



TORONTO STAFF REPORT

June 13, 2003

To: Works Committee

From: Barry H. Gutteridge, Commissioner, Works and Emergency Services

Subject: Car Free Day and Car Free Pedestrian Zones

Purpose:

To respond to requests from the Works Committee for reports on the feasibility of organizing a larger Car Free Day event and on the feasibility of establishing car free pedestrian zones in various areas of the downtown.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that this report be received for information

Background:

The Works Committee, at its meeting on June 25, 2002, requested the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services to report on the feasibility of a Car Free Day for one Sunday in the summer, including a detailed cost analysis, identification of streets to be closed, Car Free Days in other cities and the possibility of free transit on the day.

Also, the Works Committee, at its meeting on December 10, 2002 (Clause 9 of Works Committee Report No. 1, which was before City Council on February 4, 5 and 6, 2002), requested the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services, in consultation with the Chairs of the Economic Development and Parks Committee, the Planning and Transportation Committee and the Works Committee, or their delegates, and with the Toronto Police Service, the Toronto Transit Commission and other affected departments, to:

- (1) investigate the feasibility of car free zones for the following areas:
 - Yorkville;

- Chinatown;
 - Kensington Market; and
 - the Eaton Centre to Kensington Market, including Queen Street West, the Theatre District and Beverley Street, as set out in the highlighted areas of the sketch submitted by Councillor Layton;
- (2) give consideration to the implementation of a car free zone in August 2003; and
- (3) report back within six months to the Works Committee, such report to include:
- (i) an analysis of the tangible benefits of “car free zone” designations (e.g., environmental benefits);
 - (ii) an analysis of the impact on the local business community, including consultation with the Economic Development Division;
 - (iii) an analysis of the impact on the surrounding traffic flow; and
 - (iv) consideration of the need for and advisability of a “pilot” approach.

Comments:

This report addresses two separate but related issues. The first part of this report outlines a brief history of Car Free Day on a global scale and describes the status of Car Free Day in Toronto. The second part of this report summarizes the growing trend to create pedestrian zones (also referred to as pedestrian streets or pedestrian malls) in cities around the world and provides a preliminary assessment of establishing pedestrian zones in the four areas suggested by the Works Committee.

Brief History of Car Free Day

While Car Free Day events are as diverse as the cities and groups that organize them, there are two basic approaches to planning and hosting a Car Free Day. The simplest event is the voluntary Car Free Day, which depends largely on promotion to encourage residents to leave their cars at home for a day. These voluntary events can be organized by the municipality or by community and environmental groups. There are already a number of voluntary events that take place each year in the city. Toronto’s annual Bike Week is an example of a voluntary event organized by the City, and the Pollution Probe’s annual Clean Air Commute is an example of a community organized event. The objective of both events is to encourage people to leave their cars at home for one or more days and to try a more environmentally friendly mode of transportation for travelling to and from work. Several other North American cities have sponsored or are considering sponsoring voluntary Car Free Days, including Halifax, Hamilton, Seattle and Boulder, Colorado.

The second approach to Car Free Day involves restricting cars in a section of the downtown for all or a portion of a single day. These events are typically organized and promoted by the

municipality in partnership with community and environmental groups. Many Car Free Days in European cities are based on this approach and take advantage of their historic city centres, characterized by very narrow streets and dense pedestrian scale building patterns. For example, Amsterdam's Car Free Sunday, on November 4, 2001, involved the city centre contained within a ring road. This car-free zone was closed to incoming cars and motorcycles from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., including those with parking permits. Residents were able to leave the area by car or motorcycle, but were not permitted to return before 5:00 pm. Parking facilities in the car-free area were not accessible to those coming from outside the closed area. Public transit, taxis, mopeds and bicycles were allowed into the area and motor coaches had access to hotels, tourist and cultural institutions in the closed area. Access was maintained for emergency services vehicles, handicapped vehicles and primary health care. The public was advised to stay alert when crossing streets because they would not be entirely free of motor vehicles.

Perhaps the most ambitious and successful example of this type of an area closure happens annually in Bogota, Columbia, a city of over 6 million people. On one Thursday every February private cars are banned from the entire urban area from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. At the first event held on February 24, 2000, it was estimated that over 850,000 cars were left at home while people used other modes of transportation to get to their destinations. Like Amsterdam, the streets are not completely car free because thousands of taxis and public buses still operate. Bogota's Car Free Day is just one element of a larger plan to redevelop the city in a pattern which will be more supportive of walking, cycling and public transit. It should be noted that car ownership in Bogota is significantly lower than in Toronto.

