

15

HIGHWAY 404 EXTENSION GREEN LANE TO MOUNT ALBERT ROAD STATUS UPDATE TOWNS OF EAST GWILLIMBURY AND GEORGINA

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends:

- 1. The recommendation contained in the following report, January 9, 2007, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works be adopted, subject to the addition of the Town of Newmarket in the recommendation as follows:**

“It is recommended that the Regional Clerk forward this report to the Minister of Transportation and the Clerks of the Towns of East Gwillimbury, Georgina and Newmarket.”

- 1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Regional Clerk forward this report to the Minister of Transportation and the Clerks of the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Georgina.

- 2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) Environmental Assessment Studies for the extension of Highway 404 north of Green Lane.

- 3. BACKGROUND**

The province has long had plans for the extension of Highway 404 north of Green Lane East to Highway 12 east of the York Region boundary. An Individual Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed in August 2002 and a route (*see Attachment 1*) was approved.

As part of the Ministry of Environment (MOE) Conditions of Approval of the Individual EA, the MTO is required to address approval requirements associated with the MTO *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities (2000)*. The study to complete the Class EA and preliminary design work is currently being undertaken by the MTO in two parts. The first part involves the portion of the Highway 404 Extension from Green Lane to north of Mount Albert Road (2.5 km). The second part involves the portion of the Highway 404 Extension from north of Mount Albert Road to Woodbine Avenue / Ravenshoe Road (11 km). As required by the Individual EA

Conditions of Approval and the *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities (2000)*, a Transportation Environmental Study Report (TESR) for each section is to be submitted to the MOE for public review and comment.

As part of the MTO's recently initiated studies, in May 2006 Regional Council received a presentation from MTO's project team and adopted the recommendations contained in the May 9, 2006 Transportation and Works Committee Report No. 6 subject to amendment of Clause 3, Recommendation 4. The report was prepared to seek direction from Regional Council on a number of issues which arose through discussions between Regional staff and MTO staff as the Ministry has the detail design of a number of components to allow for the imminent construction of the proposed extension.

The issues that required Council direction included:

- Potential Regional assistance to "accelerate" the construction of the interim extension.
- Distribution of traffic at the interim terminal of the Highway 404 extension.
- Request for Regional funding towards the Highway 404 crossing over Mount Albert Road.
- Doane Road crossing alignment and associated funding responsibilities.

Regional staff received direction from Regional Council on the outstanding issues as outlined in the Regional Council minutes of May 25, 2006, Report No. 3 of the Transportation and Works Committee (*see Attachment 2*). A copy of the report was forwarded to the MTO by the Regional Clerk.

On July 17, 2006 the MTO responded to the issues raised in York Region's Council Report in a letter sent to the Regional Clerk (*see Attachment 3*). The letter stated the MTO position on the four points outlined above. Of significance is the MTO position on the Mount Albert Road crossing, where their commitment fell short of providing a structure with a span adequate to accommodate a future four-lane roadway with sidewalks on both sides of the road. As stated in the amended recommendation number 3, this requirement must be satisfied and that the Region considers satisfying this requirement "related to provincially-approved growth, and therefore a provincial infrastructure responsibility".

During the period between May 2006 and November 2006 Regional staff continued to participate in the MTO's EA study through several meetings and correspondence to ensure that Regional Council's position was effectively communicated to the MTO. Through the preliminary design of the Highway 404 Extension additional issues began to emerge related to potential construction impacts to accommodate traffic resulting from the Ministry's desire to fully close Mount Albert Road for an entire construction season to facilitate construction of the grade separated crossing by lowering Mount Albert Road by up to 6 m. Despite repeated efforts, Regional staff was unable to secure commitments from MTO staff on the provision of an adequate bridge span to accommodate the

required future cross section or on provision of an acceptable traffic management strategy to best manage traffic impacts during construction.

On November 22, 2006 the MTO filed the Notice of Study Completion for the portion of the Highway 404 Extension from Green Lane to north of Mount Albert Road and submitted a Transportation Environmental Studies Report (TESR) to the MOE for public review and comment. York Region was sent a copy of the completion notice and the final Transportation Environmental Studies Report (TESR), which required that if concerns related to the TERS could not be resolved through discussion with MTO staff during the thirty calendar day review period that a written request shall be submitted to the MOE (by December 22, 2006) to bump up portions of the current study to an Individual EA.

