

# TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

**MEETING DATE:** May 8, 2007

**SUBJECT:** TRANSIT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Commission:

1. Receive this report noting that:
  - TTC and City staff are working aggressively on environmental assessments for transit projects in order to allow the City to be in a position to implement significant transit improvements immediately upon receipt of the necessary funding;
  - there are currently nine environmental assessments for transit either underway, or about to be started, and there will be a number of additional environmental assessment studies undertaken in support of the *Toronto Transit City – Light Rail Plan*;
  - no new environmental assessments for transit will be formally commenced until the more-streamlined municipal class EA process for transit has been approved by the Minister of the Environment, and this is expected to occur by summer/fall 2007;
  - at the Commission meeting of June 13, 2007, TTC staff will present a work plan which will outline the activities and timelines required to enable the TTC/City to begin construction on one or more of the light rail lines contained in the *Toronto Transit City – Light Rail Plan* in the fall of 2010; and
2. Forward this report to the City of Toronto and the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

## FUNDING

This report has no effect on the TTC's operating or capital budgets.

## BACKGROUND

Over the last two years, the Commission has approved plans that require environmental assessment studies, including:

- **Scarborough RT Strategic Plan (August 30, 2006):**  
This report recommended the upgrading of the existing Scarborough RT in order to provide the additional capacity required to accommodate increasing ridership demand in the central

Scarborough area and to improve the ease and convenience of transferring between the Scarborough RT and the Bloor-Danforth subway line at Kennedy Station. The study also addressed the need for further improvements to transit services in Scarborough, including the possible extension of the Scarborough RT east and north to the Sheppard Avenue-Malvern area. These initiatives will require either new or updated environmental assessments to be done.

- **Toronto Transit City – Light Rail Plan (March 21, 2007):**

This report described a new Rapid Transit vision for the City of Toronto, entailing the implementation of seven new light rail lines which would bring fast, reliable, environmentally-sustainable electric rapid transit to parts of Toronto which do not have it now and, in so doing, would introduce a broad, interconnected network of rapid transit throughout Toronto. The implementation of these new light rail lines will require environmental assessments.

In addition, TTC and City staff and other municipal and transit representatives, under the auspices of the Municipal Engineers Association, have developed a streamlined “Class EA” process for the approval of transit projects. On April 18, 2007, the Commission approved a staff report entitled, *A New Class Environmental Assessment Process for Transit Projects* which described the proposed changes to the existing Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) document to establish a Class EA process for municipal transit projects. This new process, which will apply to all municipal transit projects except for new or extended subway lines, will provide a much-more streamlined and efficient process for transit projects, and it is expected to be approved by the Minister of the Environment in the summer/fall of 2007.

The purpose of this current report is to:

- summarize the status of transit environmental assessments which are currently or soon-to-be underway in Toronto;
- discuss the process and timing which should be followed for any new environmental assessments which have not yet been started;
- describe other issues which must be resolved in order to ensure fast and efficient completion of new environmental assessments; and
- provide a prelude to the staff report which will be presented at the June 13, 2007 Commission meeting pertaining to a work plan which will allow the TTC/City to begin construction of one or more new light rail lines by the fall of 2010.

## **DISCUSSION**

The TTC and the City of Toronto are working aggressively to implement the pro-transit policies contained within the City of Toronto’s *Official Plan*. The *Plan* says that there will be no new roads built in Toronto but, rather, all future growth in travel demand will be accommodated on Toronto’s

transit system and other non-auto modes. Toronto has adopted the goal of becoming a leader in combating global warming. Toronto subscribes to the principles of the *National Transit Strategy*, including the goal of improving the global competitiveness, quality of life, and environmental sustainability of Canadian cities through the provision of high-quality transit.

In support of these objectives, the TTC and the City of Toronto are currently undertaking, or are about to begin work on, nine Environmental Assessments which are prerequisites to the implementation of major transit improvements in Toronto. These nine projects are shown schematically on Exhibit 1, attached, and are summarized here.