Car Free Day events began in France in 1999 and grew to become a pan-Europe event. In 2002 the European Car Free Day was expanded to European Mobility Week, in recognition of the need to broaden the program's objectives. Car Free Day is the signature event of Mobility Week and takes place on September 22nd each year. In 2002, 320 cities from 21 countries took part in European Mobility Week.

Car Free Day in Toronto

Toronto's first Car Free Day took place on Saturday, September 22, 2001. St. George Street, between Sussex Street and College Street, was closed to traffic for the day and a variety of programming was provided during the day, including children's events, a sound/music stage and street hockey. The street event was preceded by a forum featuring Enrique Penalosa, the former Mayor of Bogota, Columbia, and attended by 500 people. The Sierra Club Eastern Canada Chapter organized the event with the cooperation of staff from Works and Emergency Services and Urban Development Services, and with sponsorship funding from the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, the Toronto Community Foundation and Environment Canada.

Following the success of the 2001 event, the Sierra Club and other proponents of Toronto's Car Free Day wanted to expand the project's scope to provide a much larger car free area for the 2002 event. This type of event would have required significantly more resources for planning, promotion and public consultation. As requested by City Council, Works and Emergency Services submitted a report (December 20, 2001) presenting an expanded Car Free Day proposal and a detailed budget for carrying out a larger Car Free Day event. Funds in the amount of

\$195,000 for the Car Free Day project were included as a new item in the Department's 2002 Operating Budget submission. With this funding, Car Free Day 2002 would have been organized in partnership with the Sierra Club. The funding requested for this project would have enabled us to hire temporary staff dedicated to Car Free Day to carry out all aspects of public consultation, event organization, promotion and evaluation. This staff would have worked closely with existing City staff, the Sierra Club and other participating groups and stakeholders in preparing the event. City Council did not approve funds for this project during consideration of the 2002 Operating Budget.

In the absence of increased City resources to organize a larger Car Free Day event last year, the Sierra Club took a different approach by assisting 15 different Toronto neighbourhoods to organize their own street parties on Sunday, September 22, 2002. The Sunday street events were preceded by two public forums which were instrumental in attracting the 15 participating neighbourhoods. The Toronto Atmospheric Fund (TAF) and Environment Canada again provided funding for the 2002 events.

The Sierra Club has received funding from the Climate Change Action Fund, and has submitted a funding application to TAF to organize Toronto's third Car Free Day on September 21 and 22, 2003. As described in previous reports, Works and Emergency Services does not have sufficient resources or expertise within its existing operating budget to organize a larger Car Free Day. However, staff will continue to work with the Sierra Club Eastern Canada Chapter to assist in the success of their event. The Sierra Club's primary goal for this year's event is to increase the number of neighbourhood street parties held on Sunday, September 21, 2003. This goal has been assisted by the decision of the Mayor's "Toronto: You Belong Here" Recovery Task Force, at its meeting of June 4, 2003, to waive fees for events and festivals from June to September 30, 2003. To streamline the permit application process, the Sierra Club will work with the participating neighbourhoods to submit all of the permit applications together and Transportation Services staff will review them together as a group.

Providing free transit on Car Free Day would not significantly contribute to the success of the events being organized for Sunday, September 21, 2003 because they are relatively small neighbourhood events. Furthermore, providing free transit on a Sunday would represent a loss of approximately one million dollars in revenue by the Toronto Transit Commission, based on an average Sunday ridership of 600,000 trips. An additional subsidy would be required to offset the revenue loss because a revenue loss of this magnitude cannot be accommodated within the Toronto Transit Commission's Operating Budget.

Characteristics of Successful Pedestrian Streets

Pedestrian streets are not a new idea. European cities have been closing streets to motor vehicles for many years, often as part of plans to revitalize city centre commercial areas. One of the oldest and most successful examples is the Stroget, the primary shopping district in the centre of Copenhagen, Denmark. It began as a short section of pedestrian street forty years ago and has gradually been extended to cover several kilometres of connected pedestrian streets today. Many other European cities, such as Rome, Florence and Vienna, have economically vibrant pedestrian

shopping streets and the number of successful pedestrian streets has been growing for the past two decades.

There are also a few successful pedestrian streets in North America. The Vision42 website (www.vision42.org), in an article entitled “Precedents in the U.S. and Europe”, reports that “Pedestrian streets in Denver and Minneapolis have been thriving for more than two decades, sustaining the centers of these cities even in the face of heavily subsidized suburban development. Downtown Denver’s retail sales, measured in real dollars, have nearly quadrupled in the more than 20 years since its mall opened...” Several cities also have transit malls, such as Vancouver’s Granville Street, in which private motor vehicles are restricted and the sidewalks have been redesigned and widened to improve the pedestrian environment.

