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### **NORTH YONGE STREET PUBLIC TRANSIT AND ASSOCIATED ROAD IMPROVEMENTS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PRELIMINARY PREFERRED DESIGN**

**The Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends the following:**

- 1. The presentation by Paul May, Director, Infrastructure Planning and Dave Clark, Chief Architect, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report, May 1, 2008, from the Vice-President, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation and the Commissioner of Transportation and Works, be adopted:**

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the preliminary preferred design developed through the North Yonge Street Corridor Transit and Associated Road Improvements Environmental Assessment as described in this report.
2. Staff be authorized to proceed with the final round of public consultation in June and upon consideration of public input received and completion of the environmental assessment report, file the project for the mandatory 30-day public review.
3. Copies of this report be forwarded by the Regional Clerk to the Clerks of the Towns of Richmond Hill, Aurora, Newmarket and East Gwillimbury.

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the preliminary preferred design for rapid transit and associated road improvements, and provide authorization to proceed with the final round of public consultation for the environmental assessment.

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#### **3. BACKGROUND**

The environmental assessment study area, illustrated in *Council Attachment 1*, extends from Bathurst Street in the west to Highway 404 in the east, and from 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Richmond Hill in the south to East Gwillimbury's Green Lane corridor in the north.

**The environmental assessment has been progressed based on extensive consultation since the last report to Council in May 2007**

On May 24, 2007, Council endorsed the recommended alignment for rapid transit service in the Yonge Street Corridor north of 19th Avenue, ending in Newmarket and East Gwillimbury, with two easterly branches, one along Davis Drive from Yonge Street to the Highway 404 area, and the second along Green Lane from Yonge Street to the Green Lane GO Transit Terminal.

In June 2007, the project team presented these findings at public consultation centres on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> in Aurora, Oak Ridges and the Upper Canada Mall, respectively. The public and stakeholders were generally supportive of the recommended alignment and expressed interest in being kept involved as the project proceeds.

Since that time, the project team has also undertaken extensive consultation with the local municipalities and with key landowners and other stakeholders along the segments of the proposed rapidway, including the section of Davis Drive from Yonge Street to the Southlake Regional Health Centre and through downtown Oak Ridges. On Davis Drive, many of the landowners indicated an interest in land use evolution in the corridor and rapid transit's role in supporting more intense transit-oriented development.

Small business owners and tenants along the Davis corridor and in Oak Ridges raised concerns about the impact of the rapidway construction programme on the viability of their businesses. Retail businesses remain concerned about how the new access regime will affect their customers and business operations. The stakeholders expressed a desire to limit impacts on existing businesses to the greatest extent possible.

In January 2008, Newmarket Council adopted a committee resolution supporting rapid transit service on Yonge Street between Mulock Drive and Green Lane, extending easterly along both Green Lane and Davis Drive to the Southlake Regional Health Centre.

Regional staff also met with East Gwillimbury regarding the function of Green Lane and options for bringing rapid transit services along the corridor to intersect with the GO facility. East Gwillimbury staff is supportive of the Green Lane rapid transit service to support the growth being considered in their Official Plan.

A joint presentation was made by Rapid Transit staff and senior Richmond Hill staff to Richmond Hill Council on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The preferred alignment and station locations were reviewed with Richmond Hill staff in April of this year. The station locations reflect inputs received from staff.

Staff is also scheduled to present the preliminary preferred design to the Councils of Richmond Hill, Aurora, Newmarket and East Gwillimbury in early May. Comments

received from the local Councils will be addressed in finalizing the environmental assessment report.

**The Environmental Assessment will be completed under the new Class Environmental Assessment process**

The Ministry of the Environment approved an amended Municipal Engineers Association Class Environmental Assessment in the fall of 2007 including for the first time municipal transit projects within the Class Environmental Assessment process. Ministry of the Environment approval includes provisions for projects that were started as Individual Environmental Assessment's to be completed under the new Class Environmental Assessment process. Completion of the North Yonge Transit Environmental Assessment under the class process will benefit the project schedule significantly since the class process does not require formal sign-off by a Provincial agency review team and does not require formal approval by the Minister of the Environment, as is the case for an Individual Environmental Assessment.