### **Status of Current EA's**

The TTC is managing or leading the following six environmental assessments:

Waterfront East: The TTC, in conjunction with the Toronto Waterfront Revitalisation Corporation (TWRC) and the City of Toronto, is proceeding with EA studies to identify the transit improvements required to support planned development in the West Donlands and East Bayfront precincts. These studies will identify a preferred approach to providing an effective transit network to serve these new, high-density waterfront communities. City Council has approved a transportation strategy for the Waterfront communities, which includes a "Transit First" approach calling for the early construction and operation of planned higher-order transit and the provision of exclusive streetcar rights-of-way for proposed waterfront services. These studies are being entirely funded by the TWRC. The work schedule calls for this study to be presented to City Council and the TWRC Board in the summer/fall of 2007.

Waterfront West: The Waterfront West EA is comprised of four distinct programs, supplementing or amending the Waterfront West Light Rail Transit EA Study which was approved by the Ministry of the Environment in 1995. These are:

- Exhibition Place to Dufferin Street Extension (Major Amendment);
- Dufferin Street to Roncesvalles Avenue Extension (Individual EA);
- Park Lawn Loop Relocation (Minor Amendment);
- Park Lawn Road to Long Branch Right-Of-Way (New Municipal Class EA, not started).

Taken together, these four components will allow the establishment of high-capacity, highly-reliable streetcar service, operating in its own dedicated right-of-way, between Union Station in Toronto's central business district and Long Branch in the west. The project schedule calls for the Exhibition Place–Dufferin amendment to be completed by the spring of 2008, the EA for the Dufferin–Roncesvalles section to be submitted to the Ministry of the Environment in the spring of 2008, and the Park Lawn Loop EA Modification to be complete by the fall of 2007. The EA for the Park Lawn-Long Branch section is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2007 and completed by the fall of 2008, subject to approval of the municipal class EA process for transit. Funding for all four of these components is included in the TTC's *2007-2011 Capital Budget* program.

Scarborough RT Upgrade: This environmental assessment project addresses two major components:

- modification to Kennedy Station and the approach track to implement a more-convenient and customer-friendly transfer between the Scarborough RT and the Bloor-Danforth subway; and
- engineering survey work to confirm the ability of the existing track and tunnels to accommodate the larger-capacity new-generation Scarborough RT cars which will be purchased as part of the Scarborough RT upgrading project; and,

The cost of this environmental assessment is included in the budgeted funding for the Scarborough RT upgrade project. The project will commence in the fall of 2007, premised on using the new Municipal Class EA process for transit, and is expected to be completed by late 2008. A detailed schedule has not yet been developed for this project.

Scarborough RT Extension: An EA to extend the Scarborough RT between McCowan Station and the Sheppard Avenue/Markham Road intersection was approved by the Ministry of the Environment in 1994. An update to this EA would be required to address the changes which have occurred in the area since 1994. Such an update would likely be considered a “major amendment” to the original EA; it is unlikely that a completely-new EA would be required. The extension of the Scarborough RT would also require an expansion, and possible relocation, of the Scarborough RT yard and maintenance facility. This issue will also be addressed in the EA update. It is estimated that this project will cost approximately \$750,000, which is included in the TTC’s *2007-2011 Capital Program*. The project will formally begin in 2007 and is expected to be ready to submit to the Ministry of the Environment by the fall of 2008.

Bremner/Fort York Boulevards: TTC staff are requesting approval, in a report to the Commission at its May 8, 2007 meeting, to hire a consultant to assist in the undertaking of an EA to establish a dedicated right-of-way for higher-order transit service on Bremner Boulevard and Fort York Boulevard, between Union Station and Exhibition Place. The planning which underlies the development of the railway lands is premised on the provision of high-capacity transit because the road network in and around the railway lands could not provide the capacity to carry non-transit-based travel demand from the projected very-high density of development in this area. Therefore, the main objective of this EA is to ensure that the transit capacity and infrastructure needed to support this development can proceed. However, the Bremner/Fort York corridor is also envisioned as a critical component of the Waterfront West streetcar line which would operate between Long Branch in western Etobicoke and Union Station in the central business district. This EA is estimated to cost \$355,000, which is included in the TTC’s *2007-2001 Capital Program*. The project will formally begin upon the approval of the new Municipal Class EA process for transit, expected to be approved in the summer/fall of 2007, and would be completed in the fall of 2008.