Not all pedestrian streets are considered successful. Sparks Street in Ottawa has been cited often as an unsuccessful pedestrian street because, after the office workers go home in the evening, the street is empty of people. Toronto’s own experiment with the Yonge Street pedestrian mall in the 1970s was short lived and the street was reopened to motor vehicles.

The literature on pedestrian streets, points to several key characteristics that are important for their success. While cities with vibrant pedestrianised areas can have very different development patterns, their pedestrian streets generally share in common most of the following characteristics:

- high existing pedestrian traffic before pedestrianisation;
- a mix of retail, residential and office buildings, and cultural attractions;
- narrow streets with short blocks;
- attractive buildings and high quality urban design;
- convenient transit service to, and sometimes within, the pedestrian area;
- some motor vehicle access for commercial deliveries;
- access to automobile parking on the periphery of the pedestrian area; and
- a high level of maintenance.

Concerns about air quality are often given as the reason for restricting motor vehicles and creating pedestrian streets. Tangible air quality improvements are difficult to quantify before changes are implemented because there are many variables that need to be considered, such as, the period of closure, the extent to which traffic is diverted to other streets and the number of trips which are shifted to another mode of transportation. While overall air quality improvements are difficult to forecast, it is safe to say that air quality will be improved on streets where motor vehicles are restricted. Direct tailpipe emissions would be removed. Indirect emissions such as the fine road dust created from brake and clutch wear, tire and asphalt wear would also be reduced. Many tailpipe emissions are fairly ubiquitous and spread evenly throughout the City, others are trapped over roads, especially in urban canyons. Toxic fine particulate road dust does not travel far from its source and is concentrated in transportation corridors. A reduction in motor vehicle traffic on a specific street will reduce levels of such particulate matter on that street.

Much of the literature on pedestrian streets describes the benefits in terms of improved quality of life and economic revitalization. The primary reason for establishing pedestrian streets is to

create dynamic public places contributing to a high quality of life for residents and the business community. In fact, many of the prime shopping districts in European cities are contained within pedestrian areas. These are the areas sought out by tourists visiting these cities.

The two most common concerns about creating pedestrian streets are the perceived loss of business by merchants located within the pedestrian area and the fear by those located outside the pedestrian area that displaced traffic will simply be shifted to their streets. The European experience suggests that careful attention to planning, design and promotion and appropriate public investment can lead to positive economic benefits. However, traffic and parking concerns may be more difficult to resolve to the satisfaction of residents and businesses. The Sustainable Energy Institute's website (www.culturechange.org), in an article entitled "How to Create a Pedestrian Mall", cites case studies suggesting that some traffic will be displaced onto surrounding streets and some will just disappear. In the case of London Street in Norwich, U.K., only 40 percent of the displaced traffic was found in the surrounding area following the closure of the street. In Copenhagen, the conversion of the Stroget resulted in 72 percent of the displaced vehicles reappearing on parallel streets, and this was down to 38 percent during peak periods. However, even a 40 percent shift in displaced traffic to surrounding streets may be an unacceptable impact on the residents and businesses located on those streets. Further, reductions in the number of parking spaces, if not compensated for by the provision of new parking capacity, may also present an unacceptable burden on adjacent neighbourhoods, especially where residents park on the street and do not have private driveways.

Preliminary Assessment of the Suggested Pedestrian Streets

While there are many examples of successful pedestrian streets which have become dynamic public places and have produced economic benefits, the findings cannot be generalized to Toronto. Each pedestrian street conversion project must be thoroughly planned in consultation with the community, designed with careful attention to detail and be appropriately funded to ensure a high quality pedestrian environment. It is not simply a matter of closing the street to cars.

The first step in planning and designing a pedestrian zone is to engage the local community, including residents, property owners and area businesses. While it is unrealistic to expect unanimous support from the community, it is essential that there be a significant level of support for the initiative before changes are implemented. Based on the European experience, merchants can be expected to express initial concerns that restricting motor vehicle access will negatively affect their business. Support for the pedestrian street will increase after implementation, if the project is successful. However, the project has a higher likelihood of success if the community is involved in all aspects of the process for establishing the pedestrian area.

