

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE NOVEMBER 5, 2001

**UPDATE ON REGION OF YORK INITIATIVES
TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS**

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Planning and the Commissioner of Development Services and Public Works recommend:

That this report BE RECEIVED for information purposes;

That Staff report to Council when necessary to provide updates on the status of the subject studies or to obtain direction on matters relating to the studies; and

That this report BE FORWARDED to the Region of York for information purposes.

Purpose

To update Council on the status of a number of transportation and transit related studies, currently being undertaken by the Region of York that affect the City of Vaughan.

Background - Analysis and Options

Transportation has emerged as one of the critical issues facing the Greater Toronto Area. York Region, with its large arterial road network and responsibility for Region-wide public transit, will be a key player in resolving transportation related problems in the north-central portion of the GTA. The Region of York is currently working on a number of transit and road network initiatives, which are designed to implement the Regional Official Plan, service existing and future development and provide relief to the congestion we now face on our roads.

A number of these studies will have a direct effect on the City of Vaughan, particularly on the implementation of the City's land use plan. City Planning and Engineering Staff have been working closely with the Region's Staff and its consultants on these initiatives.

In addition Councillors and Staff have been involved in a number inter-municipal committees working to effect specific road and transit improvements. These committees include:

- The Yonge Street Subway Implementation Committee with the Region of York and the Towns of Richmond Hill and Markham;
- The Spadina-York Subway Extension Committee with the Region of York, the City of Toronto and York University; and
- The Highway 427 Extension Committee with the Regions of York and Peel, the City of Brampton, Town of Caledon and Township of King.

Given the breadth of the work involved and the number of projects currently underway, it is important that Council be kept informed. The studies that are pertinent to Vaughan are listed below. A synopsis is provided which describes the location (See Attachment No. 1), purpose, status and the significance of each of the studies to the City of Vaughan.

1. **YORK REGION TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN**

Location

Encompasses the entire Regional Municipality of York and includes roads and public transit.

Purpose

To develop a long term transportation vision to the year 2031 focusing on developing a roads and transit infrastructure plan. The study will also examine: Funding strategies, implementation and priorities; supportive land use and transportation policies; performance monitoring and plan review; and special programs dealing with such matters as congestion management.

Status

The Transportation Master Plan Study began in the Fall of 2000. The study is now substantially complete. The product of the study will be plans for the Region's 2031 Road and Transit Networks contained in an overview report accompanied by a number of background studies pertaining to specific issues. The plan, among other things, will recommend phasing priorities over ten year increments to allow for the capital budgeting of the improvements. A report to the Region of York Transportation and Works Committee, with the Master Plan in draft form, is anticipated at the end of November. After consideration by Regional Council, it is expected that the Master Plan will be circulated for comment. Once the comments have been received, the Master Plan would be revised accordingly and submitted to Regional Council for final approval.

Significance to Vaughan

The 2031 plans for the Regional road and transit networks are of prime importance to all the area municipalities. This study will identify short and long term priorities thus providing the timing of future improvements. Preliminary results favour a "transit oriented" vision, recognizing that there is only limited opportunity to expand upon the existing Regional road network. As such it will influence all of the studies that are currently on-going. Upon receipt of the draft study, the City will have to assess the impact of the plan on the City's development aspirations from the perspective of the adequacy or inadequacy of the proposed transportation improvements and from the perspective of the timing and financing of the improvements.

2. **YONGE STREET TRANSITWAY STUDY – PREPARATION OF TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Location

The study area flanks Yonge Street from Steeles Avenue to Newmarket. The transitway proposed by the study abuts the easterly edge of the City of Vaughan at Yonge Street from Steeles Avenue to Highway 7.

Purpose

To prepare Terms of Reference for an Individual Environmental Assessment for a Yonge Street Corridor Transitway, for the approval of the Ministry of the Environment. The tasks involved in the preparation of the Terms of Reference include: The forecasting of future transit ridership in the Yonge Street Corridor; the documentation of the need and justification for the undertaking; a review of constraints and opportunities; and an

assessment of alternative corridors and transit technologies in respect of the affected environments (natural, social and cultural) and costs.

Status

The Region of York has requested comment from the affected area municipalities on the draft terms of reference. On October 1, 2001, a report was submitted to the Committee of the Whole. It recommended that the Region be advised that the City had no objection to the draft terms of reference and that the report be forwarded to the Region as the City's comment on the terms of reference. Council ratified the recommendations on October 15, 2001.