Highway 27: A feasibility study, as a precursor to a formal environmental assessment, will be undertaken for a higher-order transit facility (bus or streetcar rapid transit) in the Highway 27/427 corridor between Finch Avenue/Albion Road and Kipling subway station. There is increased

interest in a higher-capacity transit service on Highway 27 owing to the industrial activities along that road and the planned redevelopment of the property around the Woodbine Racetrack at Highway 27 and Rexdale Boulevard. The corridor is not identified as an "Avenue" in the Toronto *Official Plan* and, therefore, is not targeted for intensification. Therefore, a feasibility/justification study will be undertaken to determine if the more-detailed exercise of an environmental assessment should proceed. Money is available for this study in the TTC's *2007-2011 Capital Budget*. The project is planned to begin in the summer of 2007. A detailed project schedule has not yet been developed.

The following three EA's are being led by the City of Toronto:

Yonge Street: This Municipal Class EA is evaluating ways to make the bus service on Yonge Street, between Finch Subway Station and Steeles Avenue, faster and more-reliable, relative to the private automobile. York Region has completed a complimentary EA for reserved bus lanes in the middle of Yonge Street, north of Steeles Avenue, and their larger EA provides a broader context for this study. This EA on Yonge street, south of Steeles Avenue, was started in 2002 and has proceeded more slowly than other EA studies. The preferred design for reserved bus lanes on this section of Yonge Street will be presented at a public meeting in May/June 2007. The EA will be submitted to Council for approval in September or October of 2007. The cost of this EA is approximately \$480,000. This cost is being shared equally between the City, TTC, and GO Transit.

Don Mills Corridor: This is an Individual EA whose purpose is to determine the best means by which to improve TTC transit service on Don Mills Road and in the Don Mills corridor, south of Overlea Boulevard, for continuous service between Don Mills Station on the Sheppard Subway, the Bloor-Danforth Subway, and the downtown core. This study is being undertaken as a joint effort by the City and the TTC, but it is being managed and funded by the City. The project cost is \$500,000. The Terms of Reference for this EA have been submitted to the Ministry of the Environment for approval. The project schedule calls for the EA study to be complete by the summer of 2008.

Kingston Road: This study is following the Individual EA process, and its purpose is to assess potential transit improvements on Kingston Road, between Eglinton Avenue East and Victoria Park Avenue, with potential connections to the Bloor-Danforth Subway. The study is being undertaken as a joint effort between the City and the TTC, but it is being managed and funded by the City. The project cost is \$500,000. The Terms of Reference for this EA are in the process of being drafted for submission to the Ministry of the Environment. The project schedule calls for the EA study to be completed by November, 2008.

### **TTC Approach for New Environmental Assessments**

In the TTC staff report, *A New Class Environmental Assessment Process for Transit Projects* (April 18, 2007 Commission meeting), it was explained that a new "chapter" is being added to the *Ontario Municipal Engineer's Association Class EA* document in order to create a class EA process for transit projects which would be much-faster and efficient than the current Individual EA process which typically applies to transit EA projects. The report described the new "schedules"

into which transit projects will be grouped, and the three major advantages of the proposed new class process for transit projects. Specifically, under this new process:

- there will be no requirement for Ministerial approval for the Terms of Reference for a transit EA;
- there will be no requirement for Ministerial approval of a completed transit EA study; and
- cost thresholds will no longer determine which type of schedule or activities will be required for a transit EA study.

The report explained that the elimination of Ministerial approval of Terms of Reference for a transit EA study, and of the EA study itself, will reduce the time required to complete a transit EA, which, depending on the nature and complexity of the project being studied, could translate into a time saving of more than one year. This represents between 30% and 50 % of typical EA work plan schedules.

