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High occupancy toll lanes coming to Hwy. 427 within five years



Night drive

Headlights and taillights light the night in this image of Hwy. 404. The roadway is being eyed for new HOV lanes in both directions from Hwy. 407 all the way north to Green Lane in Newmarket. The province is expected to announce others will be able to use the lanes by paying a toll.

Vaughan Citizen

By Lisa Queen

Hwy. 404 isn't on the list, at least for now, but high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes are coming to Hwy. 427 within the next five years.

New HOT lanes, with electronic tolling, which allow drivers with no passengers to pay to travel in high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, will be implemented on the highway from south of Hwy. 409 to north of Rutherford Road by 2021, Ministry of Transportation spokesperson Ajay Woozageer said in an email.

The 427 is one of only two highways in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area identified for HOT lanes this week by Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca, also the MPP for Vaughan.

The first will be 16.5 kilometres of the QEW, from Trafalgar Road in Oakville to Guelph Line in Burlington, which will open next summer as a four-year pilot project.

“The QEW was selected for the pilot because it has the most peak hour, peak direction capacity available of the three existing HOV lanes in the GTA,” Woozageer said.

“It also has the most peak hour, off-peak direction traffic demand, meaning that HOT lanes would provide benefits in both directions throughout the day. Conducting a pilot on the QEW will introduce HOT lanes to the region while generating information and results to inform the longer term approach.”

The ministry is expected to announce more information next spring, including how much drivers will pay and how they will buy permits.

The ministry doesn't know what other highways will get HOT lanes in the future, Woozageer said.

“It is too early to say which corridors will receive high occupancy toll lanes and in what order that will happen. We are taking a careful look at all upcoming major highway projects in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area in terms of their suitability for incorporating HOT lanes,” he said.

“We are continuing to look for opportunities to build out the network, where it makes sense to do so.”

In his 2013 budget, former premier Dalton McGuinty announced HOT lanes would be implemented on existing HOV lanes, originally set up to encourage carpooling, as a way to raise money for infrastructure.

The Conservatives and New Democrats have criticized the plan.

“The Lexus lanes are not something I think is the right way to go,” NDP Leader Andrea Horwath has said.

Healthy Transport Consulting, which advises governments, the private sector and non-profit organizations on transportation issues and organizes Transport Future learning events, applauds the HOT lanes.

At the same time, director Martin Collier is criticizing the government for its tame, one-pilot project approach.

“If the government is serious about improving traffic flow for cars and transit while reducing automotive emissions causing climate change and smog, we must think big,” he said in a statement.

“We recommend that the MTO implement a larger, more effective and connected HOT lane network across the GTHA. We also encourage the province and municipalities to work collaboratively to install HOT lanes or other tolling systems on local roads where feasible.”

A Canadian Automobile Association spokesperson was not available to comment on the issue.