

# London city hall: Wharncliffe Road shutdown looms amid upgrades



By Norman De Bono, The London Free Press  
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Mac Outpost co-owners Peter Miazga, left, and John Hauffe are concerned that a massive Wharncliffe Road reconstruction project will have a negative impact on their business. (DEREK RUTTAN/THE LONDON FREE PRESS)

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London's Wharncliffe Road will be shut down for more than five months for a massive road reconstruction project, closing the critical north-south artery to traffic, city officials say.

The rebuilding of the rail bridge at Horton Street and Wharncliffe roads — the same project that may see Nan Finlayson's house relocated — will close Wharncliffe at that intersection in 2020, a route now travelled by about 31,000 vehicles a day.

It also will see Horton Street, which sees 20,000 cars and trucks daily driving east and west at that intersection, closed for about three months at the same time.

That disruption means businesses on Wharncliffe Road will be cut off from customers driving from north London, and that will hurt, said John Hauffe and Peter Miazga, co-owners of Mac Outpost on Wharncliffe Road, which draws from north London.

"We are a business. We depend on that traffic. There will be an impact," said Miazga. "I am convinced there will be layoffs as a result of this, bankruptcies."

The business owners also are riled they did not hear of the closure from the city, but from construction officials at a public meeting.

"It is an eye-opener and quite disappointing," said Hauffe. "They talked about disruption, but not road closure."

Customers in the north will find it difficult to navigate other main arteries, Wonderland Road, or perhaps Talbot Street to Ridout Street, to get to the area. That's a lot of driving and they fear competitors will draw their customers.

"Business is about relationships and five months is a long time. They may not come back," said Hauffe.

The owners have met city officials and want them to continue to look at options to keep traffic flowing, even if it inflates the budget.

"This is all about money. They can do anything if they spend, but they want to do it as cheaply as possible," said Hauffe.

The Wharncliffe Road work from Springbank Drive (including Horton Street) to Stanley Street is budgeted at \$39 million. The rail bridge rebuild alone will cost \$16 million.

"It could irreparably harm us. When customers can't get to your business, they go to another one. They may not come back," said Hauffe.

Hauffe and Miazga pointed to the rebuilding of the Oxford Street rail bridge at Wharncliffe as a model. Ongoing for eight months, there has been no closing of Wharncliffe at Oxford.

"We have had an ongoing conversation with the owners of Mac Outpost and we recognize their concerns. We are very aware. We will try to mitigate this as much as possible," said Doug MacRae, city manager of transportation planning and design. "The construction methodology we are proposing is the least impactful."

The city considered building a mall road west of the Horton Street intersection, routing traffic around the construction, but it would have required buying or expropriating 13 homes and tearing them down before building the road.

"It is too much of an impact. It is not viable," said MacRae.

The road must close at Horton because the work is different, and more difficult, he added. The area is smaller, complicating the work, and the road must be dug deeper.

"This project is a challenging one. It has been on the planning docket for decades. The challenges are significant," MacRae said.

As for Finlayson, whose heritage home at 100 Stanley St. is in the path of the bridge work, she faces a tough choice: either accept a city offer to buy and move the house — a \$500,000 proposition — or risk seeing it torn down.

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