

STAFF REPORT: ENGINEERING AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT



REPORT TO: Council
MEETING DATE: March 12, 2007
REPORT NO.: EPW.07.21 (Revised)
SUBJECT: South Eastern Georgian Bay Area
 Transportation Plan
PREPARED BY: Reg Russwurm, Director, Engineering and
 Public Works

A. Recommendations

THAT Council instruct staff to collaborate with the adjacent local municipalities and the Counties of Grey and Simcoe to develop an interim solution to transportation problems facing the area municipalities, and

THAT Council retain R.J. Burnside & Associates to undertake the preparation of the South Eastern Georgian Bay Area Municipal Transportation Plan or similarly worded document for an upset fee limit of \$20,000.00 as the Town of The Blue Mountains contribution.

B. Background

The existing Highway 26 corridor is heavily congested during peak traffic periods. To avoid the congestion, drivers are using the County and local road systems as alternate routes.

The majority of visitors to the area arrive via Highway 26, passing through Clearview Township and Collingwood on route to the ski areas in the Town of The Blue Mountains in the winter, and the beach areas in Wasaga Beach during the summer. Another significant source of visitors is south western Ontario who extensively use the county road system.

Over the past few years, the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has been preparing the Highway 26 Corridor Collingwood / Stayner Area Design Report but has yet to finalise the document. During the study, the area municipalities voiced significant opposition to the draft study conclusions. Recently the MTO indicated that they wished to re-start this study and have shown an interest in helping the area municipalities resolve the traffic problems. For this reason, the area municipalities have met internally to discuss how they can work together to bring a regional solution to a regional problem. To this end the Town of Collingwood, Township of Clearview and the Town of The Blue Mountains agreed to collectively retain R.J. Burnside to prepare the plan currently known as the South Eastern Georgian Bay Transportation Plan.

The municipalities that make up the South Eastern Georgian Bay area are:

- Towns of Collingwood and Wasaga Beach and the Township of Clearview in Simcoe County

- The Town of The Blue Mountains in Grey County

There are several challenges to resolving the area transportation issues. They are:

- No less than seven road authorities (i.e. MTO, Collingwood, Clearview, Blue Mountain, Wasaga Beach, Simcoe County and Grey County) are involved in the area roads. Each road authority has its own priorities and schedules to provide improvement to the road network. However, given the small geographical area, it is difficult for the six road authorities apart from the MTO, to individually carry out improvements that would significantly increase the road capacity of the area network.
- Highway 26 from Stayner (Township of Clearview) westerly to Thornbury (Town of The Blue Mountains) has insufficient capacity to carry existing traffic. In order to bypass the congested route, motorists are using alternate municipal and county roads to reach their destinations. This results in significant traffic infiltration onto the local road network; traffic that was not expected by adjacent residents and on local roads that were not originally designed to accommodate these traffic demands.
- There is significant convergence of traffic in the Collingwood / Blue Mountain Resort area and the existing local and county road systems are incapable of effectively passing the traffic.
- Although the MTO has several projects presently underway, it is anticipated that it will require many years to complete the construction of these projects. In that time, traffic volumes will increase significantly, thereby magnifying the capacity problems on the provincial and local road networks. As a result, the significant tourism attractions and development in the area will suffer due to the motorist's frustration with the road congestion along the existing Highway 26 corridor and overloading on county and local roads. Economic growth will be limited by the road system.

All six area municipalities recognize that the planning, design, property acquisition and construction processes required to implement the MTO Highway 26 improvements will be challenging. Although all area municipalities support MTO efforts in this regard, they recognize that serious traffic problems and area wide negative economic impacts from both a local and provincial perspective will result if interim measures are not provided now to alleviate road congestion. Therefore the area municipalities are preparing the South Eastern Georgian Bay Transportation Plan as a means to demonstrate to the MTO that the area municipalities are working together to come up with a regional solution to regional problems.

The area municipalities have met with the MTO at a staff level and have received encouragement to prepare the plan and to present an executive summary to Honourable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Transportation on March 19, 2007.

Given that the construction of any by-passes will be some time away and that the traffic situation is critical, the South Eastern Georgian Bay Transportation Plan will undertake a high level screen of traffic movements and will propose candidate county and local roads that can be enhanced by capital or operational improvements. It will be proposed that MTO help fund studies and capital improvements of local and county roads that alleviate traffic congestion on Highway 26. One such study will be the Comprehensive Transportation Strategic Plan that

the Town has planned for 2007. The County of Grey has agreed to fund one third of the study but MTO has not made a financial commitment as of the preparation of this report.

R.J. Burnside has been asked to prepare the South Eastern Georgian Bay Transportation Plan because this firm has been extensively involved in transportation issues for the area, is well acquainted with the participant's concerns and the short time frame necessitated a quick turnaround on the paper.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan (Statement(s) identifying how actions further the goals of the Strategic Plan)

The action aids the Town in meeting Strategic Goal #1 "Managing growth to ensure the ongoing health and prosperity of the community" and specifically Strategic Action "1.3 Advocate with other governments on transportation issues affecting the Town".

D. Budget Impact (cc: Treasury if required)

The 2007 Budget contains \$100,000 for consulting fees for the Comprehensive Transportation Strategic Plan. The cost of this assignment will be paid from this capital project. In the event that the remaining funds are inadequate for the Strategic Plan, an appropriate funding plan will be proposed.

E. Attached (Relevant documentation not personal information about an identifiable person)

None.

Respectfully submitted,

Reg Russwurm
Director, Engineering and Public Works