The Individual Environmental Assessment can proceed upon approval of the terms of reference. They have been submitted to the Ministry and it is expected that approval will take place early in the new year. In order to proceed to the full environmental assessment, further direction from Regional Council will be necessary.

Significance to Vaughan

Yonge Street is an important transportation corridor, with the potential to provide for higher order transit. Both the Regional Official Plan and the Vaughan Official Plan acknowledge the potential for the extension of the Yonge Street Subway from Finch Station to the Richmond Hill Gateway at Highway 7. The Region of York, in its report recommending the approval of OPA No. 600, has suggested that the City consider conducting a Yonge Street land use review. This would allow for an evaluation of the potential for transit supportive intensification that may exist along parts of Yonge Street.

The Transitway Study recommends that, prior to the construction of the subway, "an interim exclusive transitway" operating in the Yonge Street road allowance should be provided. This is consistent with the outcome of the TTC's "Rapid Transit Expansion Study". The TTC Study sees merit in the extension of the Yonge Street Subway as a longer term project, beyond the ten to fifteen year time horizon. As an interim step the TTC intends to identify opportunities to implement surface transit priority strategies. This may include Bus Rapid Transit, in future rapid transit corridors, such as Yonge Street north of Finch Avenue. A co-ordinated approach, between York Region, the City of Toronto and the TTC, to optimize cross-boundary service is to be encouraged.

The TTC's "Rapid Transit Expansion Study" suggests that the extension of the Spadina Subway Line, north of Finch Avenue is a necessary precursor to the extension of the Yonge Line. This will ensure that the Yonge Line does not face capacity problems in the future. The practical capacity of the Yonge Line is 32,000 riders per hour. The present peak hour ridership is 27,000 riders per hour. Therefore, it would be prudent to divert ridership from the Yonge Line to the Spadina Line. The TTC Study indicated that an extension of the Spadina Line, north of Finch Avenue, has the potential to divert up to 2500 riders per peak hour away from Yonge Street.

There may be some restrictions of the potential for the implementation of the Transitway. The Yonge Street right of way through old Thornhill is approximately 30 m in width. It is already occupied by a five lane road section, featuring two through lanes in each direction and a continuous centre turn lane. An exclusive Transitway will require between seven (7) and ten (10) metres of additional width. More space would be required at station sites.

If this technology is to be applied, great care will have to be taken in implementing it through old Thornhill. Opportunities to add right of way without affecting the buildings and the character of the streetscape are limited. Therefore, it will probably be necessary for an

exclusive transitway to be discontinuous through areas of limited right of way, with the buses operating in HOV Lanes or in mixed traffic.

Improvements in transit service are in the interests of the City of Vaughan. The introduction of bus rapid transit along Yonge Street, as a precursor to higher order service (subway) is supportable, provided the integrity of old Village of Thornhill Heritage Conservation District is maintained.

3. **HIGHWAY 7 CORRIDOR TRANSITWAY STUDY – PREPARATION OF TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Location

The study area encompasses the Highway 7 Corridor from the Region of Peel on the west to the Region of Durham on the east. The study area flanks Highway 7 and will also examine opportunities that may also be provided by the Highway No. 407 Transitway, which has been identified by the Province and preserved through a recent amendment to the Parkway Belt West Plan.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is similar to the Yonge Street Corridor Transitway study. It will result in the preparation of a Terms of Reference for an Individual Environmental Assessment for a Highway 7 Corridor Transitway, for the approval of the Ministry of the Environment. The Needs and Justification portion of the study will also include the preparation of ridership forecasts, an assessment of alternative corridors and transit technologies and a staging plan for the next twenty years.

Status

The Region of York retained the firms iTRANS and Delcan to conduct the study. Work commenced in July of 2001. Notice of Commencement of the study was published in early September. A Technical Advisory Committee has been formed and it met for the first time on September 25, 2001. The first set of public information centres was held in early October and the second set has been tentatively scheduled for late February. The project is scheduled for completion by late March of 2002.

Significance to Vaughan

Highway 7 is the most important arterial road in the south part of the City of Vaughan. It serves the Vaughan Corporate Centre, a large portion of the Employment Area and the residential communities of Thornhill, Urban Village 2 (Carrville) and Woodbridge. An upgrade in transit services along Highway 7 will be of benefit to these communities.

Also, providing a higher order transit service in the Highway 7 Corridor is a critical element in the Region of York's long term transportation plan. Ultimately, a Highway 7 service will link the three southerly "Regional Centres" located in Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill. Consultation will also be required with the bordering Regions (Peel and Durham) as the potential for inter-Regional flows of residents and workers will need to be accommodated.

