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Proposed Bridge on Burnhamthorpe still up in the air

Residents and Conservation Halton united in opposition to mid-valley crossing

By MANDI HARGRAVE

Members of RAND (Residents Association North of Dundas) and residents of Oakville who have been living on Burnhamthorpe Road for about 35 years oppose the proposed building of a bridge on it that could become a main route for commuters.

"The bridge and the road is a combined issue for RAND. It's not really just a single issue. They've changed Burnhamthorpe Road to a regional road from a town local road," said Laura Knowlton, President of RAND. "So now they want to move people through the community as well as to the community. They want the road to work for both local and commuter type traffic. We don't think that our road is suitable for commuter traffic for now or the future community," she said.

Bob Edmonson, Director of Water Shed Management Services for Halton Conservation said that their main concern is the sensitivity of the area.

"This is a very sensitive area through this section of the 16 Mile Creek valley. It's an ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) in the Region's official plans. We're concerned with more fragmentation of the valley with another bridge crossing," Edmonson said.

He also said that the Region has identified the need for additional crossing.

"They've done their traffic studies and so forth. When you look down the future they are indicating that the volumes indicate that there will be another requirement for a crossing somewhere in that area. The big question is where," said Edmonson.

He said the Region is trying to decide where the bridge should go between the 407 and Dundas.

"One of our concerns is the less fragmentation of the valley system the better. So probably something that's closer to the 407, closest to Dundas would be preferred. But you have to look at what it is going through and what are the landing points," said Edmonson. "There are natural features along the woodlots and so forth along the Sixteen Mile Creek that we would like to avoid. Ideally we'd find the area, from our stand point at least, where the environmental impact is minimized and try to keep the main part of the valley intact without another disturbance in the middle of it."

Knowlton agrees that the bridge needs to go somewhere that would have the least impact on the environment but also an area that would have less social and financial impact.

"They've determined through their EA (Economic Analysis) process that they need a bridge. We've always said that if they've decided they needed a bridge that we felt that the least environmental, social and financial impact we felt, (which are the three components of the EA that they're doing) would be to take the bridge adjacent to the 407," Knowlton said. "The reason for that is because the valley has already been disturbed there because of the recent building of the 407 and it removes the bridge from the community."

Both Edmonson and Knowlton have said that there is another proposal being considered. It is to build a new Burnhamthorpe road that is located further to the North and would be built to accommodate commuter traffic.

Edmonson pictures it looking like Britannia going into Mississauga. He said it wouldn't be a highway but it would have a number of lanes to allow for many vehicles. He also said he would presume that like Britannia there wouldn't be a lot of driveways or businesses off the road to allow for better traffic flow. It would be like a wider Dundas except with a speed limit of 60km because it would be a major arterial road.

Knowlton said, "It wouldn't disturb the existing or future community and could service the new employment areas that would be to the North as well. It would keep those people that go into those areas for employment out of the community rather than bringing truck traffic down into the community."

The residents are concerned about having their lifestyles destroyed by the bridge due to pollution, noise and congestion, which would make it an unsafe community said Knowlton.

Edmonson said he thinks the whole area of North Oakville will be urbanized with residential development and employment lands with a population increase of about 55,000.

"The road itself presumably will be serving the people that will live there and allow for the additional East/West movement. Everybody is going to be affected by the development. Anybody living in that area now is going to be urbanized from this. It's going to be one of the infrastructure roads that will be needed in order to service the area," he said.

He thinks the bridge would be good for the community because it would allow people to get across a large area since East of 16 Mile Creek is a residential area and West of it will become employment land and the road would allow people to travel through the large neighborhood.

Edmonson said that right now the Region is going through the environmental process to determine the impact on it as well as the social impact of the residents living in the area. He said that the time frame right now is 15 years out but the bridge could come sooner.

Knowlton said the problem is that they want to reserve space years before anything is built.

"They have set aside more land in this Region, double the land that they have anywhere else. There is obviously room for the bridge and the road for the new Burnhamthorpe. You might want to call it the new East/West Corridor because we're trying to get away from being called Burnhamthorpe as we don't want them to utilize the road."

Knowlton said sighing, "They seem to be keeping us in the dark until this is all sort of said and done. I think the problem is that the perception from most people, all of the stakeholders and the people who have been involved in the process feel that they've already determined the outcome but they're just not going to say anything until the EA is completed. But they insist that they're letting the process make the determination," Knowlton said.

The next meeting regarding the proposed bridge will be in October with a subsequent meeting in January and the location for the bridge should be announced in February 2006 said Knowlton.