



River Road extension is approved

News Mar 05, 2014 by [Jeff Outhit](/waterlooregion-author/jeff-outhit/CB820047-326C-44D3-9B62-2098CF76324A/) (<mailto:jouthit@therecord.com>) [Waterloo Region Record](#)

KITCHENER — After a seven-year delay to get around rare salamanders, regional councillors unanimously endorsed perhaps the most expensive road they have built.

Politicians intend to spend \$75 million to extend River Road across Highway 8 in south Kitchener and through the Hidden Valley natural area. The new road will link to Bleams Road. This amount includes costs already spent and costs to come.

Pending regulatory approvals, the road could open in 2019 after construction launches in 2017. It will be four lanes wide with a raised centre median and paths on both sides for cycling and walking. It includes a new interchange at Highway 8.

"It's likely the most expensive road we've ever built," Kitchener Coun. Jim Wideman said. "We're balancing the needs of the transporting public and the environment."

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Politicians voted 15-0 on Tuesday to build it. It's meant to ease chronic congestion on Fairway Road South, reduce Fairway collisions and provide a better transportation link across south Kitchener.

"Just having this road is going to be of such a benefit," Kitchener Mayor Carl Zehr said. "A lot of people have had to remain very patient for this."

The planning started in 2004, but the project stalled in 2007 when Jefferson salamanders, an endangered species protected by provincial legislation, were discovered near the planned route in Hidden Valley.

Some critics asked politicians to abandon the proposed road to protect the salamanders and other environmental features.

Instead, council took seven years to map the salamander habitat and move the new road around it. It's estimated the salamander delay may have added \$11 million or more in extra costs. This includes a \$5-million redesign, more than \$4 million in inflation-related construction delays and \$2 million from failing to time a new bridge across Highway 8 with widening recently completed on the highway.

Extending River Road across Highway 8 now likely means disrupting new retaining walls and drainage installed as part of the widened highway.

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Public delegate Louise Lantaigne told councillors that the tens of millions they are spending on the new road could buy a lot of transit upgrades.

"We can't build roads to solve driving issues in perpetuity," she said. "It doesn't make sense."

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