In March 2008, the public was notified that the Individual Environmental Assessment was being transitioned to the newly approved Municipal Engineers Association Class Environmental Assessment process.

The final environmental assessment submission is scheduled for early August of this year. After the 30-day comment period, the environmental assessment could be automatically approved by mid-September 2008.

**Davis Drive operational and safety improvements environmental assessment will be incorporated**

The transit environmental assessment project team has been working with the project team that has been undertaking the Davis Drive Operational and Safety Improvements Environmental Assessment to integrate this scope of work into the broader North Yonge Corridor Transit Environmental Assessment, in accordance with Council's direction on September 27, 2007.

**Extensive technical analysis has been undertaken**

Since the round of Public Consultation Centres in June 2007, the project team has been developing the details of the preliminary preferred design, confirming the preferred station locations, the extent of dedicated rapidway (taking into consideration constrained areas such as through downtown Aurora, as well as other considerations, such as background traffic congestion, forecast transit ridership and adjacent land use and transit-oriented development opportunities), and also undertaking the detailed assessment and developing mitigation of effects of the proposed infrastructure.

### **Province has committed funding for the North Yonge Corridor rapidway**

Given the early need for transit improvements to the hospital, the Region advanced these segments as a Quick Win project to Metrolinx for transit project funding.

The Province, in its spring 2008 budget, committed \$100 million in funding for preliminary engineering, vehicles and intelligent transportation systems for Viva Phase 2, which includes segments of the North Yonge Street corridor. Specifically, \$29 million was identified for the northern segment from Mulock Drive to Green Lane, including transit improvements on Green Lane and Davis Drive.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

### **A preliminary preferred design on Yonge Street has been developed**

The preliminary preferred design (*see Council Attachment 2*) for Viva rapid transit on Yonge Street through north Richmond Hill calls for the widening of the existing roadway to accommodate dedicated median rapidway lanes from 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the limit of the previously approved South Yonge Environmental Assessment, to north of Bloomington Road, incorporating median stations at 19<sup>th</sup> Ave./Gamble Road, Tower Hill Drive (future), Jefferson Sideroad, Silver Maple Road (future), King Road, Regatta Avenue and Bloomington Road.

In Aurora, insertion of rapidway lanes is constrained by the existing narrow right-of-way through the historic downtown neighbourhood. Consequently, Viva service is planned to continue operating in mixed traffic with new curb side station platforms north of the Wellington intersection. North and south of the downtown, the existing right-of-way permits consideration of widening for median transit lanes and on-going consultation with Aurora and GO Transit (owners of the Barrie Line rail overpass) will lead to final recommendations on the extent of rapidway south of Golf Links Drive and north of Orchard Heights. Stations are planned at Henderson Drive, Golf Links Road, Wellington Street, Orchard Heights Drive and St. Johns Sideroad.

Entering Newmarket, median rapidway would again be constructed from Savage Road to Davis Drive, in a widened roadway maintaining four general purpose lanes. This design incorporates median stations at Savage Road North, Mulock Drive, Eagle Street and Davis Drive.

North of Davis Drive, the preferred Yonge Street design to address rapid transit and road operational needs comprises widening to achieve the Region's six-lane Great Streets cross-section with rapid transit operating in the curb-lane designated as a high occupancy vehicle lane. In this section, curbside stations are planned at London Road and Green Lane.

### **A preliminary preferred design on Davis Drive and Green Lane has been developed**

The preferred design for rapid transit service on the Davis Drive East branch of the 'F' configuration calls for roadway widening to accommodate median rapidway and new left turn lanes at key intersections between Yonge Street and the Southlake Regional Health Centre. Median stations are planned in the Longford area, at Main Street and the Health Centre. Integration of the station at the Southlake Health Centre within the hospital site is currently being planned and coordinated with the expansion plans for the hospital.

