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# \$80 million project to widen Highway 3 announced

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

By 2014, Highway 3 will be widened to four lanes from Leamington to Windsor, Essex MPP Bruce Crozier announced Oct. 13. Construction on the three-phase, \$80 million project is expected to begin next summer.

It's a plan Crozier has been working towards since he took office in 1993.

"I've continually kept on governments," Crozier told a group of local politicians and members of the media gathered at the Essex Civic Centre. "My county colleagues and I have been persistent."

Traffic on the highway has increased by more than 30 percent over the past decade, he said.

A detailed design on the first phase of the project is expected to be complete by next spring. It's a 6.9 kilometre route running east of County Road 34 near Maidstone toward County Road 8 in Essex. The project has a price tag of roughly \$18 million with a construction contract tendered for June.

The two new lanes will be on the south side of the

existing highway lanes.

It is expected to take two years to complete.

Ministry of Transportation senior project engineer Michael Swim said the route has the heaviest flow of traffic.

It's become a "dangerous piece of property," said Essex Mayor Ron McDermott.

"Thirty-five years ago we didn't have the traffic we have now," McDermott said. "This will improve the safety of our residents."

Phase two, a 6.4 kilometre stretch west of Walker Road to County Road 34 near Maidstone, will cost roughly as much as the first phase.

It is also expected to take two years, Swim said.

The third and final phase of the project is the longest and most expensive.

The 20.2 kilometre stretch will run eastward from County Road 8 in Essex to County Road 34 in Kingsville to connect with the Leamington bypass. Swim said it may take as long as three years to complete and cost \$36 million.

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Essex MPP Bruce Crozier presents the design plans for the widening of Highway 3 to four lanes from Leamington to Windsor during a press conference Oct. 13. Construction on the \$80 million project is expected to begin next summer.

# Town addresses debt concerns

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Essex town council responded to public concerns of fiscal mismanagement and increasing debt Oct. 16, with a detailed presentation highlighting decreases in debt since the beginning of the term.

Town Treasurer Donna Hunter compiled the report after receiving personal phone calls from residents with concerns about a \$22 million debt.

Hunter said every tax bill that was issued contained a summary of the amounts outstanding for the council's term ending Dec. 31 of this year.

Hunter said no new debt

has been initiated in the past three-year term.

In addition, debt per household and per person is down since 2003, she said.

Hunter's presentation noted that a \$9.2 million increase for sanitary sewer upgrades and an expansion of the Essex Sanitary Sewer Plant in 2005, accounted for much of the debt accumulation outlined in the tax bills.

Ward 3 councillor Bill Caixeiro responded by saying it is "debt that had to be incurred" and will be paid for by the town's new housing developments.

"It is essential for growth," he added.

Caixeiro added that the costs are paid for by Ward 1

sanitary sewer users only and not from property taxes.

Debt paid through property taxes, Hunter explained, is down \$2 million from the start of this council's term.

Hunter went on to note that of the \$22.3 million, \$19.2 million is not paid through property taxes but through user rates.

Hunter added that no new property tax supported debt has been incurred since the previous term of council.

Ward 2 Councillor Richard Meloche said there is a lot of misinformation circulating throughout the municipality that has caused concern among resi-

dents about council operations.

"I think many people are confused with the information," Meloche said.

Caixeiro said any claims that council has increased debt are false.

In an effort to clarify any misinformation among residents, Hunter said the debt presentation will be posted on the town's website.

"We'll try to get it out as much as we can," she said.

Deputy Mayor Percy Dufour said it is council's responsibility to pass on the information door-to-door, and has included the debt information in his campaign brochure.

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