

Long drive still ahead

Ring road details revealed, but construction years away

Kim Guttormson

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The ring road running along the city's south-west edge is still years away, but details of its 20-kilometre path revealed Tuesday pave the way for the finalization of a deal between the province and the Tsuu T'ina Nation.

The route, which runs across the Tsuu T'ina reserve, requires about two square kilometres of land to be transferred to the province.

Tsuu T'ina spokesman Peter Manywounds said determining where the freeway would go, how much band land is needed and how much that's worth is critical to reaching a deal.

"The functional study and all the work we've been doing had to be completed so we could explain to members," he said. "Now we're in the home stretch here."

"We hope to get there soon."

Appraisers are evaluating the land's worth, and Manywounds said he hopes to have a completed deal in front of band members for a vote by next summer.

But while that agreement is the major hurdle in the process, it could be another year or more before the land is actually in the province's possession.

The federal government has to pass an order-in-council to transfer the property, which Manywounds said he'd "like to think would take six to eight months. But if someone in the federal government doesn't make it a priority, it could take longer."

Alec Waters, Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation's executive director of the southwest ring road project, said the process could take one to two years.

"Alberta's position is to not make any commitments about detailed design or construction until it's approved. Approval is outside our direct control."

Once construction begins, it is expected to take between three and four years to build.



CREDIT: Photo, Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald. Map courtesy of the City of Calgary

Tsuu T'ina Nation spokesman Peter Manywounds says the ring road process is "in the home stretch," although it will be years before anyone is driving on it.

While there is no price tag for the stretch of freeway, project engineer Aziz Merali, with TransTech Engineering, estimated Tuesday it's likely to cost more than \$1 billion.

The ring road, which is designed to accommodate the traffic volumes predicted for 2025, will run from Glenmore Trail S.W. to Spruce Meadows Trail.

While there is enough land to build a 16-lane freeway, it's likely to start with four. However, that could be expanded to accommodate traffic flow.

There is the potential of 14 interchanges along the route, but only five are guaranteed to be built as part of the province's framework agreement with the Tsuu T'ina. Those are the links at Anderson Road, 130th Avenue, Strathcona Road (at Glenmore Trail and 37th Street), the junction of Sarcee Trail and Glenmore, and at either Southland Drive or 90th Avenue.

The interchange at Strathcona Road would serve the Tsuu T'ina casino, expected to open next summer.

Alex Broda, the city's director of transportation planning, said the others are up for discussion as to who would build and pay for them.

That's a concern to southwest resident Dave Fryett, who wants an intersection built at 162nd Avenue at the same time the freeway is constructed.

Pointing out that the road now ends at a point just before the planned ring road, he said it would make no sense to not connect the two.

"It's incredulous to me," said Fryett, with the South Fish Creek transportation committee. "Some people say the road may never be built. I'm starting to believe it. But we need it.."

Fryett plans to attend two open houses being held today and Thursday at the North Glenmore Park Community Association.

Nancy Carson will also attend, but her concerns are around the effect the major freeway will have on the environment, as well as the noise the traffic will create.

"They have to heavily consider how they'll do it," she said.

The northwest section of the ring road is scheduled to be completed in 2008. The northeast portion is out to tender as a private-public partnership.

kguttormson@theherald.canwest.com

Southwest Ring Road

- 20 kilometres long
- Requires two square kilometres of land from the Tsuu T'ina Nation
- Potential 14 interchanges
- Crosses the Elbow River and Fish Creek, which need to be realigned
- Requires relocation of Elbow Valley constructed wetlands and clay marsh

- Will have room for 16 lanes of traffic, but will start construction with a minimum of four

Open houses on the proposed southwest ring road will be held at the North Glenmore Community Association, 2231 Longridge Dr. S.W.: n Today from 2 to 8 p.m.,

- Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m.

This story features a factbox "Southwest Ring Road".

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