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THE CITY

Exit will mean \$200M to city: Graham

Spinoff Planned Highway 1 off-ramp will be 'huge benefit' to economic development of Saint John, premier says

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SAINT JOHN – The province's decision to spend \$700,000 on the new exit ramp off Highway 1 to Ashburn Lake Road will mean \$200 million worth of spinoff revenue for the city, Premier Shawn Graham said Monday.

"The Ashburn Lake Road exit ramp is a piece of strategic infrastructure that is going to be a huge benefit to economic development to the city of Saint John," Graham said.

"To invest approximately \$700,000 today... we're going to see a return of more than \$200 million in economic activity here in the Saint John region."

Graham was in the city to announce the province's plans to build the ramp, which will allow eastbound traffic to leave the highway at Ashburn Lake Road, connecting with Rothesay Avenue and the East Point Shopping complex.

"We are convinced that investment in our roads will give our businesses the tools needed to facilitate their growth and enable them to make significant contributions to our economy and to our province's self-sufficiency," Graham said.

Saint John Mayor Norm McFarlane, who has worked for months to get the ramp, said more shoppers will be drawn to the East Point complex.

"It will attract more spontaneous shoppers from the highway to Saint John and most importantly it will play a key role in attracting more retailers to our community," he said.

McFarlane said he has spoken to retailers who said they are sometimes reluctant to move to a location without access to a highway.

"Retailers tell us that the last 10 per cent of making a decision about whether you come somewhere or not is if there is highway access," he said. "That is the deciding factor."

Developer Troy Northrup of the East Point Shopping complex said having more highway access will help make Saint John "a drive-in city and not a drive-by city...."

"Continuing retail development will



Sharing a laugh during Monday's ceremony announcing the building of a Highway 1 exit ramp at Ashburn Lake Road are, left to right, Transportation Minister Denis Landry, Premier Shawn Graham, Mayor Norm McFarlane and developer Troy Northrup of East Point Shopping. Contracts for the \$700-million off-ramp project are expected to be awarded in September.

provide benefits for all the citizens in our region by both improving the level of retail services available right here in Saint John and providing the economic benefits ... attracting more visitors and more tourists to spend both their time and their money here in our city," he said.

Transportation Minister Denis Landry, whose department will be footing the bill for the ramp, said a tender will be

issued by the end of the month and he expects the work to be finished during this construction season.

McFarlane said work on the highway access ramp will be done in conjunction with improvements to the Ashburn Lake Road, including drainage work and asphalt resurfacing from the bridge crossing Marsh Creek to the off-ramp.

The work will be paid for with funding received through the gas tax and con-

tracts for that work will be awarded in early September.

"That means our citizens will be able to use the new ramp and road for all your Christmas shopping," McFarlane said.

"This will protect our roads. We have a tremendous amount of traffic on Westmorland Road and on Rothesay Avenue, which we as a taxpayer must look after in the city," he said.

Fast facts about the exit ramp project

Cost: \$700,000

Start date: Tenders for the work will be issued this month.

Completion date: By the end of the construction season, in time for Christmas shopping.