In addition, the Highway 7 corridor is planned as the terminus for the three rapid transit services that will connect York Region to the City of Toronto (e.g. Yonge Street Transitway/Subway and the Spadina Subway Extension). Establishing the planned transit services in these corridors will be critical to achieving the land use objectives of

both the Regional and Local Official Plans. The Highway 7 transitway will support the extension of the rapid transit services north of Steeles Avenue, into the Region of York.

The York Region Transportation Master Plan has developed a “transit oriented” vision, recognizing that there is only limited opportunity available to add capacity to the existing roads. A transit based transportation system requires supportive land uses and land use policy. Therefore, it would be expected that the planning and implementation of improved transit services would benefit from a review of the current development policies.

On October 15, 2001 Vaughan Council approved the hiring of a consulting team led by The Planning Partnership to undertake the Highway 7 Policy Review. The purpose of the review is to develop land use policies and design guidelines that will support the transition of Highway 7 from a Provincial Highway to a more urban “Main Street”, which links and integrates the communities along its length. It would ensure that land use and design criteria are consistent with the potential that would result from the improved level of public transit envisioned by the York Region Master Plan.

Vaughan’s Highway 7 Policy Review will be proceeding concurrently with the Transitway Study. It is expected that the Policy Review will be completed by the middle of 2002. The Transitway Study is scheduled for completion in the Spring of 2002. As such, the results the work of the Transitway will be available as input into the Highway 7 Policy Review. The results of the Highway 7 Policy Review will ultimately be of great assistance when the Environment Assessment for the Highway 7 Transitway is prepared.

The Region’s Highway 7 Corridor Transitway Study and the City’s Highway 7 Policy Review are complementary. Having the studies conducted simultaneously provides the opportunity to develop land use, transportation and urban design strategies that are mutually supportive. Staff from the Region and the City will be co-operating closely as the studies proceed.

4. **PRIVATE SECTOR PROPOSALS TO PLAN, DESIGN, FINANCE AND BUILD A RAPID TRANSIT NETWORK IN YORK REGION**

Location

The Regional Official Plan identifies four corridors that have the potential to provide higher order transit service. Three will link York Region with the City of Toronto. These north – south services include: The Yonge Street corridor, from Steeles Avenue to the Langstaff Gateway in Richmond Hill; York University to the Vaughan Corporate Centre; and a connection to the Markham Centre. A service extending across the Highway 7 corridor will connect the three north – south links, serving the Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham “Regional Centres”.

Purpose

The purpose of the initiative is to pursue a public-private partnership, which would plan, develop, fund (both capital and operating costs) and operate the York Region Rapid Transit System.

Status

The concept of involving the private sector in providing rapid transit services in York Region originated with the Yonge Street Subway Implementation Committee. It was brought to the attention of the Spadina – York Subway Extension Committee at a joint meeting of the two committees on March 27, 2001. A draft request for private sector expressions of interest was circulated at the meeting.

Regional Staff prepared a report to the Transportation and Works Committee on May 2, 2001. The Committee approved the Staff recommendation, which endorsed the draft request for Expression of Interest (REOI). In addition, it was recommended that the REOI be advertised in the appropriate commercial newspapers and that a consultant be retained to evaluate the expressions of interest and assist in the process. Regional Council ratified these recommendations on May 10, 2001.

In recognition of the Region's initiative, a report was prepared for the May 15, 2001 Committee of the Whole meeting. The report recommended that Vaughan Staff work with the Region and the Towns of Richmond Hill and Markham in pursuit of expressions of interest from the private sector to plan, finance and implement a rapid transit system in York Region. Also Staff were directed to report back to Council on the results of the expression of interest and on any costs which might accrue to the participating municipalities. Council ratified this recommendation on May 30, 2001.

The Request for Expression of Interest was advertised during the week of May 7, 2001, with a requested response by Tuesday June 26, 2001. A total of eight responses to the REOI were received. In September of 2001, Regional Council authorized the hiring of KPMG to assist in the process.

The next step is the preparation of a Request for Qualification (RFQ), which would define more precisely the nature of the partnership that would be expected. In addition, the RFQ would require the private sector consortia to identify its qualifications in terms of its ability to plan, finance and implement a York Region Rapid Transit System. The RFQ would be open to all bidders, not just those who responded to the REOI.

