

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - OCTOBER 1, 2001

YONGE STREET CORRIDOR TRANSITWAY INDIVIDUAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Development Services and Public Works, in consultation with the Commissioner of Planning, recommends:

1. That the following report be received for information purposes;
2. That the Region of York be advised that the City of Vaughan has no objection to the Region of York seeking the approval of the draft Terms of Reference for the Yonge Street Transitway Individual Environmental Assessment, as prepared by McCormick Rankin Corporation and dated April 2001; and
3. That this report be forwarded to the Regional Municipality of York as the City of Vaughan's comments on the draft Terms of Reference for the Yonge Street Transitway Individual Environmental Assessment.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide comment to the Region of York on the latest step in the Yonge Street Corridor Transitway undertaking: The preparation of draft Terms of Reference for an Individual Environmental Assessment for the proposed transitway between Steeles Avenue and 19th Avenue in Richmond Hill.

Background - Analysis and Options

Previous studies have determined the need for increased north-south transportation capacity in the Regional Municipality of York. In response, the Region of York initiated the Yonge Street Corridor Transitway Needs and Justification Study to confirm the need for north-south rapid transit in the Region, to assess potential transit corridors and to determine a preferred corridor and transit technology. It determined that the Yonge Street Corridor, and bus rapid transit technology, are generally preferred. The study area for the Needs and Justification Study is shown on Attachment No. 1.

The next step in the undertaking is to commence an Individual Environmental Assessment (EA) for the transitway. The EA will identify potential routings through the Yonge Street corridor and will identify corresponding impacts and mitigation measures. This will lead to the selection of a preferred alignment once the alternatives have been evaluated.

As part of any Individual EA, the Environmental Assessment Act requires that a Terms of Reference be prepared, which defines the framework for the EA Study, for approval by the Ministry of the Environment. The Region of York, which is the proponent of the undertaking, retained McCormick Rankin Corporation to prepare the Terms of Reference. The Region has requested the City's comments on the draft Terms of Reference.

The nature of the undertaking was determined in the Yonge Street Transitway Needs and Justification Study. It proposes that the southern portion of Yonge Street be studied in two sections: From Steeles Avenue to Highway 7, and from Highway 7 to 19th Avenue.

The extension of the Yonge Subway is proposed for the Steeles Avenue to Highway 7 section in the longer term. Prior to the construction of the subway an "interim exclusive transitway", operating within the existing Yonge Street right of way, would be provided. This approach is consistent with the recommendations of the TTC's "Rapid Transit Expansion Study" which sees the Yonge Subway extension as a longer-term project. The TTC also sees the merit of investigating this corridor for bus rapid transit as a precursor to future rapid transit services. A transitway with buses operating within an exclusive right of way is proposed for the Highway 7 to 19th Avenue section of Yonge Street. The remainder of the corridor northerly to Davis Drive will be the subject of a future EA Study.

The proposed transitway will abut the eastern boundary of City of Vaughan, between Steeles Avenue and Highway 7. Many buildings along this section of Yonge Street are located in close proximity to the road, particularly in the Old Village of Thornhill Heritage Conservation District. As such, these buildings and the overall ambiance of the old village may be affected by the transitway.

The Yonge Street right of way through Old Thornhill is approximately thirty (30) metres 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 would require between seven (7) and ten (10) metres of 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 buildings and the character of the streetscape are limited. There are a number of buildings in this area which have setbacks from the road allowance ranging from 0 metres to 7.5 metres. Therefore, it may be necessary for an exclusive transitway to be discontinuous through areas of reduced rights of way, with buses operating in HOV lanes or in mixed traffic.

The Terms of Reference identify the factors to be used in evaluating the impact of the various routing options. These factors include: The Natural Environment; the Social Environment; the Economic Environment; and the Cultural Environment. Route alternatives will be evaluated on the basis of these factors and a technically preferred alternative will be identified. The factors identified are sufficiently comprehensive. While the need to provide the required transit service is clear, it will also be necessary to ensure that the social, cultural and economic impacts of the undertaking are given sufficient weighting in the evaluation of the alternatives, given the potential impacts on Old Thornhill.

