic. We also have the JOC coming, which is going to add a lot of traffic along Industrial Parkway [and] the GO Station, which is a lot of traffic on Industrial Parkway. If we leave it one way each way, instead of being proactive and looking at something to do now and reacting later when we actually get to capacity, this is something we need to look into before committing funds.’

Supporting the idea was Councillor Sandra Humfries, who said Council is continually trying to encourage thru-traffic onto the corridor.

‘If we make it a truly wide, comfortable road to travel, I really think this is an opportunity to [at least] get consultation or staff to provide us with the feasibility of that,’ she said. ‘I know there is congestion at the corner of Wellington and Industrial that is driving everybody a little bit crazy. I know we will address that eventually, no matter what, but I would love to have that cost assessment and the feasibility to have that done.’

While Mayor Geoff Dawe said he supported the idea ‘on principle’, he added he needed more information on a wider perspective of what to do with the streets that intersect with the GO garage.

‘If this just goes out there and two, three, four years out there that traffic is just going to get worse,’ said Mayor Dawe. ‘It is an extensive project and there are a whole bunch of other issues that go along with that.’

Looking ahead to the motion, Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, said it was feasible to get a full report back on the feasibility, by the end of 2015 or early 2016, once Council approved a budget for a consultant, but a ‘quick and dirty costing’ could be done and back to Council relatively quickly.

This cursory costing found support in Mayor Dawe.

Also supporting the idea ‘in principle’ was Councillor Paul Pirri who questioned just how widening would be accomplished on a street that is not only lined with businesses, but also a handful of homes and a conservation area near its intersection with Mary Street, as well as a school at its north end.

Expropriation of land would be required along the length of the street to make widening a reality, responded Mr. Simanovskis, estimating building the road could cost \$15 million alone, not including costs to purchase additional land.

With that in mind, Councillor Pirri concluded the most immediate need was to address the Industrial Parkway South and Wellington Street intersection.

?To me, when I think of Industrial both ways, I think there are constraints where it would be difficult to have four lanes,? added Councillor Michael Thompson. ?[We could do the report] in house on if there are space constraints, where we would have to expropriate and where there are places we could not simply expand it.?