On October 3, 2001 a report to the Region of York's Transportation and Works Committee was prepared, which recommended that the Commissioner of Transportation and Works be authorized to issue a Request for Qualification from potential private sector partners for the delivery of a York Region Rapid Transit System. This recommendation was approved by the Committee and ratified by Regional Council on October 11, 2001. Further direction from Regional Council will be required prior to the release of the RFQ.

It is recommended that the City of Vaughan continue to work with the Region, Markham and Richmond Hill in advancing this process. Because the process is still in its earliest stages, it would be inappropriate to abandon the work that is currently taking place. For this reason, the Region is continuing to work on the Highway 7 and Yonge Street Corridor Environmental Assessments; Markham is working on a transportation master plan; and the City of Vaughan is continuing to support the extension of the Spadina Subway. Should this process not succeed in attracting a partner, abandoning the initiatives already in place could result in the loss of several years in the implementation of any improvements.

As the process proceeds, City Staff will proceed on the basis of the following principles and objectives:

- The process is in place to implement the land use plans identified in the official plans of the Region of York and the area municipalities;
- The resulting undertaking will have to reflect the outcome of the York Region Transportation Master Plan, which largely confirms the transportation policies of the York Region Official Plan;
- The quality and integrity of the Environmental Assessment is critical. Should a private partner not emerge from the process, then the EA that was prepared should allow the Region to proceed as the proponent for the selected undertaking(s);

- The process should focus on a York Region solution for Rapid Transit while developing co-operative cross-boundary linkages with adjacent transit authorities, which fit into an overall GTA-wide transportation solution;
- A critical issue will be providing for the necessary north-south linkages to the City of Toronto and the TTC system and possibly GO Transit. To provide an optimal level of service it will be necessary to co-ordinate the systems. Therefore, a high level of co-operation, at the earliest stages possible, will be important;
- Continue to support the extension of the Spadina Subway to Steeles Avenue as recommended in the TTC's "Rapid Transit Expansion Study";
- Continue to pursue, in conjunction with the Region, the acquisition of the bus terminal and commuter parking access for a Steeles Avenue Subway Station, in accordance with OPA No. 529;
- Continue to support the early commencement of the preparation of a terms of reference for an Individual Environmental Assessment for the Rapid Transit right of way leading from York University to the Vaughan Corporate Centre, in accordance with OPA No. 529. Preservation and the ultimate acquisition of this corridor will be critical. This is consistent with the process the Region has been following with the Yonge Street Corridor and Highway 7 Corridor Transitway Studies.

Staff will be reporting back to Council in early 2002 on the results of the Request for Qualification.

5. **REGIONS OF YORK AND PEEL
BOUNDARY AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (BATS)**

Location

The study area flanks Highway No. 50 in the Regional Municipalities of York and Peel, from Highway No. 407 extending to the north through Brampton and Vaughan and into the southern parts of King Township and the Town of Caledon.

Purpose

The Regions of York and Peel are leading the study, with the assistance of Vaughan, Brampton, King and Caledon. It has three components:

Part 1 provides for the development of a long term (to 2031) transportation plan for the study area. This will also include the development of strategies to accommodate current and on-going growth pressures and the identification of preferred locations for interchanges associated with the future Highway No. 427 extension.

Part 2 will identify the arterial road requirements within the area bounded by Highways 7, 27 and 50 and Langstaff Road, necessary to meet the area's current and future transportation needs, prior to the construction of the Highway No. 427 extension. This will also include the preparation of the implementing Class Environmental Assessments.

In Part 3 a Class Environmental Assessment will be prepared for improvements to Langstaff Road, between Highway 27 and Highway 50.

Status

The Regions of York and Peel, in consultation with the local municipalities has retained the transportation engineering firm iTRANS to conduct this study. Work is now underway and meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee took place on September 27, 2001 and October 24, 2001. Part 1 is projected for completion by February 2002; and Parts 2 and 3 are planned for completion by the end of June 2002.

Significance to Vaughan

The completion of this study and the successful implementation of its findings are critical to the timing of the development of the south part of the West Vaughan Enterprise Zone. This area is located south of Langstaff Road, west of Highway 27, and already enjoys an "Employment Area" designation. Between Highway 27 and Highway No. 427 the area is either developed or is well along in the approval process. However, to the west of Highway No. 427 development approvals are being delayed by a number of transportation related issues. A block plan approval application has been submitted but it has not been approved.

