Ontario proposes legislation to fast-track Highway 69 four-laning by five years

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When the Ontario legislature resumes sitting this week, Transportation Minister Prabmeet Sakaria will introduce the Building Highway 69 Faster Act, which he says will accelerate the final four-laning of the stretch between Sudbury and Parry Sound.

Through a project-specific environmental assessment framework that builds on work already completed while maintaining environmental oversight and the province's duty to consult Indigenous communities, the legislation could speed up construction by five years by allowing eligible work to begin sooner, he said in the Town of Cranberry last week.

Of the 152-kilometre corridor between Sudbury and Parry Sound, 84 kilometres have been four-laned, leaving 68 kilometres to complete. The province has divided the remaining work into six sections, with construction expected to be underway on four sections by the end of 2027, Sarkaria said in August.

If new legislation is approved as expected, the province could advance early work, including clearing contracts, while design work continues.

"The construction industry has long emphasized the importance of improving approval processes to get critical infrastructure built faster, while maintaining appropriate environmental oversight," said Nadia Todorova, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

"Accelerating this long-awaited expansion by up to five years would be a significant step toward improving road safety, strengthening northern Ontario's economy and ensuring the efficient movement of people and goods."

The first two areas slated for early work include the first half of the section in Sudbury and the first part of the section in Parry Sound.

Before highway construction can proceed in some areas, a portion of the Canadian National Railway line must be relocated to accommodate a new interchange at Highway 522. That work is expected to begin in the next couple of months, Sarkaria said.

Utility relocations, grading and tree clearing are also among the preparatory activities needed to advance the project.

The final cost of the project will be disclosed after contractors have been selected through the competitive tendering process, Prakaria said.

The proposed acceleration follows an August announcement that construction on the remaining sections would resume in 2027.

The Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA) also welcomed the proposed legislation, citing the potential benefits for northern communities, road safety and the movement of goods.

"Accelerating this critical infrastructure project will connect Northern communities faster, improve safety for motorists, and strengthen Ontario's economic competitiveness," said Steven Crombie, ORBA's senior director of public affairs.

"It will also help get critical minerals to market faster, supporting economic growth and unlocking opportunities across the province."

In August, Shwe Miikaan Miller, a joint venture involving Magnetawan First Nation, Shawanaga First Nation, Henvey Inlet First Nation and Miller Paving, received a seven-year, $43-million contract for year-round maintenance of Highways 69, 522, 529 and 529A in the Britt-Parry Sound area.