

Wider Hwy. 404 could get longer this month

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Another section of Hwy. 404 is now easier to travel and the latest extension of the highway is almost ready to open.

Ministry of Transportation spokesperson Will MacKenzie said the 404's newest span from Davis Drive to Green Lane (Herald Road) in Newmarket may open, though still unfinished, to traffic this month.

"The weather's going to be the big factor," MacKenzie said this week, adding that final paving and electrical work will begin this spring.

"The project is not going to be completed but it will be usable, and that will help a lot of people."

Also a relief to many — the ministry estimates 110,000 vehicles a day reach the southern end of the region on the 404 — is the widening of the highway from four to six lanes between Major MacKenzie Drive and Aurora Road. MacKenzie said the ministry is now confident the highway has the capacity it needs for several years.

Widening "should make a difference," he concluded, "but at the same time, what sort of growth are you seeing in some of the communities alongside the highway?"

Calculating the time saved for the average commuter, especially before new traffic counts are taken, "is like trying to nail Jello to a tree," MacKenzie suggested.

The extra lanes between

Major MacKenzie and Aurora Road opened bit by bit over the course of the fall, the project's scheduled completion date.

Finishing up at the CN rail crossing near Bloomington Road will restrict travel to two lanes each way for about three weeks this spring or summer.

Widening over the crossing is the most difficult part of the project, and construction was not all finished in time, MacKenzie said. "We did some temporary work to take it through the winter with all lanes open."

There's no word on a proposed further extension of the highway to Ravenshoe Road in Georgina, which is still under study by the ministry of the environment.

