

15

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS DONALD COUSENS PARKWAY (FORMERLY MARKHAM BYPASS EXTENSION) TO MORNINGSIDE AVENUE LINK – PROJECT UPDATE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated June 5, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services and General Manager, Roads, subject to amending recommendation 4 to include the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Ministry of the Environment be requested to expedite the approval of the section of the alignment from Highway 407 south to 9th Line, common to both York and Toronto's preferred alternative.
2. The Ministry of the Environment, through the conditions of approval for the common section, also protect the corridor west of 9th Line and south to the existing terminus of Morningside Avenue for both York and Toronto's preferred alignment until a final EA decision is rendered on the remainder of the corridor.
3. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, through the Office of the Provincial Development Facilitator, continue to assist until a final agreement is reached on implementation and cost sharing of inter-regional transportation infrastructure in this York/Toronto/Durham boundary area.
4. A copy of this report and associated staff presentation be forwarded by the Regional Clerk to the Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Clerks at the City of Toronto, Town of Markham, Region of Durham and City of Pickering.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Committee and Council on the status of this project since staff last reported in May 2006, and to present a strategy to proceed with EA approval for the section of the road corridor that is common to both York and Toronto's preferred alignment, while at the same time protecting the section of the corridor where York and Toronto's preferred alignment differ, until a final agreement can be reached.

3. BACKGROUND

For detailed project information, please refer to the previous reports to Planning and Economic Development Committee, May 10, 2006, and to Transportation and Works Committee, October 12, 2005. *Attachment 1* presents the proposed road link within the inter-regional context of this York/Toronto/Durham boundary area.

The Individual EA for the Donald Cousens Parkway (formerly Markham Bypass Extension) to Morningside Avenue Link was completed and filed for public review from December 23, 2005 to February 17, 2006.

Toronto Council, at their meeting on June 14, 15 and 16, 2005 took a position formally opposing the alignment for the proposed road link, and most recently reaffirmed this position at their meeting on April 25, 26 and 27, 2006. *Attachment 2* identifies both the alignment preferred by York as identified through the Individual EA and that preferred by Toronto. As can be seen from the attachment, much of the alignment is common, particularly east of 9th Line to Highway 407.

On September 20, 2006, York requested that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal assign the Provincial Development Facilitator to assist in resolving the York/Toronto issue. The request was granted and the Provincial Development Facilitator has been involved since the Fall of 2006 in discussions with Toronto and Provincial representatives to try to find some common ground to move the process forward.

The next major step in the EA process is for the MOE to publish an EA Review, documenting their position on the EA for public comment before the Minister makes a final decision. In consideration of the efforts to resolve the alignment dispute, the MOE agreed to extend the publication deadline for the EA Review to June 30, 2007.

In consideration of the approaching MOE deadline, staff seek to finalize approval of the section of the road corridor from Highway 407 to 9th Line that is not in dispute and protect the remainder of the corridor until an agreement can be reached.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Need for this Road Link

There are a number of key purposes for this transportation link. The obvious one is to service projected travel demand, which will continue to grow with development in and around this York/Toronto/Durham boundary area. *Attachment 3* illustrates the significant development areas including the Seaton Community and Federal Airport lands within Durham, the Morningside Heights Community and Tapscott employment areas within Toronto, and the Cornell and Box Grove development areas within York.

A second purpose, equally as significant given the recent announcements by the Province to protect additional lands in this area, is to provide a bypass of the sensitive conservation lands east of the CP Rail. *Attachment 3* illustrates the magnitude of lands conservation in this area, with the existing Rouge Park, the recently created Bob Hunter Memorial Park, Greenbelt land and additional land recently announced for Rouge Park expansion. Keeping traffic on high quality arterial road corridors within the urban boundary is critical to managing traffic through these sensitive conservation areas.

The proposed Donald Cousens Parkway to Morningside Avenue Link is planned as a multi-modal high quality corridor and will provide efficient travel choice for transit service, walking, cycling and autos, and should not be overlooked as a key component of wise management of conservation land in this area.

Maintaining the status-quo of an incomplete and overstressed transportation network in this boundary area will only lead to further traffic gridlock and environmental impact, which is already evident with traffic congestion on Steeles Avenue and significant traffic through the existing Rouge Park south of Steeles Avenue.

4.2 Relationship to Expanded Park Area

As noted previously, *Attachment 3* illustrates the magnitude of lands conservation in this area. The Rouge Park extends from the headwaters in the Oak Ridges Moraine to the marshes at Rouge Beach where the river empties into Lake Ontario. In March 2006, the Province announced plans to expand Rouge Park by an additional 1500 acres in Markham, for a total Park of over 11,500 acres (46 square kilometres).

In addition to the expanded Rouge Park in this area, the process of creating the Bob Hunter Memorial Park is well underway. The park includes 500 acres of land east of the CP Rail, north and south of 14th Avenue.

As noted in section 4.1, one of the key purposes of the proposed Donald Cousens Parkway to Morningside Avenue Link is to provide a bypass of the sensitive conservation lands in this area and keep traffic growth, to the extent possible, within the urban boundary and development areas.

