

## Council renews pressure for St. John's, Highway 404 interchange

Council is set to formally renew pressure on the Province and Region to advance plans for an interchange at St. John's Sideroad and Highway 404.

The move, which will be formally ratified at the October 22 Council meeting, came following a motion from Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson.

Bringing an interchange to fruition has been a long-standing matter for Councillor Thompson and the need now urgent with future growth projections, he said.

The York Region Master Transportation Plan, approved by York Region Council in September of 2022 identified a need for an interchange to be built at Highway 404 and St. John's Sideroad by 2051, said Councillor Thompson in his motion to Council. The Region will be updating their 2022 Transportation Master Plan every five years during its planning horizon, with the next update occurring in 2027. Our Official Plan forecasts Aurora's population will be 79,600 residents and 38,300 jobs by 2041, and 85,800 residents and 41,600 jobs by 2051. Additionally, neighbouring municipalities of Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville are expected to grow cumulatively to over 221,500 people and 86,400 jobs to 2051, with the Region's total population also expected to be over 2 million people and approximately 1 million jobs over the same horizon.

The Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review and Land Needs Assessment for the 2022 Regional Official Plan identified Aurora as having the greatest share of Major Office jobs over the planning horizon of any Northern Six York Region municipalities. Aurora's Employment Area along the 404 Corridor is over two kilometres long and is anticipated to generate over 6,000 new jobs, yet it currently is forced to rely on only one existing interchange at the south end.

The proposed interchange has been in the municipal planning framework for nearly 20 years, he added, and the motion called for staff to press the case with the Region for the traffic link to be part of a shorter-term vision.

At the end of the day, it is the jurisdiction of the Province, but we need to get the Region on board with us, to agree that there is a definite need and we need to continue to push for this because, as we have seen countless times with significant projects, capital projects take a significant amount of time to get from approvals to build, to completion so the sooner we get started the better.

These sentiments were echoed around the Committee table last week, with the matter advanced to Council.

I am in complete agreement with Councillor Thompson on this, said Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese. Frankly, if in 2015 it was in the 10-year Capital Plan, we could be looking at one happening sometime soon. I think it is apropos, now that we have a housing crisis, we have more units being built, greater density, and we need the infrastructure.

It's a long time coming, added Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim. If you're persistent, they might lend an ear and there might be some action. Let's keep on being persistent every year. If it needs to take a motion every year to do so, let's do it. I feel more confident than before that with staff and the Mayor being persistent with the Regional Staff and representatives we will eventually be successful.

Mayor Tom Mrakas agreed that this is an issue tackled at Council at least once per term and that it has been a push for a long time.

I think that with the changing landscape within our community, with all the growth that has occurred, I think the projections and the data will show a much greater need at this point in time than ever before, he said. I think it is probably something the Region won't be able to ignore, but also the Province won't be able to ignore. I think it's about time we get the Province to step up and finally build an interchange.

**By Brock Weir**