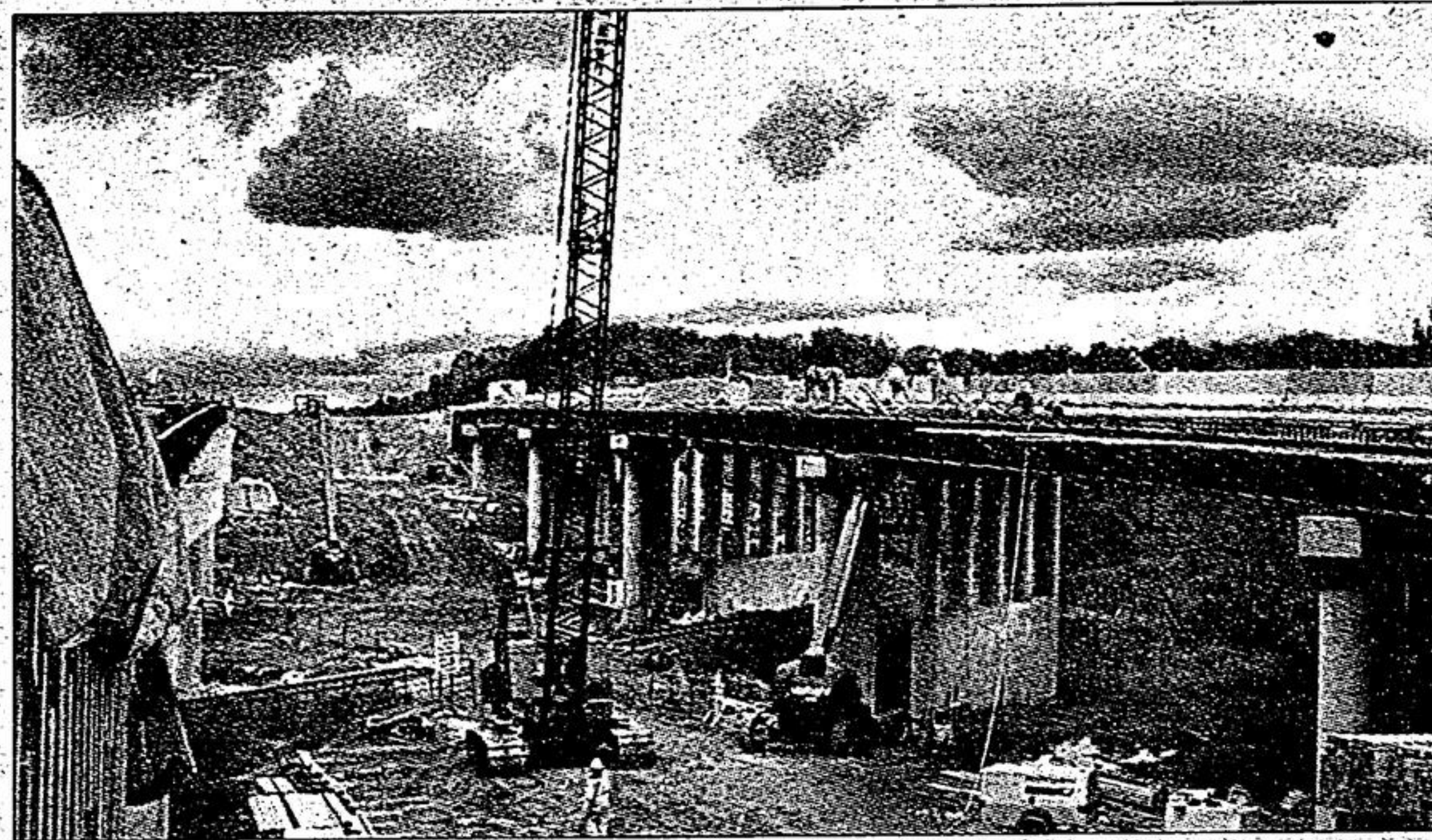


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Construction of additional lanes on Hwy. 404 is shown near Bloomington Road last fall. A new section, from Davis Drive to Green Lane, could open this month.

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Feds expected to chip in for transit

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"The total net capital investment for the region ranges from \$4.2 billion to \$5.3 billion," he said.

That amounts to \$140 million to \$180 million a year and would require a 1-per-cent increase in funding each year over 30 years, he said.

The region is banking on partnerships to help fund its goals.

Those may include public-private partnerships. The region has called for expressions of interest from companies as it examines the viability of forming a consortium to design, build and operate rapid transit systems on heavily travelled corridors, such as Yonge Street and Hwy. 7.

A short list of bidders was to have been selected last week.

The province has come on board with its decision to reassume full funding for GO Transit. That's \$11.7 million York Region can now devote to its transit needs.

Meanwhile, the federal government appears ready to step up, as well. Finance Minister Paul Martin alluded to funding opportunities in his last budget and, on Thursday, indicated infrastructure funds will be made available to municipalities for transit investment.

"Even though we're going to put these huge projects into place over the next five, 10, 15 years...it won't have a dra-

matic monetary impact on (taxpayers)," Fisch said.

The master plan reviewed Wednesday recommends:

- Significant increases in GO Transit service, with a concentration on rail corridors and the construction of as many as 15 train stations;

- The creation of a sophisticated rapid transit system to serve commuters in York and improve links with the Toronto Transit Commission;

- Express bus lanes on the 400 series of highways to promote transit across regional boundaries;

