

Future of Wellington underpass, Centre Street could be clearer in weeks: Mayor

The future of a traffic underpass on Wellington Street East to accommodate all-day, two-way GO Train service, as well as the future of Centre Street, could be clearer in early 2026, if not sooner, according to Mayor Tom Mrakas.

Mayor Mrakas last week met at Queen's Park last week with Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sarkaria. Following what he described as a ?productive? meeting, Mrakas said in a social media post that he pressed the need for a grade separation at the GO Station and said ?it isn't a question of if ? it's a question of when.?

Speaking to The Auroran this week, Mrakas said a potential interchange at St. John's Sideroad and Highway 404, something that has long been advocated for at the municipal level, was also discussed.

?We know that once the twinning of the track is complete [and] the train is running at full capacity at that point we anticipate, and this is data from Metrolinx, that 20 minutes out of every hour essentially Wellington Street will be shut down at that section,? he says. ?From our perspective, that is unacceptable to have one of our main arteries shut down, basically, one-third of the day. It's vitally important that the Ministry understands that and that the Minister understands that, and that they look at figuring out a way that our Town isn't essentially cut off for one-third of the day.?

A traffic underpass where Wellington meets the GO tracks has been part of the vision for all-day, two-way 15-minute train service along the Barrie corridor for the better part of a decade, but whether or not the tunnel will be a part of the final vision has been in flux.

Area residents have expressed mixed views on the proposal. Many have acknowledged the need to keep traffic flowing, but those speaking out against the tunnel have cited disruption outside of their homes and businesses during construction and access to these same homes and businesses once the project is complete as the entrance to the proposed underpass for eastbound traffic has been proposed for close to Larmont Street.

Mayor Mrakas, responding to how a balance can be found between residential concerns and the flow of traffic, says it's important to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum.

?I think people have come to realize that it's?.going to cause some disruption, but it's something that is much-needed because the disruption and the way things would be without having it will be even greater,? he says. ?Shutting down, essentially?cutting our Town off from one side to the other for one-third of the entire day is absolutely unacceptable and I think will do much more harm than the actual construction of moving forward with grade separation.?

Another significant detail of the GO redevelopment has been the future of Centre Street.

As the trains cross Centre Street at grade, whether or not it will be able to remain a through-street has also been questioned.

A decision has not yet been made, Mayor Mrakas says, but ?details and timelines [have been] promised to come back to me in a very short period of time? ? potentially within the next week or ?just after the holidays.?

?The Minister?knows the importance of being able to communicate with residents exactly what is going to be happening over a certain period of time in the area because it seems like a lot of times we're left in the dark and we're not really getting that much information from Metrolinx,? Mrakas says. ?The Minister gets that, and the Minister has promised me that he will personally oversee getting that information for me.?

That said, however, the Mayor says he doesn't yet have a formal position on the future of Centre Street, noting there are still ?options to look at.?

?I think what happens with the grade separation and ultimately what happens with some of the other components of the overall scope of the work happening for the twinning will eventually kind of narrow the options that make the most sense for Centre Street and how we move forward on it. Until we have that full information, we haven't definitively come up with a way that is best to move forward with Centre Street.?

There is nothing definitive as to the potential of a St. John's and 404 interchange, either, but Mrakas says he relayed the ?importance? of it to Aurora in last week's meeting, particularly given the growth of housing in the surrounding area.

?They're going to have some deeper conversations about their full scope of how they're looking at interchanges right across the entire 404 highway and see what they're looking at from a 10-year perspective, and they promised to get back to me with all those details,? he says.

?When you look at the traffic numbers that are continuously increasing around the Wellington interchange, everyone has noticed the increase in vehicle traffic in that area, and especially as we continue to grow, and we know that there's a push to see more growth occur not only in our community, but in the communities surrounding the Town of Aurora. Without that interchange? a lot of people coming from just north of St. John's trying to get to the 404 inevitably will end up on Wellington and we'll see Wellington really become the bottleneck if there's not a way to alleviate the pressure of that traffic. The data does support the increase in traffic on Wellington so that, in turn, tells everyone that something needs to be done to alleviate that pressure from continuing to grow.?

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