

## Yonge Street Active Transportation Corridor moves forward amid budget questions

A multiuse path on the west side of Yonge Street in Aurora's south end is poised to move forward this month amid an increase in costs to make it happen.

Local lawmakers gave their tentative approval to adjust the budget for the Yonge Street Active Transportation Corridor by an additional \$2.53 million for a total of \$7.861 million.

The corridor will take the form of a multiuse path, accommodating pedestrians and cyclists, on the west side of Yonge from Bloomington Road northward to Industrial Parkway South, with a sidewalk running parallel on the east side of the street.

The Region of York has committed to fund 50 per cent of the construction costs for the multi-use path, up to \$2.8 million, but the increase in budget remained a sticking point at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting.

"Most of us, when we first got the report, were quite surprised, at least I was, to see the increase in the overall budget," said Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson, asking staff to share a memo on the costs. "For the most part, I thought we would have had a good grasp on the linear cost of sidewalk installations, we do them every year."

Expanding on the memo, staff said the project has "a lot of moving parts," not the least of which is the fact that Yonge Street is considered a Regional Road in this stretch.

"Unfortunately, we just don't have the real estate" on the east side, so we did the next best thing and moved forward with a sidewalk," staff said. "In order to be considered a multi-use path, you have to be four metres in width, so we do have room for that on the west side. We moved forward through a multi-criteria analysis and with input from the public through two picks to determine that that was the best use of funds to do a sidewalk on one side and a multiuse path on the west side."

"Right now, the multi-use path on the west side is a lot more technically difficult to construct. It's almost double the cost of the sidewalk. We also have to do some upgrades to the intersection, which is the Region intersection at Industrial Parkway South and Yonge because now we're going to have a crossing there." all these pieces are all movement. The extra complexity too is that once you tender [the project], it depends on who's available to bid, what the labour situation is at the time."

The Regional support of the project, replied Councillor Thompson, is a key factor in moving forward.

"From my perspective, it's important to move forward," he said. "I can tell you that I've had a number of residents from Delmanor specifically who have reached out to me over the last year or two, speaking to the fact that there is no sidewalk there. It's hard for them to traverse Yonge Street. They go north to the shopping plaza and they are eagerly waiting and anticipating a sidewalk " in this case, a multi-use path " being built because, for them, with their mobility challenges, it is extremely difficult sometimes to navigate. It's a longstanding piece in terms of our sidewalk policy to be able to do these connections. We have an opportunity to take advantage of the Region funding over and above it, so I support it."

Similarly, Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she has also had requests from residents for a navigable path in this area.

"I'm in full support for this program because active transportation is part of a connected community and every quality community is a connected community and the people in the south have not had the pedestrian opportunities that others have had, and it's growing there," agreed Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese. "I think we need to do something of this nature."

While Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo said he was in support of the project in and of itself, he said more scrutiny needs to be done on how estimates could have been so far off the mark.

‘I need a better understanding of how this happened, considering the roads are there and how much could York Region or any unknowns have come up that we couldn’t have figured out beforehand what the costing was, and how do we fix this? How do we get a better sense of? I’ve been here 14 years and it’s happened time and time again that we budget and then we have to increase by many percentages,’ he said. ‘Although we have many, many capital projects and the vast majority we get right, these big ones come back, and we’ve built many, many sidewalks and roads in this Town, I fail to see how this is an anomaly in budgeting and then the reality is we’re that far off.’

In supporting this project, Mayor Tom Mrakas noted that \$4.5 million of the project’s total cost will come from development charges earmarked for roads.

‘That’s exactly why we collect development charges,’ said Mayor Mrakas. ‘It is to build infrastructure in our community. This is much needed infrastructure in our community, so \$4.5 million from development charges and \$2.8 from the Region, I’ll be in favour of moving forward.’

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