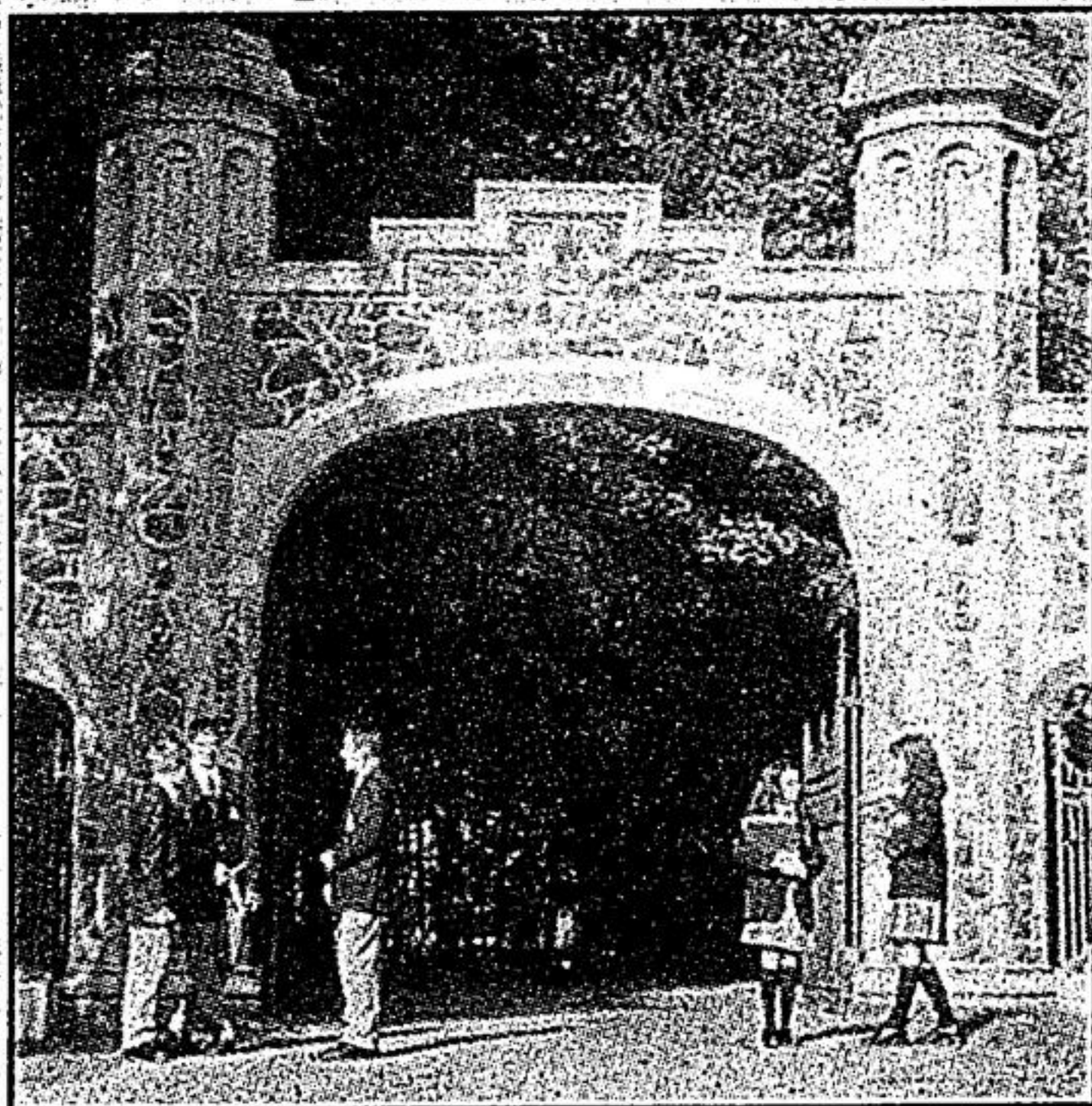
- Significant investment in major regional