Conclusion

Staff are satisfied that the draft Terms of Reference can form the basis for the Yonge Street Transitway Individual Environmental Assessment. Staff will be involved in the Technical Advisory Committee for the Environmental Assessment and will update Council on the status of the study when necessary. Should Council concur, the recommendations set out above should be adopted.

Attachments

1. Key Plan

Report prepared by:

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Respectfully submitted,

FRANK MIELE
Commissioner of Development Services
& Public Works

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Executive Director of City Engineering
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YORK REGION
YONGE STREET CORRIDOR
TRANSITWAY STUDY
*(Preparation of Terms of Reference/
 Needs and Justification)*

KEY PLAN

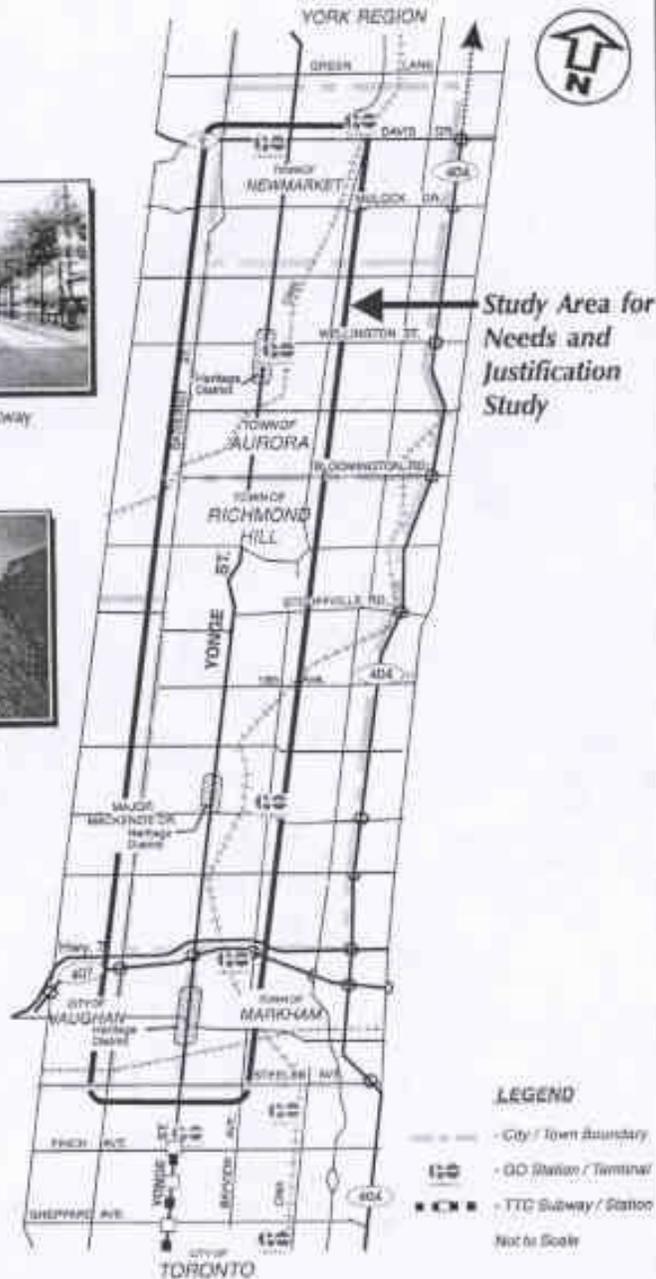
ATTACHMENT No. 1



Example: Transitway



Example: Transitway



LEGEND

- - - - - City / Town Boundary
- GO Station / Terminal
- ■ ■ ■ ■ TTC Subway / Station
- Not to Scale