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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, September 16, 2004, from the Vice President of the 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 Council regarding the study progress, public consultation, approval status, next steps and outstanding items pertaining to the four 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.

In late August 2004, the Court of Appeal for Ontario set aside the 2003 judgement of the Divisional Court. This does not affect the YRTP EA's as they are now being submitted under the revised Terms of Reference, which have been approved by the MOE and supersede the original Terms of Reference.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Environmental Assessment Studies

4.1.1 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.

The Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill and Thornhill Ratepayers Associations reiterated, in written submissions, their concerns over the perceived effects of rapid transit on their community. A workshop was convened with the Society and Association representatives in June to review the concepts developed through extensive consultation in 2003. The streetscaping concept recommended by the joint Markham and Vaughan Thornhill Community Study will be presented in the EA Report as an example of potential measures to enhance the transit right-of-way through the Heritage District and mitigate any effects of the road widening required. Society and Association representatives will have an opportunity to review the concept at the final public consultation opportunity scheduled for early September.

Completion of the updated EA report is scheduled for mid-September 2004. After internal review and the final public consultation session scheduled for early September, the draft report will be submitted to MOE and government review agencies at the end of September.

4.1.1.1 Outstanding Issues

- Location of signalized intersections to improve access to some local streets and recreational facilities in Thornhill (Extreme Fitness, Thornhill Country Club) and Holy Cross Cemetery south of Langstaff Road.
- Traffic impact report to be finalized and submitted to Richmond Hill for review.
- Rapid Transit vehicle turnback arrangements at 19th Ave. are to be described in the final report.
- An outline of park-and-ride policies, requirements and opportunities is to be provided in the report.

4.1.2 Highway 7 / Vaughan N-S Link Corridor

The technically preferred alignment, approved by Regional Council last September, was presented to Markham Council in April 2004. Finalization of alignment details and mitigation of stakeholder concerns is nearing completion.

Extensive consultation with developers and IBM has been carried out to secure a right-of-way from Highway 7 to the planned Markham Centre. These discussions were concluded during August with IBM executive indicating that they could not endorse a transit right-of-way across their property given that their long-term needs on the property could not be predicted with any certainty at this time. The Network Plan schedule contemplates segregated transitway construction in 2007.

The EA will continue to seek MOE approval of the preferred alignment across IBM property. When funding has been secured for this segment and detailed design is commenced, IBM will be consulted to determine whether they are now in a better position to confirm their long-term land needs and accommodate the Rapid Transit right-of-way.

YRTP is pursuing a strategy to allow submission of the future subway analysis portion of the Vaughan N-S Link EA in advance of the TTC's recently initiated York University subway EA. This will identify the interface zone immediately north of Steeles Avenue as a Special Study Area in which the precise alignment of the subway will be determined in an addendum to the EA once the TTC study is completed.

Report assembly, including integration of the Region's previously completed Need and Justification Study findings, is continuing.

Completion of the updated EA report is scheduled for end September 2004. After internal review and the final public consultation session scheduled for early September, the draft report will be submitted to MOE by mid-October.

4.1.2.1 Outstanding Issues

- Finalization, with Markham staff, of local alignment concepts on Town Centre Blvd. between Highway 7 at Markham Civic Centre and the proposed Markham Centre area on Enterprise Drive.
- Flexibility in local alignment routing at M-S Hospital to recognize potential proposals for hospital expansion and community centre integration under development.
- Submission of road access and parking concepts for Jane/Steeles Regional transit terminal to Ontario Hydro for approval.

4.1.3 Markham North-South Link Corridor

Finalization of the Need and Justification and development of alignment alternatives for this corridor continued during preparation of the revised ToR. The alternatives will be evaluated through the fall leading to presentation of the technically preferred alternative to the public at the final open house in November.

Assembly of the consolidated EA report will follow the remaining analysis and public consultation and be completed by end of 2004.

4.1.3.1 Outstanding Issues

- 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.
- Evaluation of Highway 7 interface configurations to enable the Markham N-S Link to serve both the planned Markham Centre and the Beaver Creek/Hwy 404 employment centre.

4.1.4 North Yonge Street Corridor Terms of Reference

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 was convened during May to obtain local municipal input to the scope of the Terms of Reference. The draft ToR was completed in July with submission to MOE scheduled for September 2004 after an internal review. Following MOE approval of the ToR, the EA will proceed subject to approval of budget for the study itself.

4.2 Public Consultation

4.2.1 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 information centre will be convened. This will be held at Shopping Centre venues in Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham early in September 2004.

4.2.2 Markham N-S Link

The analysis and evaluation of alignment alternatives will be presented to the public for input at an open house in September 2004.

4.2.3 North Yonge Street Corridor

Public comment on the EA ToR content and study scope was obtained at open houses held in Newmarket and Oak Ridges in mid-June 2004.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Considerable additional time and effort has been required to prepare the revised terms of reference, incorporate prior studies into the draft EA Report and undertake an additional round of public consultation. Rapid transit staff are currently reviewing a submission from YC2002 outlining their costs and will report back in October on our position.

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 the Yonge, Highway 7 (incl. Vaughan N-S Link) and Markham N-S Link. Formal MOE approval for these corridors was received during July and August. Outstanding issues are being effectively managed

and resolutions are imminent. The draft ToR for the North Yonge Street Corridor was completed in July and submission to MOE is scheduled for September 2004 after an internal review. Following MOE approval of this ToR, the EA will proceed subject to approval of budget for the study itself.