This report responds to proposals for pedestrian streets by deputants to the Works Committee, not from the communities who live, work and operate businesses on these streets. It should be noted that the Planning and Transportation Committee, at its meeting on October 15, 2001, also received deputations recommending that pedestrian streets be established in these same downtown communities. The Committee requested the deputants to consult with the Ward Councillors, business associations and the Toronto Pedestrian Committee, and to forward this

matter to the appropriate Community Council(s) for consideration when they had received some level of support from the affected communities (Clause 13, Report No. 4 of the Planning and Transportation Committee, which was received by City Council at its meeting on April 16, 17 and 18, 2002). To date, the deputants have not come forward with any indication of support from the communities affected by their proposal to create pedestrian streets.

Four downtown areas have been suggested for conversion to pedestrian streets. Two of the suggested areas are not recommended for further investigation. The first proposed area, Chinatown, is focused specifically on Spadina Avenue and Dundas Street West. Both of these streets are major arterial roads, carry high volumes of through motor vehicle traffic and have frequent streetcar service. Given that the primary function of these streets is to carry through traffic, the lack of alternative parallel streets to accommodate displaced traffic, and the anticipated traffic infiltration into the adjacent residential neighbourhoods, these streets are not appropriate for conversion to pedestrian streets.

The second area, Yorkville, has many of the essential characteristics for a successful pedestrian zone described above, however, the Bloor-Yorkville BIA does not support restricting motor vehicle access to create a pedestrian zone. The BIA management staff have expressed concerns that it would be detrimental to their businesses and that it would restrict access to parking facilities associated with the new condominiums under construction in the area. In fact, the proposal put forward by the deputants to the Works Committee would block several different access points to existing parking lots, laneways and driveways. Yorkville has been developed with an emphasis on improving the pedestrian environment and with significant investment in pedestrian infrastructure both by the City and the BIA. As a result, Yorkville is a very pedestrian friendly shopping district with relatively wide sidewalks and an abundance of street trees, an award-winning park in its centre, several pedestrian walkways connecting between streets, and narrow roads with relatively slow moving traffic.

The two remaining suggested areas have potential for pedestrianisation or significant pedestrian enhancements. The first of these, Kensington Market, warrants further investigation and consultation because there is an active group in Kensington Market which has been meeting and discussing strategies for pedestrianising the Market area. In response to this interest, the Kensington Market Action Committee held two community meetings on February 2 and 24, 2003 to discuss this issue. The minutes from those meetings state that “the general feeling so far seems to be that it could have excellent or disastrous results, depending on the way it will be implemented. There is a strong group claiming that all the necessary structures should be in place BEFORE the provisions are implemented.” Following are some of the suggestions and recommendations made at the two meetings:

- limit traffic closure to some days of the week or some times of day to enable everyone to experience the practical impact of such change on businesses and residents;
- a three to four week test would be adequate to see the initial effects;
- an alternative to complete closure is to limit parking to a few minutes, sufficient for loading and unloading;

- eliminate street parking to increase space for deliveries and pedestrians;
- close streets on the edges of the Market rather than central streets;
- allow delivery vehicle traffic to the merchants;
- important not to favour some businesses over others -- for example restrictions on motor vehicles may favour restaurants and cafes but negatively impact furniture and grocery stores;
- many Market customers travel a great distance and would need parking and some sort of delivery system to get their purchases to their car;
- need increased parking to more than cover the loss of 200 on-street parking spaces;
- careful attention must be paid to traffic flow and parking changes that would affect businesses and residents within the Market and on the periphery;
- parking in residential streets should be limited, at all times of the day, to residents who hold parking permits;
- need provisions in place to discourage vagrancy;
- City should organize and fund events and promotion of the pedestrian area;
- merchants feel that parking enforcement is too intense, while residents generally feel there needs to be more parking enforcement to prevent obstructions to pedestrians; and
- need to improve street lighting and garbage collection.

While there is some support within the Market community for creating a pedestrian area, there is also considerable opposition. At a community meeting on March 24, 2003 to discuss the Kensington Market Community Improvement Plan, the overwhelming majority in attendance, primarily business owners, were opposed to making the Market a pedestrian area. The meeting participants also expressed concern that the City would impose significant traffic and parking changes on the Market area without the support of the whole community. In the words of one member of the Kensington Market Action Committee Board, "there are many different points of view and it is important to go slow."

It must be reiterated that creating a successful pedestrian area is not just a matter of closing streets to cars. Toronto's first attempt at creating a pedestrian street in 30 years, if it is to have lasting benefits, must be carefully planned in consultation with the community and all of the other stakeholders. Transportation Services proposes to establish a working group consisting of the Ward Councillor, Kensington Market business owners and residents, as well as Transportation, Planning and Economic Development staff to develop a detailed proposal. The Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure branch of Transportation Services would be responsible for

managing the working group. There are many possible options to consider, including restricting cars on only one street or more than one street, on specific days of the week, at certain times of the day or at different times of the year.