The current work plan for these revisions to the Municipal Class EA process calls for Ministerial approval of these changes by summer/fall 2007. Therefore, TTC staff will not commence formal work on any new environmental assessment for transit projects until the new Municipal Class EA revisions have been approved by the Minister of the Environment and are available for use, so that such new projects will be able to proceed with this faster and more-efficient process. Preliminary data collection and analytical work can still proceed in preparation for launching an EA and, where possible, such work will proceed at this time.

TTC staff are working closely with staff from the Ministry of the Environment to facilitate Ministerial approval of the new *Municipal Class EA Process* for transit, as soon as possible, which is believed to be late August/early September 2007.

### **Other EA Issues Which Must be Resolved**

The changes to the *Municipal Class EA Process* for transit will allow transit EA studies to be done more quickly and efficiently. Additionally, TTC and City staff are committed to undertaking these studies in the most-practical way possible to allow transit improvements to be implemented without undue delay resulting from the study requirements. However, there are other important issues that must be resolved in order to allow staff to complete these EA studies in a timely and effective way.

Local Councillor Support for the Proposed Transit Project: The single biggest obstacle to progress in recent transit environmental assessments has been the lack of support for or, in some cases, active opposition to, the project by one or more local councillors. It is highly counter-productive, frustrating, and demoralizing for staff to work on an environmental assessment that has been approved and funded by City Council, only to find themselves dealing with active opposition to the project from one or more affected City Councillors. In order to eliminate this wasteful and destructive situation, City Council should develop a protocol for how local Councillors would express concerns pertaining to EA's which have been endorsed by City Council, in order to prevent the situation of Councillors publicly opposing staff who are

attempting to do the job which Council has asked them to do.

Council Confirmation of Transit Technology: The normal practice, when doing broad environmental assessments for transit improvement projects, is to identify and evaluate all possible means of effecting the desired improvement in the subject corridor. This means that, even if a number of alternatives are clearly and obviously unreasonable, staff are obligated to investigate and report on a wide variety of technology-related options ranging from express bus services, to increasing the frequency of service on a transit route, to looking at alternative-fuel vehicles, to LRT, to subways. In order to prevent this time-consuming and unproductive part of an EA, it would be helpful if City Council were to establish a policy pertaining to transit technology so that only Council-directed technologies would be investigated. In particular, the *Toronto Transit City – Light Rail Plan* was explicitly premised on the use of fully-accessible, environmentally-sustainable electric light rail technology. If desired, staff could formally document the rationale for this technology selection. If Council were to approve a policy directing that all environmental assessments pertaining to components of this *Plan* are to investigate only light rail technology, then those environmental assessments would be done much-faster and with less wasted time, money, and resources.

### **Moving Forward with the *Toronto Transit City - Light Rail Plan***

The *Toronto Transit City - Light Rail Plan*, which was presented to the Commission at its meeting of March 21, 2007, has received strong, widespread public support. The Commission, as well as other City Councillors, have expressed interest in getting one or more of the proposed light rail lines contained in the Plan under construction in the foreseeable future. TTC staff share this enthusiasm and are currently preparing a work plan which will outline the activities and timelines required in order to be in a position to start construction of a new light rail transit line in Toronto by the fall of 2010. This work plan will be contained in a staff report which will be presented at the June 13, 2007 Commission meeting.

### **SUMMARY**

TTC and City staff are working on nine different EA's and related studies in order to allow the City to be in a position to implement significant transit improvements immediately upon receipt of the necessary funding. No new environmental assessments for transit will be formally started until the more-streamlined *Municipal Class EA Process* for transit projects has been approved by the Minister of the Environment. TTC staff will soon present to the Commission a work plan which will outline the activities and timelines required to enable the TTC/City to begin construction on one or more of the light rail lines contained in the *Toronto Transit City – Light Rail Plan* in the fall of 2010.

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April 27, 2007  
11-31-80  
Attachment: Exhibit 1





Exhibit 1

# Transit Environmental Assessments - April 2007