The transit ridership and background traffic level do not warrant the construction of dedicated rapidway lanes east of the hospital. However, the environmental assessment is recommending Viva service to continue east on Davis Drive to the Leslie Street/Highway 404 area.

In the same manner, Viva service on the Green Lane arm of the 'F' is recommended to operate in mixed traffic along Green Lane to GO Transit's Rail station in East Gwillimbury. While current ridership projections and background traffic levels do not warrant dedicated rapidway lanes at this time, East Gwillimbury's preliminary land use planning along Green Lane justifies the environmental assessment recommendation to extend Viva service and protection within the right-of-way for future physical infrastructure to be defined (high occupancy vehicle lanes or rapidway) as development in East Gwillimbury proceeds, traffic levels increase and transit ridership grows.

The need for high occupancy vehicle lane conversion to rapidways will be carefully monitored as part of the emerging land use vision for Green Lane and will be dealt with through the new expedited environmental assessment process.

### **Intersection reconfigurations are being considered along Davis Drive**

The consolidated environmental assessment includes reviewing the existing connecting road network. The study team is currently working with Newmarket and adjacent landowners to optimize the final details of the proposed infrastructure along Davis Drive, including potential rationalization and realignment of the local road network at some intersections (examples of intersections under investigation include at George St./Wilstead and at Longford/Parkside). Fine tuning recommendations for streetscape improvements along this corridor are also ongoing.

### **Transit interface at Davis Drive and Yonge Street and Southlake Regional Health Centre is being finalized**

Similar to the work we are doing with Southlake Regional Health Centre to locate a transit facility on-site, the project team has been working with Newmarket and the Upper Canada Mall to look at opportunities for on-site transit facilities at the mall. From a transit service perspective, it is certainly desirable to closely integrate transit service with

these key ridership generators if feasible. The preferred direction is to indicate in the environmental assessment that the four corners at Davis Drive and Yonge Street provide excellent opportunities for intensification by bringing built-form up to the corner. As a major place-making opportunity, the master planning of all four corners should examine opportunities to integrate an intermodal transit facility and the language in the environmental assessment will support this initiative. The preferred environmental assessment will continue to show the station for rapid transit on Yonge Street south of Davis Drive.

#### **A final public meeting is being considered for June**

Following this final round of consultation and consideration of comments received, the project team will finalize the preferred design, complete the assessment report and file the Class Environmental Assessment for the mandatory 30 day public review in the fall of 2008.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The budget for the consulting services to complete the North Yonge Street Corridor Rapid Transit environmental assessment is included as part of the Yonge Street – Steeles Avenue to Richmond Hill Centre Terminal (Y1) O&M agreement between York Consortium 2002 and York Region.

### **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Extensive consultations have occurred with local Councils, municipal staff, stakeholders and the public in the development of the preferred preliminary design. As noted above, staff is also scheduled to present the preliminary preferred design to the Councils of Richmond Hill, Aurora, Newmarket and East Gwillimbury in early May. Comments received from those local Councils will be addressed in finalizing the environmental assessment report.

### **7. CONCLUSION**

The North Yonge Environmental Assessment has identified a preliminary preferred design for a rapid transit service between 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Richmond Hill through to Newmarket and East Gwillimbury including associated road improvements.

The details of the preliminary preferred design will be presented to the public at an upcoming public consultation centre in June. Following this final round of consultation and consideration of comments received, the project team will finalize the preferred

design, complete the assessment report and file the Class Environmental Assessment for the mandatory 30 day public review.

For additional information, please contact Mary-Frances Turner, Vice-President, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation at (905) 886-6767 ext. 2226.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(The two attachments referred to in this clause are included with this report.)*