

Pilot program will impact turns at St. John's, Old Yonge Street

A Regional pilot program will see significant change coming to your morning and afternoon commute on St. John's Sideroad.

Beginning next month, the Region of York's year-long pilot program will prohibit left turns at the intersection of St. John's Sideroad and Old Yonge Street Monday through Friday from 7 ? 9 a.m., and again from 4 ? 6 p.m.

The initiative, according to the Region, is intended to help address traffic bottlenecks at St. John's and Yonge and, moving eastward, around the GO Tracks near Industrial Parkway North.

?The intersection has had operational challenges because of the proximity to the intersection of Yonge Street,? said Nelson Costa, Manager of Traffic Safety and Signal Operations for the Region of York, in a presentation to Aurora Council last week.

Costa said the intersection of St. John's and Old Yonge is too close to St. John's intersection with Yonge Street approximately 100 metres away, a space that does not allow for traffic signals just east at Old Yonge.

?Old Yonge Street currently allows for the left, through, and right turning movements ? basically all movements in all directions, however it is very difficult to make these movements, especially during the morning and evening rush hour,? said Costa, adding the traffic volume in this area is only likely to increase. ?There is a future residential development on the north side that is planned for 39 townhomes across from Old Yonge Street. The access will be ultimately restricted to a right-in right-out as development proceeds. Another new residential development is located on the southwest corner of Old Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad, which will consist of approximately 110 condo units. The proposed access to the development will be off Old Yonge Street; however, with these two developments, there is going to be an increase in traffic in the area that is going to add further congestion in the intersection.?

Regional concerns about the intersection, he added, include westbound left-turning vehicles waiting to make a left at Old Yonge impacting traffic flow coming in from the east ?to the point where traffic queues are spilling back and impacting the rail crossing.?

?It is very difficult for motorists to turn right and left? due to limited gaps in traffic,? he said. ?In fact, vehicles exiting right from Old Yonge Street were observed climbing the curb lane because of vehicles trying to make a left out of old Yonge Street onto St. John's Sideroad and having to wait extensive periods of time. The left turns from St. John's Sideroad onto Old Yonge Street experience significant delays, upwards of more than four minutes in order to make that left turn because of the eastbound traffic flow. This is leading to driver frustration and impatience amongst drivers, resulting in aggressive driving and unsafe turns.?

Following last week's presentation to Council, lawmakers said that while they had some concerns regarding traffic problems in the surrounding neighbourhoods, they agreed the issue needed to be addressed.

?There are a few problematic intersections or challenges within the road network, not only on Regional roads, but also our roads, but we have talked many times [about] this one?? said Mayor Tom Mrakas. ?I thank you guys (the Regional staff) for coming up with some creative solutions for us to look at to possibly allow for better traffic flow in the area and hopefully the pilot does work and the residents and the community see the benefits to it.

?If it doesn't work out well, I guess we'll have to go back to the drawing board and you guys will have a lot more work to do at that time.?

Regarding the impact to nearby residents, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she was concerned that neighbours on Batson, for example, will have a very roundabout way of getting where they need to go, including home.

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson also raised questions, particularly on the status of the future Highway 404 interchange with

St. John's Sideroad, a project for which Council has long-advocated ? and could impact traffic pressures in this community.

Regional staff said the interchange is not yet on the 10-year horizon of the Provincial Government.

?Maybe they can at least throw a dart at the board and say maybe it's not in the 10-year capital [plan] but it's there at least in the 20 or 25,? said Councillor Thompson.

By Brock Weir