



Ontario Minister of Transportation Donna Cansfield and Essex MPP Bruce Crozier talk with reporters Aug. 1 in Windsor about plans to alleviate traffic on Walker Road. The provincial and federal governments are funding construction of an underpass at Walker Road and Grand Marais Road and are also working together on plans for a new border crossing in Windsor. Cansfield says a new border crossing will be in place by 2013.

Minister announces Walker Road project, Highway 3 widening

BY SARAH FISHER

Starting in 2007 Essex residents who travel to Windsor for work may need to consider an alternate route to Walker Road. They can also expect new lanes for Highway 401 and Highway 3 and a new border crossing in place by 2013, according to Minister of Transportation Donna Cansfield.

Cansfield toured Windsor Aug. 1 with Essex MPP Bruce Crozier. The minister gave a short press conference at the corner of Walker Road and Grand Marais Road about a plan to divert traffic under the railway crossing at the intersection. About \$100 million of the \$300 million in federal and provincial money promised for highway expansion and road improvement projects in the region have been spent, Cansfield said.

"I'm coming on a regular basis to Windsor to make sure the people of Windsor know that this is a top priority for our government," the minister said about the projects.

Crozier, Windsor West MPP Sandra Pupatello and Cansfield took a helicopter tour of the area about three weeks ago. Cansfield announced Aug. 1 that a portion of Walker Road would be closed early in 2007 a few hundred metres on either side of the intersection of Grand Marais Road while construction begins on an underpass for motorists under the railway crossing.

Construction of the underpass is expected to cost \$50 million.

In order for the underpass to be built, the utilities at the intersection have to be moved. That task was started about a month ago. Traffic may be

moved to one lane in both directions because of that initiative, but the road will not be closed during that project, ministry of transportation employees say.

Tenders for the underpass and rail bridge will be requested at the end of this year. Starting in early 2007, Walker Road will be closed for 18 to 24 months a few hundred metres north and south of the underpass.

The project is receiving federal and provincial funding because of its connection with the border initiative. Traffic is bottlenecked at the location in part because of delays caused by a new Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System. Aside from the new security issues, the City of Windsor estimates that 26 "long trains" pass through the intersection every day.

MTO representatives understand many people confuse the closing of part of Walker Road for the underpass construction with a plan to widen the entire road. The results of a 2001 environmental study completed for the City of Windsor indicated Walker Road needed to be widened from Riverside Drive to the city limits. According to Wade Bondy, an infrastructure engineer for the City of Windsor, while that portion of Walker Road is closed, the city will oversee a project to add a turn lane south of the underpass for a few hundred metres. Bondy said the city would like to widen the entire roadway, but because of the cost involved, widening will have to take place over time in several small projects.

"There is a plan, just not right now," Bondy said about widening Walker Road. "Because of the magnitude of

the project it has to be split into little chunks that we can afford."

At the press conference, Crozier took the opportunity to mention plans to widen Highway 3. An engineering report about widening Highway 3 from Windsor to Leamington is currently being studied, Crozier said. The Essex MPP said he hopes construction will begin in the spring of 2007. The cost of the widening endeavour is estimated at between \$24 million and \$30 million.

"An actual design is being undertaken and will certainly take the rest of this fall," Crozier said. "I hope in October to announce a starting date for the improvement of the highway, as well as the phases, because it's likely that this will be done in four phases. I don't want to make a local announcement until I'm given a start date and a date when everything will be built."

The start of a widening project on Highway 401 from Windsor to Tilbury was announced last month. The highway will be expanded from three lanes to six lanes and is being funded by the provincial and federal governments. The project includes five phases. On June 22, Cansfield announced the start of the third phase between Highway 77 and Essex County Road 27. The 10-kilometre stretch is expected to cost \$61 million.

Cansfield promised Aug. 1 that the Windsor border crossing plan was getting the attention of 41 people in government. She said she has also met with legislators in Michigan and expects that a specific border location will be identified and construction will be completed on a new border crossing by 2013.

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