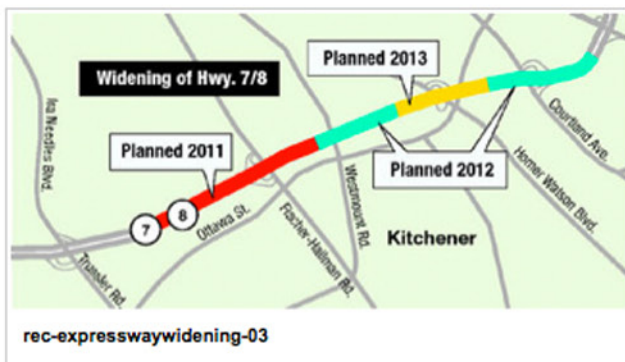


## Expressway widening long overdue

By Jeff Outhit, Road Ahead



Ontario plans this spring to start widening the Highway 7/8 expressway between Courtland Avenue and Fischer-Hallman Road in west Kitchener. The \$150-million project will take three years to complete. Construction will unavoidably disrupt traffic. Expect lane and interchange disruptions on the expressway and on nearby roads.



Still, this is welcome news for an overwhelmed highway that regularly backs up.

Some concerns: The Ministry of Transportation contends traffic is not busy enough past Fischer-Hallman to widen all the way west to Ira Needles Boulevard. The expansion will fall short of Ira Needles by just over one kilometre.

"Totally, totally short-sighted," warns Coun. Jim Wideman of Kitchener. He points out that local planners aim to shift traffic onto Ira Needles from Fischer-Hallman.

"By the time it's built we're going to have a bottleneck," he complains. "It's an incomplete project, pure and simple."

Wideman is also displeased the province is not widening the Fischer-Hallman overpass. "It needs to be wider," he said. "You pay now or you pay later. You pay now, it's cheaper."

The province argues the bridge does not need replacing because it's in good shape and because current lanes can be squeezed to handle traffic.

Expressway expansion includes:

Widening to six lanes with the addition of a median barrier. This will keep out-of-control cars from crashing into oncoming traffic as happens today across the grassy median.

Remodelled interchanges at Courtland, Homer Watson Boulevard and Fischer-Hallman.

Better lighting and extended noise barriers.

Neighbours challenged the province over traffic noise and the province has largely responded. In reviewing its policies, it has agreed to shield Toynbee Crescent, to shield Avalon Place, and to extend noise protection west of Fischer-Hallman.

However, some areas will remain without costly noise barriers. Government policy states noise protection is a developer responsibility in neighbourhoods approved after 1977.

Ontario and the City of Kitchener are considering sharing costs for noise barriers at Kehl Street and at a seniors' residence next to the Concordia Club.

Plans for the Fischer-Hallman interchange include the welcome addition of an eastbound on-ramp. This will help ease the traffic mess near the Sunrise shopping centre.

The province is supporting plans for twin roundabouts by 2015 at Ottawa Street South and the Homer Watson interchange. This will provide a much-needed second eastbound on-ramp from Ottawa Street.

Expressway widening is long overdue and there's a lot to like in the plan. Brace for traffic headaches when construction launches.

Jeff Outhit can be reached at 519-895-5642 or [jouthit@therecord.com](mailto:jouthit@therecord.com).