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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT UPDATE

The Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 15, 2004, from the Vice President, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report is presented to update the Rapid Transit Public Private Partnership Steering Committee and York Council regarding the progress, next steps and outstanding items pertaining to the three Environmental Assessments currently being conducted.

3. BACKGROUND

Four individual Environmental Assessments (EAs) are being conducted to obtain Ministry of the Environment (MOE) approval of the York Rapid Transit Plan. These comprise:

- The southern portion of the Yonge Corridor between Steeles and 19th Avenues.
- Highway 7 Corridor including the Vaughan North-South Link.
- The Markham North-South link.
- The northern portion of the Yonge Corridor between 19th Avenue and Newmarket.

Focussed Terms of Reference (ToR) for the southern Yonge and Highway 7 Corridor EAs based on previously completed Need and Justification Studies were submitted and approved during 2003. A similar focussed ToR for the Markham North-South Link was submitted in draft form for pre-circulation in the summer of 2003. By that time, all EA study activities and a draft EA Report for the Yonge Corridor and most of the EA study activities for the Highway 7 Corridor had been completed.

Last fall, the MOE notified all proponents currently preparing EAs that due to a Divisional Court ruling concerning an eastern Ontario landfill EA, they would be unable to process for approval EA Reports based on focussed Terms of Reference. Consequently, the partnership undertook to prepare and re-submit revised non-focussed ToR for all three corridors.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Terms of Reference

MOE comments on the draft revised ToRs submitted at the end of 2003 have been incorporated and the updated versions made available for public review on the YRTP website and at the YRTP office. Very few comments were received allowing formal submission of the revised southern Yonge and Highway 7 ToRs to MOE on April 2, 2004 and the Markham North-South link two weeks later to stagger the review effort by the government review agencies.

The MOE's regulatory 12-week maximum review period for a ToR will result in a likely approval date of early June for southern Yonge and Highway 7 Corridors and late June for the Markham N-S link.

4.2 ToR Issues

The Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill has reiterated their concerns over the perceived effects of rapid transit on their community. They have requested that potential adverse effects be addressed and indicated that they will pursue their campaign for an underground solution through their district. A response will be prepared referring the Society to the surface solution developed jointly with the community and Society representatives through extensive consultation in 2003.

4.3 Environmental Assessment Studies

4.3.1 Southern Yonge Street Corridor

To comply with EA Act requirements for an EA based on a non-focussed ToR, the Region's Need and Justification Study documentation is being incorporated into the previously completed draft EA report.

Completion of the updated report is scheduled for June 2004.

4.3.1.1 Outstanding Items

- Access to some local streets and Holy Cross Cemetery.
- Traffic impact report to be finalized and submitted to Richmond Hill for review.
- Bus turnback at 19th Ave. to be resolved.
- Park-and-ride opportunities to be confirmed.

4.3.2 Highway 7 / Vaughan N-S Link Corridor

After completion of the public consultation program by mid-2003, the technically preferred alignment was presented to Council in September to allow commencement of EA Report preparation.

Finalization of alignment details and mitigation of stakeholder concerns is nearing completion. Report assembly, including integration of the Region's Need and Justification Study findings, is proceeding.

Completion of the updated report is scheduled for June 2004.

4.3.2.1 Outstanding Items

- Confirmation of local alignment details on Town Centre Blvd. between Highway 7 at Markham Civic Centre and the proposed Markham Centre area on Enterprise Drive.
- Local alignment routing at M-S Hospital to respond to revised proposals for hospital expansion and community centre integration.
- Submission of road access and parking concepts for Jane/Steeles Regional transit terminal to Ontario Hydro for approval.
- Development of a suitable station location to serve residential and employment areas between Yonge and Bayview is still to be finalized.

4.3.3 Public Consultation for southern Yonge and Highway 7 Corridors

Public Consultation for both corridors was completed prior to the MOEs notice concerning the ToR change. Due to the need for a public consultation opportunity to review the technically preferred design alternative after approval of the revised ToR a combined Yonge and Highway 7 public meeting will be convened. It is likely that this will be held early in September as ToR approval may not be received in time for a pre-summer vacation meeting.

4.3.4 Markham North-South Link Corridor

Development of alignment alternatives for this corridor has continued during preparation of the revised ToR. These will be presented to the public for input at an open house in May. The alternatives will be evaluated through the summer leading to presentation of the technically preferred alternative to the public at the final open house in early September.

Assembly of the consolidated EA report will proceed in parallel and be completed by end of September 2004.

Given the need to submit a revised ToR, the Region sought to facilitate collaboration without approval by the City of Toronto, offering to name them as a co-proponent in the revised Terms of Reference for this corridor. The city has declined the offer, therefore there will be less commitment to obtaining acceptance of alignment recommendations in the corridor south of Steeles Avenue.

4.3.4.1 Outstanding Item

- Compatibility of alignment alternatives south of Steeles Ave. with City of Toronto DVP/404 study recommendations will have to be resolved through TAC meetings during on-going alternatives analysis.

4.3.5 North Yonge Street Corridor

Data Collection for the EA Terms of Reference for the northern portion of the Yonge Corridor has commenced using the non-focussed format now adopted for the revised south Yonge and Highway 7 EA's as described above. A Technical Advisory Committee meeting will be convened during April to obtain local municipal input to the scope of the

Terms of Reference. Public comment on the document will be obtained at a meeting planned for May with submission to MOE following in June 2004.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There may be potential financial implications associated with the need to prepare revised Terms of Reference discussed in this report. The matter is under review by YC2002 and regional staff and if approval of costs for the additional EA work is required it will be identified in a subsequent report.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are involved in the resolution of the issues noted in Section 4.

7. CONCLUSION

Subsequent to last fall's Divisional Court ruling concerning an eastern Ontario landfill EA precluding the processing of EA Reports based on focussed ToR, the Region prepared and re-submitted revised non-focussed ToRs for all three corridors. The MOE's regulatory 12-week maximum review period for a ToR will likely result in approval in early June for the Yonge and Highway 7 Corridors and in late June for the Markham N-S link. Outstanding issues are being effectively managed and resolutions are imminent.