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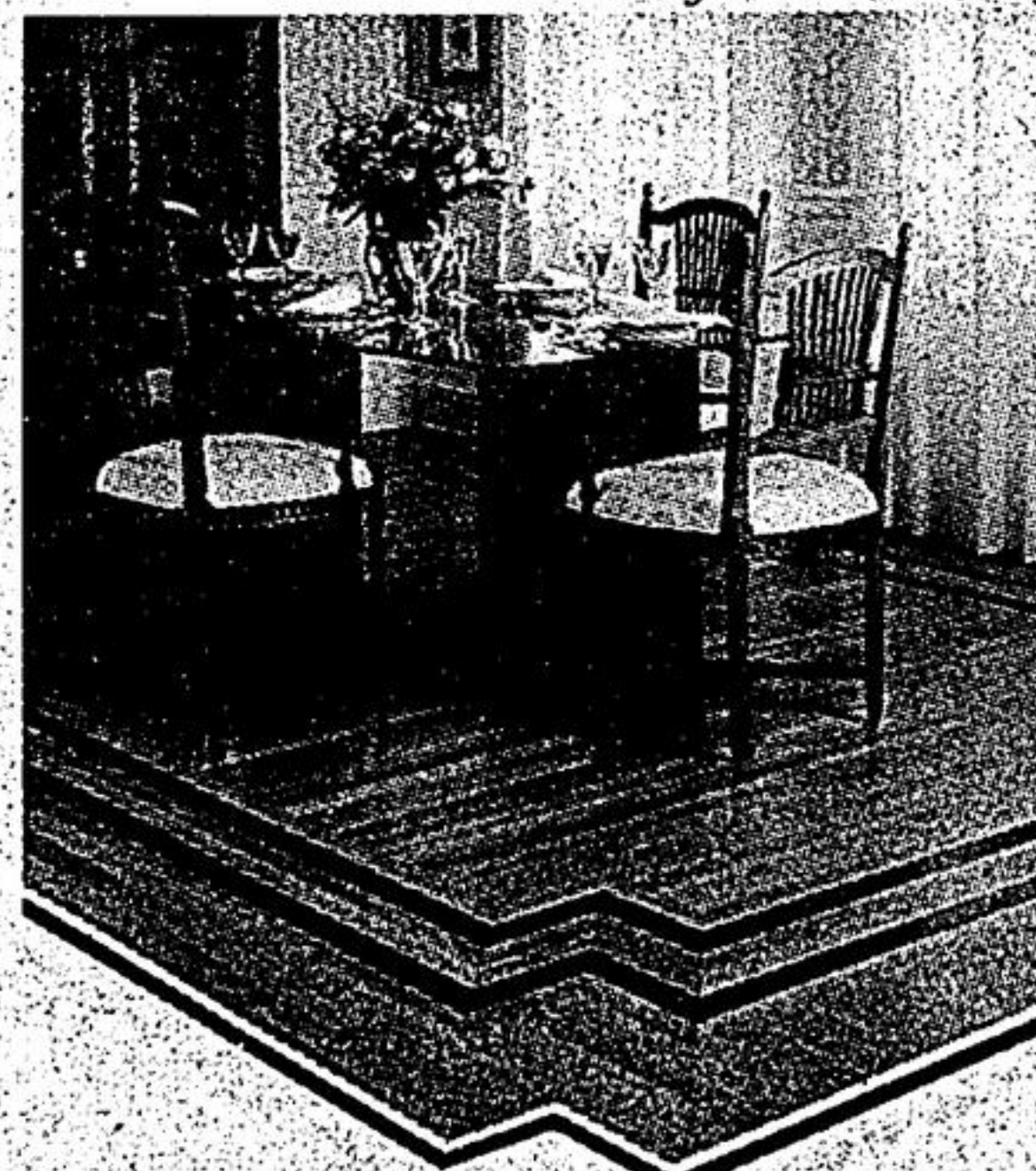
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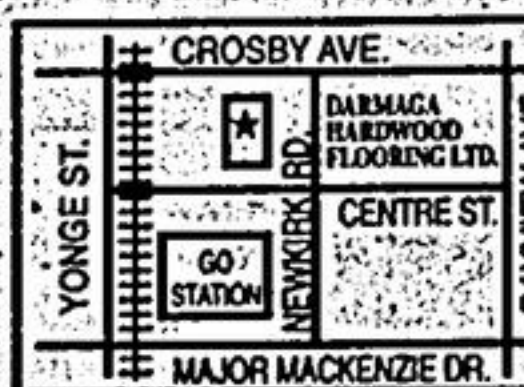
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