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HIGHWAY 404 MID-BLOCK COLLECTOR ROAD CROSSING BETWEEN HIGHWAY 7 AND 16TH AVENUE

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, June 2, 2005, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The technically preferred alignment for a new four-lane crossing of Highway 404 between Highway 7 (Y.R. 7) and Sixteenth Avenue (Y.R. 73) as determined through the Transportation and Class Environmental Assessment study and shown on *Attachment 2*, be endorsed.
2. Following input from stakeholders and the public at the final Public Consultation Centre and completion of the Environmental Study Report (ESR), the Commissioner of Transportation and Works, in cooperation with the Towns of Richmond Hill and Markham, be authorized to file the ESR into the public record for the mandatory 30-day review period.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate copies of this report to the Clerks of the Towns of Markham and Richmond Hill and to the Ministry of Transportation.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the Transportation and Class Environmental Assessment Study (EA) for a new four-lane crossing of Highway 404 between Highway 7 and 16th Avenue. This EA is being undertaken jointly between the Region, and the Towns of Richmond Hill and Markham.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 General

At its meeting on May 22, 2003, Regional Council adopted recommendations contained in Clause 1 of Report No. 5 of the Transportation and Works Committee including the following:

“ Regional staff be authorized to undertake an Environmental Assessment (EA) study for the mid-block crossing of Highway 404 between Highway 7 and Sixteenth Avenue, subject to one third funding from each of the Towns of Richmond Hill and Markham.”

At its meeting on April 29, 2004, Regional Council adopted recommendations contained in Clause No. 1, Report No. 3 of the Transportation and Works Committee including the following:

“The proposal of URS Canada Inc. in the amount of \$142,337.82 (includes G.S.T.) be accepted for the conduct of the Transportation and Class Environmental Assessment Study for the Highway 404 Mid-Block Road Crossing between Highway 7 and 16th Avenue.”

The study area for the EA is shown on *Attachment 1*. As noted previously, the EA is being undertaken jointly between the Region, and the Towns of Richmond Hill and Markham. The 1/3 cost sharing formula is consistent with the Region's policy governing contribution toward new 400 series highway crossings and the current Development Charge Bylaw.

3.2 EA Study Background and Public Consultation

The EA Study which began in April 2004 included a Project Team with staff representatives from the Region, Town of Markham and the Town of Richmond Hill.

The first Public Consultation Centre (PCC) was held on June 2, 2004 at the Town of Richmond Hill Municipal Offices. The purpose of the first PCC was to present the need and justification component of the EA along with a broad range of planning alternatives. At the first PCC, three general alignment options for a new crossing of Highway 404 were also presented for initial public feedback (also shown on *Attachment 1*). The public comments received during the first PCC were generally supportive of the need for a Highway 404 crossing to alleviate traffic congestion in the study area.

The second and final PCC is scheduled for June 2005 and will present the technically preferred alignment and general design concept for the proposed Highway 404 crossing. Subsequent to this PCC and in consideration of public and stakeholder input received, the preferred alignment and design concept will be finalized and documented in the ESR.

The final step in the EA process is to file the ESR into the public record for a mandatory 30-day review period, in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Class EA. The ESR is scheduled to be completed and filed into the public record in September 2005.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 General

There were three general alignment options developed as part of the EA Study for the new Highway 404 crossing as shown on *Attachment 1*. An alignment immediately north of Highway 7 (GA-1), one south of Buttonville Airport (GA-3) and an alignment centred between the two (GA-2).

The alternative alignments were evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Technical
- Natural Environment
- Social/Economic
- Cultural Environment
- Cost

Both overpass and underpass alternatives were evaluated for each of the three general alignment options. Due to the vicinity of Beaver Creek, an underpass option for GA-2 and GA-3 is not recommended since the road would be lower than the creek and susceptible to flooding. In addition, an underpass alternative is not recommended since it would require staging and detour work on Highway 404 to provide for construction of a bridge under the existing highway and would be significantly more expensive. This would apply for any of the alignment options.

An overpass alternative is recommended since it would be less expensive, could be constructed with minimal impact to Highway 404 traffic and would eliminate the flooding risk noted above.

The proposed Highway 404 crossing is identified in the Region's 2005 10 Year Capital Roads Construction Program and is scheduled for construction in 2007. The Town of Markham and Richmond Hill have also included the work in their Capital Plans for 2007.

