

Halton Hills Mayor welcomes news of Connecting Links program

By Lisa Tallyn
ltallyn@theifp.ca

An announcement that the province is re-establishing the Connecting Links funding program is seen as welcome news by Mayor Rick Bonnette.

The province is committing \$15 million annually to the new program, which will help municipalities pay the construction and repair costs for connecting links— municipal roads that connect communities to provincial highways and border crossings.

It will be designed to complement the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which provides small, rural and northern communities with funding to build and repair critical infrastructure.

The previous Connecting Links program was cancelled in 2013.

"While the devil is in the details, it's encouraging to hear that the government is going to re-establish a program that they cancelled without prior notice and that placed an unfair financial burden on municipalities," said Bonnette. "Halton Hills pushed

back on this decision and I'm glad to see there is some movement in the right direction. We are looking forward to working with Ministry on the program for implementation in the spring of 2016."

"The first step is to work with the Ministry to develop the details of the program that will meet our needs," said Chris Mills, the Town's Director of Infrastructure Services.

A few of the Town's major projects that could be considered for funding under Connecting Links, announced Monday, Mills said include bridge rehabilitation over CNR at Main St. N. (approximately \$750,000), asphalt resurfacing on Mill St. in Acton (\$2.4 million) and asphalt resurfacing and intersection improvements on Guelph St. between Maple Ave. and Mountainview Rd. (\$1.5 million). Mills said all cost estimates would have to be updated.

Minister of Transportation Steven Del Duca said the provincial government is "creating jobs and increasing connectivity across our province."

"These highways are essential



An aerial view of Guelph St., a Connecting Link through Georgetown.

links in many communities, they carry our loved ones, and they carry our economy. This is further proof of our government's commitment to making travel and quality of life better for Ontario families," said Del Duca.

Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, said the Province listened when municipalities told them they wanted it to introduce a new Connecting Links program.

"We are committed to consulting closely with our municipal partners to ensure the program returns stron-

ger than ever, so we can improve infrastructure across the province and sharpen Ontario's competitive edge," said Duguid.

"The cancellation of the original Connecting Links program created huge problems for municipalities like the Town of Halton Hills and the Township of Centre Wellington," said Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnett. "Implicitly, the government is admitting that they made a mistake by cancelling the program in the first place."

He said the previous program had

provided municipalities with a stable source of funding for up to 90% of the cost of necessary road and bridge repairs on provincial highways passing through built up areas.

"I want to thank our municipal leaders for speaking up. Many of our elected councillors in Wellington-Halton Hills have been persistently vocal about their disappointment with the Government's decision."

He's cautiously optimistic the program has been restored but warns the details are still sketchy.

"Despite this announcement, the government has left a lot of questions unanswered," said Arnett. "Is this announcement new money, or is it just a shell game and a reallocation of previously promised funding to municipalities? Will the Government still be funding 90% of the costs like it used to? They haven't said."

He also said the \$15-million commitment is considerably less than what the province spent in some previous years under the old program and he hopes the \$15 million is only a start.

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