
Community & Neighbourhood Services
Eric Gam, Commissioner

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To: Councillor Gerry Altobello, Chair, Planning and Transportation Committee
Councillor Jane Pitfield, Chair, Works Committee
Councillor Howard Moscoe, Chair, Toronto Transit Commission

From: Barbara Yaffe, Acting Medical Officer of Health

Date: September 3, 2004

Subject: St. Clair Avenue West Transit Improvements

At its meeting July 12, 2004, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to comment on the potential health impacts of the proposed St. Clair streetcar right-of-way, and this recommendation was adopted by Council. Please find my comments below, for your information.

The City is undertaking a municipal class environmental assessment of potential transit improvements for St. Clair Avenue West. In the staff report dated August 31, 2004, *St. Clair Avenue West Transit Improvements Environmental Assessment: Yonge Street to Gunns Road* (the "Staff Report"), the City/TTC indicate that the streetcar tracks must be replaced immediately due to wear, and that transit improvements are required to accommodate current transportation needs, and increased future demand. The Project Team (consisting of the City, TTC, Toronto Parking Authority and consultants) has recommended the solution of implementing exclusive lanes for transit vehicles on St. Clair Avenue West (a streetcar right-of-way). I am writing to express my support for the concept of dedicated transit lanes, as a means of encouraging transit ridership, reducing air pollutant emissions from private, low-occupancy vehicles, and improving air quality.

In Toronto, transportation is a primary source of air pollutants, including nitrogen oxides (NO_x), sulphur oxides (SO_x), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO) and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀). On hot days these air pollutants also combine to form ozone, the key ingredient in smog. These air pollutants are known to cause or exacerbate cardiac and respiratory effects including asthma. In fact, one scientific study showed that when car use dropped suddenly (during the Atlanta Olympic Games), both air pollution levels and the number of childhood asthma events also dropped. That study indicates that reduced car use can improve

health and quality of life. In June, 2004, I released a new study reporting that air pollution in Toronto (from all sources) contributes to an estimated 1,700 premature deaths and 6,000 hospitalizations each year. To protect human health and quality of life in Toronto, it is essential that we find creative solutions to reduce major sources of air pollution, including transportation.

While automobiles emit exhaust into the local environment, streetcars, which are electric, do not emit exhaust in the neighbourhoods where they operate. However, according to the City/TTC in the Staff Report, the majority of streetcar delays result from traffic congestion and other automobile-related delays. Encouraging streetcar use, and discouraging the use of single-occupancy vehicles, reduce local pollutant emissions and can generate real air quality improvements, particularly at street level in the local area, for example on sidewalks and inside nearby buildings.

To ensure that transit use is the preferred option for more residents and visitors, transit must be reliable, speedy, comfortable and convenient. The City/TTC indicate that the proposed streetcar right-of-way would enhance the street and local transit in a number of ways. According to the Staff Report and supporting modelling results, separating streetcars from automobiles and making other recommended enhancements would significantly improve transit reliability, efficiency, and trip quality. It would shorten average transit travel times, shorten passenger waiting times, and increase the proportion of streetcars that are able to make complete trips (instead of “short-turning” due to traffic and delays in the streetcar lane). Ultimately these improvements would attract more transit riders and reduce automobile dependency.

Based on the City/TTC’s analysis in the Staff Report, I support the recommendation that transit enhancements should be undertaken and take the form of exclusive streetcar lanes, to encourage transit use and reduce vehicle-related pollutant emissions.

cc: Councillor John Filion, Chair, Board of Health
Paula Dill, Commissioner, Urban Development Services
Dave Kaufman, Acting Commissioner, Works and Emergency Services
Richard Ducharme, Chief General Manager, Toronto Transit Commission
Maurice Anderson, President, Toronto Parking Authority
John Warren, Director, Environmental Services, Works and Emergency Services