There are a couple of small scale semi-regular pedestrian areas that have been in place for a few years. A short section of Duncan Street, just north of King Street, is closed to traffic on several summer weekends and the restaurants and their patrons spill out onto the sidewalks and the roadway. Roy Square, a public lane to the south and east of the intersection of Yonge Street and Bloor Street, is frequently closed for several hours per day, enabling the small businesses on the lane to move their café tables and product displays outside and the pedestrians to enjoy a car free walking space. These current examples may serve as a model for a modest pedestrian street concept for Kensington Market.

The goal of the working group would be to develop several options for consideration by the whole Kensington Market community with the aim of selecting a preferred option. A detailed traffic management plan for the preferred option would be developed for both the pedestrianised area and the surrounding area. The objectives of the traffic plan would be to minimize impacts on traffic circulation and infiltration on adjacent neighbourhood streets, and to maintain commercial delivery and parking capacity, where feasible. Municipal services, such as police, fire, ambulance, solid waste pick up, road and sidewalk snow clearing and maintenance, and access for utilities must also be reviewed and accommodated in the pedestrian area. As part of this process, staff will identify operating and capital funding requirements so that these can be considered during 2004 budget review process.

If there is broad community support for the preferred option following the consultation process, a report describing the preferred option and the associated traffic management plan will be prepared for consideration by Toronto East York Community Council in 2004. It is anticipated that the proposal, if approved by City Council, would be for a test period in the summer of 2004. This will allow time for a thorough consultation process so that the proposal could receive the strongest possible community support. A monitoring and evaluation process would be established for the duration of the test period and an evaluation report would be submitted to City Council following the test period. This follow-up report would be prepared in consultation with the community and would contain recommendations on whether or not the project should be continued.

The fourth suggested area for a pedestrian zone was a concept proposed by former Councillor Layton to link significant public places and cultural landmarks between the recently completed Dundas Square and Kensington Market, including Nathan Phillips Square, Osgoode Hall, Queen Street West, the Theatre District, the Art Gallery of Ontario and Chinatown. This concept is consistent with a conceptual proposal to develop seven cultural corridors as presented in the 2001 report, "Canada's Urban Waterfront – Waterfront Culture and Heritage Infrastructure Plan", prepared for Economic Development, Culture and Tourism by ERA Architects Inc. and Jeff Evanson. One of the seven proposed cultural corridors follows a "north/south axis proximate to John Street" and would link several significant cultural attractions between the Art Gallery of Ontario and Harbourfront Centre on the waterfront. It is anticipated that these cultural corridors would be developed through a capital works and urban design program which would

emphasize the pedestrian links between significant public places, including the waterfront and cultural attractions. The cultural corridors concept is contained in the May 13, 2003 report by Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, titled "Culture Plan for the Creative City", which was adopted by the Economic Development and Parks Committee on June 9, 2003. Transportation Services Division staff have begun preliminary discussions with Culture Division staff on developing this concept in more detail and will continue to work cooperatively to identify opportunities and strategies for implementing cultural corridors.

Conclusions:

The Sierra Club of Eastern Canada is working with several neighbourhoods to organize local street parties to celebrate Toronto Car Free Day on Sunday, September 21, 2003. Transportation Services staff continue to provide support to the Sierra Club towards the success of their event.

Transportation Services staff have reviewed the four locations suggested for car free pedestrian zones. Two of the suggested areas have potential for pedestrianisation or significant pedestrian enhancements. The first area, Kensington Market, has many of the key ingredients necessary to establish successful pedestrian streets. There is an active Kensington Market group engaged in discussion about pedestrianising the Market, however, there is also considerable opposition to the idea at this time. Transportation Services is proposing to establish a working group to develop a detailed proposal, including budget requirements, in consultation with the Kensington Market community. If there is broad community support for a preferred option, a report would be submitted to Toronto East York Community Council in 2004 and, if approved by City Council, a pedestrian street pilot project could be implemented during the summer of 2004.

The second proposal which warrants further study is the concept proposed by former Councillor Layton to develop enhanced pedestrian links between major cultural attractions in the downtown, from the recently completed Dundas Square to the Theatre District and Chinatown. This concept is consistent with a proposal for developing cultural corridors as one of the key elements of the Culture Plan being developed by Economic Development Culture and Tourism. Transportation Services staff will continue to work with Culture Division staff to develop this concept further.

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