The traffic analysis undertaken as part of the EA included an assumed redevelopment scenario for the Buttonville Airport lands. When a specific development proposal is submitted by the landowner to the Town of Markham for planning approval, additional traffic analysis will be required in support of the development proposal and requirements for any additional transportation capacity that may be required can be assessed.

4.2 Alignment Options

The proposed alignment between Fulton Way and Valley Wood Drive (GA-2) is not recommended since Fulton Way does not connect directly to Leslie Street. Hence, this alignment would not provide optimal traffic benefit and connectivity with the area road network. In addition, there are existing physical constraints on the east side of Highway 404. There are two office buildings in close proximity to each other and any alignment between the two buildings would have a significant impact on the existing sites.

A crossing with a straight alignment between East Wilmot Drive and Allstate Parkway (GA-3) is not feasible since this alignment would encroach within the flight envelope of the Buttonville Airport. One option is to defer construction of the crossing until the Buttonville Airport lands redevelop. However, this option is not recommended since the timing for redevelopment of the airport land is uncertain and the need for traffic relief in the area is immediate.

An alternative alignment between East Wilmot Drive and Allstate Parkway that swings south to avoid the airport flight envelope was developed for consideration. Although the alignment alternative is technically feasible, the EA evaluation did not identify it as the preferred option. The main disadvantage is that there would be no direct connection to Woodbine Avenue and therefore would not provide optimal traffic benefit and connectivity with the area road network.

The proposed crossing between East Pearce Street and Centurian Drive (GA-1) was determined to have the greatest overall net benefit and is the technically preferred alignment for the following main reasons:

- This alignment provides a continuous east-west connection between Leslie Street to the west and Woodbine Avenue to the east.
- This alignment protects for a future connection to the Highway 404 northbound off-ramp extension being planned by the Town of Markham.
- The detailed alignment was developed to minimize adverse impacts while providing the greatest benefit to the transportation network.

The project team has been in contact with all directly affected landowners to present the alignment options and discuss issues particular to the landowners. The landowner input has been considered in development of detailed alignment options to minimize any adverse impact to existing or planned development and prior to the evaluation of the alternatives and determination of a technically preferred alignment.

On the west side of Highway 404, the technically preferred alignment was developed to minimize impact to the planned Campus 2000 Development which is a proposed high density residential site approved by the OMB in February 2005 (located between East Beaver Creek and Highway 404 and immediately south of the proposed crossing). On the east side of Highway 404, the technically preferred alignment was developed to minimize impacts to the existing development (Seneca College site to the south) while still providing for future development of the remaining vacant lands immediately to the north of the crossing (Great West Life lands).

Both the GA-2 and GA-3 alignment options would require a new crossing of Beaver Creek. Alignment option GA-1 does not require a new watercourse crossing but will require widening of the existing Seneca access to become the new four-lane roadway

with some impact on the man-made ponds just west of Allstate Parkway. The potential impacts to the natural environment for each of the alignment options are not considered significant and can be mitigated.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct cost implications associated with this report. The EA study is expected to be completed within budget and cost shared equally between the Region, Town of Richmond Hill and the Town of Markham.

The construction cost for the proposed Highway 404 crossing (excluding property cost) is estimated at \$15,000,000 and is proposed to be shared equally between the Region, Town of Richmond Hill and the Town of Markham. York Region's share is included in the current Development Charge Bylaw. The construction is currently programmed for 2007.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The proposed Highway 404 crossing will divert traffic from Highway 7 and 16th Avenue, thus resulting in improved conditions on these corridors. Further, the new crossover will facilitate access between the employment areas on both the east and west side of Highway 404. Improvement in traffic operations will result at many of the intersections in the study area.

7. CONCLUSION

The Class EA for the Highway 404 road crossing between Highway 7 and 16th Avenue is nearing completion. The study recommends a new 4-lane bridge overpass of Highway 404 as illustrated on *Attachment 2*.

The second and final PCC is scheduled for June 2005 and will present the technically preferred alignment and general design concept for the proposed Highway 404 crossing. Subsequent to this PCC and in consideration of public and stakeholder input received, the preferred alignment and design concept will be finalized and documented in the ESR. The ESR is scheduled to be completed and filed into the public record in September 2005.

There are many advantages to constructing a new Highway 404 crossing north of Highway 7. Benefits such as diversion of traffic from Highway 7 and 16th Avenue, thus improving conditions along these corridors, facilitate access between the employment areas both east and west of Highway 404 and improved traffic operations at many intersections in the study area.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)