4.3 The Two Alignments

As noted previously, *Attachment 2* depicts both the York and Toronto preferred alignments. The York preferred alignment (commonly referred to as the continuous alignment), was determined through the EA to have the greatest net benefit to the overall environment (natural, socio-economic, transportation, etc.) and has been endorsed by Markham, Durham and staff from the TRCA and Rouge Park.

The alignment preferred by Toronto (commonly referred to as the discontinuous alignment) proposes to use a section of Steeles Avenue to link traffic between the existing 9th Line and the City's preferred Morningside Avenue Extension corridor.

In this scenario, the resulting pair of T-intersections to Steeles Avenue will experience significant turning volume and congestion. Also, Steeles Avenue would be surcharged in this area, carrying both east-west traffic and north-south destined trips. The adverse effects resulting from upgrading the Steeles Avenue crossing of the Rouge River and Morningside Tributary to accommodate the traffic surcharge is typically underestimated or neglected altogether by those who advocate the discontinuous alignment as being best for the natural environment.

A final resolution of the difference between the two proposed road alignments is not expected in the short term. However, as can be seen on *Attachment 2*, much of the alignment is common to both, particularly east of 9th Line connecting to Highway 407. This commonality provides an opportunity to move the process forward and provide some relief to traffic in this area, as well as provide for orderly development in the Box Grove Planning Area, which is directly affected by this section of the corridor.

4.4 Moving Forward

As noted in Section 3.0, the next major step in the EA process is for the MOE to publish an EA Review for public comment. The typical process timelines have been expanded to allow the Provincial Development Facilitator an opportunity to resolve the York/Toronto issues regarding the final alignment. Since the fall of 2006, the Provincial Development Facilitator has made a significant effort to mediate discussions between York, Toronto and the Province to clarify interregional interests in this area and begin to find some common ground in which to move forward.

Although there has been some progress, there is no indication of an imminent resolution between York and Toronto on the final road alignment. In an effort to build on the progress to date, staff recommend that the EA process proceed to a final decision on the common segment of the alignment from 9th Line to Highway 407. This will help begin to manage traffic through the sensitive Rouge Park and Bob Hunter Memorial Park lands, and at the same time allow some of the development in this area to proceed. In addition, this segment was identified in the EA as the logical first stage of construction and can be implemented as a stand-alone component, without prejudicing a future decision by the MOE on the remainder of the corridor west of 9th Line and south to Morningside Avenue.

A final agreement on the alignment between York and Toronto may take some time to materialize. Staff are confident that a final resolution can be reached as the importance of this link is well documented, additional growth pressures in this area are imminent as the Seaton lands in Durham begin to develop, and there are common interests in realizing long overdue road improvements in this area, including widening of Steeles Avenue.

A final resolution will likely involve negotiations on a number of boundary area improvements and cost sharing between York/Toronto/Durham and the Province. The continued involvement of the Provincial Development Facilitator is critical if a final agreement is to be reached. In this regard, a recommendation has been included in this report requesting that the Provincial Development Facilitator continue to assist.

In the interim period before a final resolution is reached on the alignment west of 9th Line and south to Morningside Avenue, both the York (continuous) and Toronto (discontinuous) alignments need to be protected. In this regard, the Ministry of the Environment is being requested to ensure protection of the corridor through the conditions of the Phase I approval until a final decision can be rendered on the remainder of the corridor.

4.5 Relationship to Vision 2026

Goal 7 of Vision 2026 states: “In 2026, York Region will have effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive transportation, waste management and water systems.” Action areas for Goal 7 include:

- “Developing an integrated transportation network.”
- “Ensuring that our transportation network coordinates with development.”

The recommendations of the report are consistent with these action areas.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Partial approval of the road corridor from Highway 407 to the 9th Line will allow the implementation of this section to proceed in orderly concurrence with Phase II development plans in the Box Grove Development Area. This link to the Highway 407/Donald Cousens Parkway interchange will provide an important connection to the arterial network and service development in the Box Grove area, Cornell and beyond.

7. CONCLUSION

An agreement with the City of Toronto regarding the final alignment of the Donald Cousens Parkway to Morningside Avenue Link does not appear imminent, despite the efforts of the Provincial Development Facilitator.

The MOE is being requested to proceed with the final EA review and approval for the section of the alignment from Highway 407 to 9th Line. This section is common to both the York and City of Toronto preferred alignment. This section will allow orderly development to proceed in the Box Grove Development area, is an important link to Highway 407 and will not prejudice a future decision by the MOE on the remainder of the corridor west of 9th Line and south to Morningside Avenue.

This road link remains a critical piece of the inter-regional transportation network in this York/Toronto/Durham boundary area and must be protected until a final EA decision is rendered on the remainder of the corridor.

This road link is also a critical component for the wise management of sensitive conservation lands east of the CP Rail. The proposed road will keep traffic growth within the urban development areas, and reduce traffic growth through the Rouge Park, Bob Hunter Memorial Park and Greenbelt areas.

For more information on this report, please contact Steve Mota, Program Manager-Transportation Engineering, Infrastructure Planning Branch at 905-830-4444 ext. 5056 or steve.mota@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments and presentation referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)