In light of the:

- Firm direction provided by Regional Council for the Mount Albert Road crossing;
- Inability to secure commitments from MTO staff on two key unresolved issues related to the Mount Albert Road crossing of the Highway 404 Extension (as outlined in more detail below);
- EA approval process requirements for implementation of the project and deadline for response to the MOE no later than December 22, 2006;

Regional staff submitted a letter to the Minister of Environment on December 22, 2006 (see *Attachment 4*) outlining the Region's overall support for the long awaited and much needed infrastructure as well as the outstanding concerns that were unable to be resolved through discussion with MTO staff prior to the review period deadline.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Outstanding Unresolved Concerns

As a result of the impending deadline for comments, and to comply with the requirement to document outstanding issues relative to the proposed project within the 30 day review period, York Region provided a letter to the MOE to document two significant outstanding issues remaining to be addressed prior to the start of construction. The first issue pertains to adequacy of the proposed infrastructure and the second issue relates to mitigation of traffic impacts during construction.

4.1.1 Provision of Adequate Clear Span of the Overhead Bridge

As outlined in the May 25, 2006 Report No. 3 adopted by Regional Council, the grade-separated crossing proposed at Mount Albert Road must not preclude the Region's or Town's ability to implement future infrastructure that will be required to accommodate planned growth as directed in the provincial *Places to Grow legislation*. The proposed Highway 404 bridges should span a platform wide enough for four traffic lanes, two sidewalks and future utility requirements. This clear span is needed to address community needs in the vicinity of the Highway 404 crossing and future traffic resulting

from foreseeable, planned growth and should be constructed at the time of highway construction to avoid a considerable additional public expenditure that would otherwise result in the foreseeable future. As per Recommendation 3 of the May 25, 2006 Council report (*Attachment 2*), York Region considers these imminent requirements to be a provincial infrastructure responsibility and seeks MTO commitment in this regard.

4.1.2 Provision of Adequate Detour Routes During Construction

To save the cost of building a local detour, the MTO has proposed to close Mount Albert Road to traffic between Donlands Avenue and Woodbine Avenue for the duration of the construction of the new Highway 404 bridges over Mount Albert Road. The proposed 6 km long detour uses Woodbine Avenue, Green Lane East and Leslie Street. Although, York Region staff agree that this detour route is appropriate for long distance traffic, the needs of the residents of the existing community of Sharon located immediately west of the proposed closure, can be better accommodated through the continued use of Farr Avenue located approximately 300 m north of Mount Albert Road. Farr Avenue, and potentially Donlands Road, would however require some temporary operational improvements and likely some restorative pavement work following the Mount Albert Road re-opening.

York Region staff are prepared to recommend that Regional Council permit a full road closure of Mount Albert Road to facilitate construction of the new bridges provided:

- Farr Avenue between Woodbine Avenue and Donlands Avenue remain open during the period of the Mount Albert Road closure.
- MTO commit to mitigation of the construction period impacts by implementing road and operational improvements where required. These improvements may include, but are not limited to, temporary traffic signals at Woodbine Avenue at Farr Avenue and reconstruction/resurfacing of Farr Avenue and Donlands Avenue to the satisfaction of the York Region and the Town of East Gwillimbury.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no financial impact associated with the recommendation to direct MTO to be responsible for all costs of providing a widened structure opening under Highway 404 at Mount Albert Road. The Ministry's request for the incremental costs associated with this, if agreed to by the Region would result in an estimated capital contribution of at least \$350,000 (estimated 2005).

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The construction of the interim Highway 404 extension will provide substantial community and economic benefits to the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Georgina. The extension has long been a critical transportation infrastructure component of planning

done in both of these municipalities. Provided that provisions can be included in the initial construction to accommodate both existing and imminent community needs at the arterial roads crossings and connections to the extended highway, the extension will greatly improve the transportation servicing to the adjoining communities.

Temporary construction impacts can be expected in the vicinity of the highway and the adjoining arterial and local municipal roadways, and these will have to be managed. A number of potential road closings during construction are anticipated, and these will be the subject of future reporting to Transportation and Works Committee and Regional Council. Regional staff will continue to work with MTO staff to ensure that local municipal staff are consulted and involved during the preparation for the upcoming construction.

On December 22, 2006 the Town of East Gwillimbury submitted a letter to the MTO outlining Town concerns related to the same outstanding issues. Town staff is aware of and supports the letter submitted by York Region to the Minister of Environment.

7. CONCLUSION

The long-awaited extension of Highway 404 from Green Lane East to the interim termination point at Woodbine Avenue/Ravenshoe Road has raised a number of issues. It is recommended that Regional staff continue to work with MTO staff to ensure early construction of the extension.

York Region remains committed to working closely with the MTO and the MOE to ensure that the above mentioned Regional and Town concerns are adequately addressed either by way of a “bump-up” or the imposition of conditions.

For more information on this report contact Paul Jankowski, General Manager Roads Branch at extension 5901 in the Transportation and Works Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this clause were included in the agenda for the January 10, 2007 Committee meeting.)