

Herb Gray Parkway completed, final stretch to open Saturday



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The last remaining section of the Herb Gray Parkway is seen in Windsor on Wednesday, Nov. 4, 2015. MTO officials overseeing construction said the final stretch between Labelle and Ojibway Parkway will be open before the end of November. *TYLER BROWNBIDGE / WINDSOR STAR*

With the final four-kilometre stretch of the \$1.4-billion Herb Gray Parkway opening Saturday, community leaders said Friday that the Windsor area should be proud to have the showpiece highway in our city.

“It’s a premier facility, they’ve done a wonderful job,” said former Mayor Eddie Francis, who helped negotiate its final design on behalf of city council. “I’m very proud how the community stuck together and how we are able to enjoy this facility now that it is open.

“People in Windsor should take pride. They stood together and said ‘we deserve better.’ Now we have a superior solution that accomplished everything intended in getting trucks out of neighbourhoods and people’s backyards.”

The final stretch will extend the parkway from Labelle Street to the intersection of Ojibway Parkway and E.C. Row Expressway.

For the first time, area drivers will now be able to access Highway 401 on the far west end of the city at the intersection. It will provide easier access to the highway not only for drivers on west end, but also those coming from parts of LaSalle and Amherstburg.

“The Windsor-Detroit Gateway is Ontario’s premier gateway and vital to Ontario’s economy,” said Brad Duguid, ministry of economic development and infrastructure. “Ontario is following through on its commitments related to a new border transportation system for Windsor-Detroit.”

There will still be up to another year of landscaping work, tree planting and final touches to be applied to the massive 11-kilometre below-grade border highway project. But the road construction that forced Windsor’s drivers to deal with an aggravating four years of detours and lane reductions has ended.

When the parkway was in its planning phases, there was much debate on whether Windsor workers and construction companies would benefit from the massive project or the bulk would go to out-of-town

employers.

But Jim Lyons, executive director of the Windsor Construction Association, said Friday the parkway project was a huge economic boost to the local industry.

“I hope someone takes the time to hammer out the numbers, but I would guess about 80 per cent of the parkway’s content — labour and materials — was local,” Lyons said.

“(Completion) brings to a close all the challenges and rewards this project has brought to our industry over the past four or five years. It’s an awesome travel experience now for anybody on the Highway 401 needing to get to the west side of Windsor. It’s going to be exciting for all of us to drive it.”

In late August, Ontario’s transportation ministry opened up the first seven kilometres of parkway which for the first time allowed border-bound travellers to stay on Highway 401 coming into Windsor all the way to at Labelle Street — just south of E.C. Row.

Those wishing to use the Ambassador Bridge will still exit at Labelle.

Eventually, a bridge overpass will take traffic over a temporary dead end at Ojibway Parkway into the plaza of the new Gordie Howe International Bridge, which is scheduled to open in 2020.

“The parkway and what’s been talked about for years is real now,” said Windsor-Essex Chamber of Commerce CEO Matt Marchand. “It marks another big step of the Highway 401 to I-75 connection becoming reality.”

Completion of the parkway should add a “nice economic boost” for the Windsor area and bring an end to all the controversy caused by having trucks gridlocked on city streets, he said.

“Along with this being an excellent addition to the community, it’s another huge step in having this whole border (delay) issue resolved,” Marchand said. “Having trucks on city streets all these years has been addressed and now we can get to the business of driving economic

growth.”

Speed limits for the eastbound lanes of the final four-kilometre stretch will be 100 km/h for the eastbound lanes and 60 km/h for the westbound lanes.

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