

Toll lanes included in 427 extension plans

By Bill Rea

The proposed extension to Highway 427 is going to include provisions for toll lanes.

That was among the details that came out of a public open house session in Vaughan last week. It was hosted by the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

Project Manager Iqbal Muhammad said high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes would be an extension of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes.

'It would give a choice to other people,' he commented.

Chris Copeland, an environmental planner with MTO, said there are provisions for HOT lanes, but there's been no decision yet on whether they will be used, or the technology involved. 'We don't know what it is yet,' he said.

The Province is maintaining that HOT lanes are an important part of the transportation strategy. It was announced in December that MTO has started long-term planning for the implementation of HOT lanes all over the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

HOT lanes will work roughly the way HOV lanes do. Vehicles with enough occupants will not be charged a toll. The hope is HOT lanes will promote behavioural changes, encouraging people to form carpools. That should reduce congestion, since every carpool takes at least one vehicle off the road.

The plan is to extend the road to Major Mackenzie Drive. There have been calls that the road should go further north, but Muhammad said the current project is only looking as far as Major Mackenzie.

The actual project is going to involve work on the stretch from Albion Road to Major Mackenzie (roughly 10.6 kilometres).

Information at the meeting stated MTO believes the extension will improve the ability of the provincial transportation network to accommodate future travel demand, improve traffic flow between Peel and York Regions, solve traffic congestion issues and improve the flow of goods, provide greater truck accessibility to and from the Canadian Pacific Intermodal Facility, and provide commuter with additional options and connection.

The hope is construction can start sometime in 2017, but Copeland could not narrow that down any more. They are looking to have the work completed in 2021.

There have been previous environmental assessments dealing with the proposed extension. The latest, completed in January, calls for eight lanes from Highway 7 to Rutherford Road, and six lanes north to major Mackenzie. There are also plans to widen the highway from a point south of Albion Road to Highway 7 from six to eight lanes, with provisions to have two of those lanes (one northbound and one southbound) available for HOV or HOT. The stretch south of Highway 7 would have a concrete barrier median in the middle, with a storm sewer underneath. There would also be a concrete barrier and storm sewer on the road north to Rutherford. There would be a median ditch north of that.

The plan is to have modifications to various existing structures at the CN Rail crossing, Albion Road, Steeles Avenue, Highway 407 and Highway 7 to allow for the road widening. There will also be three new interchanges constructed. They will be at Langstaff Road, Rutherford and Major Mackenzie.

York Region is planning to widen Major Mackenzie to six lanes. That road connects with Coleraine Drive at Regional Road 50, and that is part of the Bolton Arterial Road (BAR).