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## Ring road deal 'isn't imminent'

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There is no deal on the horizon for a long-awaited ring road through Tsuu T'ina reserve land, despite the province granting the band permission to build a \$30-million casino, further increasing the likelihood of a major spat between the band and the city over access to the site.

The province confirmed Wednesday no deal appears close between Alberta Transportation and the Tsuu T'ina regarding the ring road, stressing there is no connection between the casino licensing process and talks on the road.

"An agreement isn't imminent," Bart Johnson, spokesman for Alberta Transportation, told the Herald, adding, "there is no connection there" between the road and casino.

The band was granted approval Tuesday by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission to start work on its 70,000-square-foot casino on Tsuu T'ina land at Glenmore Trail and 37th Street S.W. Work is to begin before the end of the year.

However, the city does not want construction to begin until a deal is reached between the province and the band to build a southwest connector, a road long seen as a key part of Calgary's transportation system.

While a framework agreement for the ring road was signed by the province and the band in March, the deadline for a draft final agreement is now uncertain -- Johnson said Nov. 1 is a target, but he could not say if it will be met.

The city says that if no deal is reached, it will be forced to cut off access to the casino from 37th Street to build its own ring road, leaving the band without its desired entry to the facility.

Ald. Craig Burrows, whose Ward 6 borders the reserve, went so far as to suggest the city may block access if the casino is built without a ring road deal in place.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier said Wednesday the framework agreement signed in March is not enough, adding that until a final agreement and road alignment are reached, the city can't guarantee access off 37th Street.

"Agreements are nice, pavements are better," said Bronconnier. "There have been many agreements in the past. In the absence of a concluded agreement, the city will be left with only one option, and that, of course, is to construct the road on the 37th Street alignment."

Bronconnier said the ring road and casino projects are separate but "somewhat inextricably linked," and he urged the province and the band to speed up the road approval process.

Burrows suggested Tuesday that the casino approval was likely linked to an impending

ring road deal, but Morten Paulsen, spokesman for the band, said any connection is "an invention."

"The gaming commission doesn't build roads and the Transportation Department doesn't approve casinos," said Paulsen, adding the ring road will "absolutely" be built on Tsuu T'ina land.

"Either the alderman (Burrows) failed Politics 101 or he is playing politics with a road that his voters badly need."

Diane Colley-Urquhart, whose Ward 13 also borders the reserve, said the city should work with the band rather than threaten to block access.

"Putting up firewalls around Tsuu T'ina Nation is just not something that is at all desirable. It's a bit reckless," said Colley-Urquhart.

Colley-Urquhart said the city could not block access to the casino off 37th Street, and said the casino should no longer be used as a bargaining chip for the ring road.

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