Many of the road network problems associated with the West Vaughan Area result from the uncertainty over the timing and location of the Highway No. 427 extension. Efforts to resolve these problems have been underway for some time. Before the initiation of the BATS, a study was undertaken to protect the options for a future extension of Highway No. 427 north of Highway 7, prior to the completion of the required Environmental Assessment. The objective was to allow for the development of the existing employment areas, south of Langstaff Road, while preserving the opportunity for Highway No. 427 to proceed either to the north or westerly into Brampton, south of Rutherford Road. This entailed prohibiting development in the areas where Highway No. 427 might reasonably be located as a result of a future Environmental Assessment.

To identify the area to be protected, the Regions of York and Peel and the Cities of Vaughan and Brampton retained the firm Cole Sherman to prepare a report entitled "Highway 427 Northerly Extension – Corridor Study Area Limits Review From Highway 7 to Langstaff Road". A report on the study was submitted to Vaughan Council on December 18, 2000.

The study identified the most extreme easterly and westerly alignments for Highway No. 427, based on Ministry of Transportation freeway design standards and pertinent environmental constraints. As a result, a wedge shaped area abutting Langstaff Road and extending south into the concession block, was identified as a no development area, pending the completion of the Environmental Assessment. Further restrictions were recommended on the west side of the prohibited area to prevent development that would have direct access to Highway 50. The affected municipalities are satisfied with this approach. As such, all future development plans (i.e. block plans and draft plans) will need to respect these constraints.

Arterial road capacity is already taxed on Highways 7 and 50 and the operations of the Highway 7/50 intersection are becoming increasingly problematic for the Region of Peel, the City of Brampton and the Town of Caledon. The development of the West Vaughan Enterprise Zone would worsen the existing situation. These problems would be relieved by the construction of the Highway No. 427 extension.

In March of 2001, the Province indicated that it would be commencing the Environmental Assessment process for the Highway no. 427 extension in the Spring of 2001. As of this date, the EA has not commenced and its timing remains uncertain. Even if the Environmental Assessment began today, it could be up to ten years before the Highway No. 427 extension could be opened. The Highway 427 Extension Committee will continue to work to encourage the Province to expedite the Environmental Assessment process.

In order to deal with the immediate road capacity constraints it was determined that a study should be undertaken which would establish the measures, which may be taken in the interim, to address these congestion problems and allow for the development of the

West Vaughan Enterprise Zone to proceed. This is one of the primary objectives of the Boundary Area Transportation Study.

Once the interim measures have been established by the Boundary Area Transportation Study, it will be possible to implement them in the Block Plan and the resulting draft plans of subdivision. In addition, the Block Plan and the draft plans will have to reflect the exclusion area identified in the earlier "Corridor Study Area Limits Review" which reflects the most western and eastern limits of a future Highway No. 427 extension.

It is expected that the Boundary Area Transportation Study will be completed by the middle of next year. Staff will be targeting approvals for the Block Plan and the implementing draft plans of subdivision for mid-2002.

Conclusion

The Region of York is currently engaged in a number of transportation studies. Many studies have been undertaken in the past. However, these are unique in that they signal a change in the orientation of our transportation system. The York Region Transportation Master Plan, in developing a transit oriented vision, is beginning the shift in emphasis from the private automobile to alternative forms of transportation, recognizing that the road network is nearing capacity. This is reinforced by the work on the Yonge and Highway 7 Transitways and the Region's search for a private sector partner to design/build/operate a York Region Rapid Transit System. The Boundary Area Transportation Study is a more typical transportation/traffic study. Its unique feature is the degree of cross-boundary co-operation required between Peel and York and the respective area municipalities. Cross-boundary co-operation will be important in varying degrees in these exercises because transportation problems (and solutions) do not respect municipal boundaries.

These studies are critical to the future of the City of Vaughan as the outcomes will influence land use decisions for decades. A comprehensive rapid transit system serving the south part of York Region, with good connections to the City of Toronto, will be a key to Vaughan's economic future. Such a system would also be supportive of the City's efforts to develop the Corporate Centre and to transform Highway 7 into more of an east-west main street for the south part of the City of Vaughan. The Boundary Area Transportation Study is necessary to resolve traffic problems, in advance of the construction of the Highway No. 427 extension. The solutions derived by the study will allow for development in the West Vaughan Enterprise Zone, south of Langstaff Road, east of Highway 50 to proceed.

City Staff have been working with Region of York Staff and its consultants on these studies. Staff will continue to provide input from the City's perspective. When necessary, Staff will report back on the status of the studies and request Council direction as required.

Attachments

1. Study Locations – York Region Transportation and Transit Improvements

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Respectfully submitted,

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