

Transportation plans push for new highway interchange, HOV lanes

By Brock Weir

Significant changes could be coming to Aurora's roads over the next 10 years to account for large scale growth in the area, if the Town gets its way.

Councillors are set this week to approve a revised Master Transportation study, which will be forwarded to the Region of York for consideration.

If you're tired of the commute and the traffic to get on Highway 404 at either the Wellington Street or Bloomington Road interchanges, Aurora will be pushing for Ontario's Ministry of Transportation and the Region of York to complete the construction of a highway exit at St. John's Sideroad by 2021 ?if feasible? to handle an anticipated influx of traffic when the 2C neighbourhoods are built out.

The study also anticipates widening of Wellington Street from four to six lanes from Leslie Street to Highway 404 within the next 10 years to account for dedicated transit and carpool lanes, and the same for Bloomington Road from Bayview to the 404.

Building on the recent installation of right light cameras at Yonge and Wellington Streets, recommendations in the revised report call for further installations along Yonge Street, at Aurora Heights Boulevard and Mark Street respectively.

The plan is not just dedicated to cars and transit. It also places a heavy emphasis on trails and other forms of ?active transportation? over the next decade, including nearly 13 km of identified trail routes, as well as a prioritized plan for addressing current gaps in the Town's sidewalk systems. These will be based on road reconstruction, timing, safety, and demand.

?The scope of the study was undertaken to assess traffic and transportation network issues and opportunities within Aurora as well as identifying opportunities for active transportation and integration,? said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure. ?This is to come on the heels of our sidewalks network as well as our trails master plan, which was completed a year and a half ago and finding other opportunities within our network and providing a road map for future infrastructure.

?During the study, we also implemented some of the more operational recommendations that came up. Of significant importance for the north-south travelling public is the Yonge Street corridor where we took the opportunity to optimize the signal timing integration of each traffic light north and south on that corridor including the Yonge and Wellington intersection.

?This was done in conjunction with the Region and actually resulted in some fairly substantial improvements in travel time within that corridor. Also, we installed pedestrian countdown signals at all the signalized intersections, which goes to enhancing pedestrian safety while crossing at those intersections.?

Speaking to Council, Mr. Simanovskis underscored that by the time the nearly 4,000 homes are built in the 2C area east of Mavrinac Boulevard over the next few years, there will be significantly increased traffic activity, including many jostling for highway access through the ?primary corridor? of Wellington Street to the busy highway.

The St. John's Sideroad Interchange has been on the books for years and it is hoped this will be, in part, an impetus for getting things sped along.

?Active transportation was a big part of the study and we're trying to identify a number of opportunities to create future linkages [in sidewalks and trails] where linkages don't exist today,? he said. ?With regards to our sidewalk gap study, we had completed an in-house gap study 3.5 years ago which identifies a number of projects in sidewalk gaps and those projects were programmed into our 10 year capital forecast out to 2017. We have reviewed those linkages and identified some of those linkages for this plan and identified them within the plan and they will be coming forward as part of the forecast. Some of them have been reprogrammed to be

further out based on future need.

?From a capital perspective, we have identified about \$11.5 million worth of sidewalk projects over the next 15 years, primarily funded from development charges. Capital funding is available in the current 10 year plan through 2017 based on the previously approved plan. That will be updated as we see our future growth of the 10 year plan coming forward this summer or fall. Boulevard cycling lanes will be proposed when the road connections warrant them and future projects will be requested through our 10 year plan as well as our capital budget requests coming through Council.?