

**Supplementary Report –
Front Street West Reconfiguration
Environmental Assessment Study**

Date:	February 29, 2012
To:	City Council
From:	Acting General Manager, Transportation Services
Wards:	Ward 20 (Trinity-Spadina) Ward 28 (Toronto Centre-Rosedale)
Reference Number:	P:\2012\Cluster B\TRA\TIM\cc12001tim

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to respond to a request from the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee, at its meeting of February 15, 2012, in considering a report titled "Front Street West Reconfiguration Environmental Assessment Study" (PW12.5) to report directly to City Council on comments from the Design Review Panel with respect to the recommended reconfiguration.

The Design Review Panel (DRP) did not have any scheduled meetings between the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee meeting on February 15, 2012 and this Council meeting. Therefore, there was no opportunity to present this proposal to the full Panel. Staff attempted to arrange a meeting with the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the DRP as an alternate plan but, unfortunately, they were unavailable to meet during this time. It is important to point out, however, that the recommended reconfiguration of Front Street West had previously been presented to the DRP in April 2010. The DRP expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide input to the project at that early stage in the planning process and indicated general support for the proposed reconfiguration.

Given that staff had no opportunity to meet with the DRP since receiving this direction from Public Works and Infrastructure Committee on February 15, 2012, staff propose to meet with the DRP during the detailed design process, if this plan is approved by City Council, to seek the DRP's further input and advice.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report has no financial implications.

DECISION HISTORY

The Public Works and Infrastructure Committee, at its meeting of February 15, 2012 considered a staff report titled "Front Street West Reconfiguration Environmental Assessment Study" (PW12.5). The Committee recommends approval of the proposed reconfiguration of Front Street West, between York and Bay Streets and, in addition, requested the following:

"The Design Review Panel meet with the Acting General Manager, Transportation Services, the Director, Community Planning, Toronto and East York District, and the Chair of the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee to review the report on the Front Street West Reconfiguration – Environmental Assessment Study and provide comments to be forwarded to the March 5, 2012 meeting of City Council."

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The City of Toronto Design Review Panel was approved by City Council as a pilot project in June 2006 and made permanent in November 2009. The Panel is an important voice for the promotion of design excellence within Toronto and plays a significant leadership role for design professions within the development approval process.

The Design Review Panel assists Council in fulfilling Official Plan objectives by providing City staff with professional design advice on public and private projects. The Panel's goal is to promote design excellence within the public realm, including the pursuit of high quality architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and environmental sustainability. The Panel is an advisory body.

COMMENTS

The DRP has regularly scheduled monthly meetings. The last meeting was February 13, 2012 and the next scheduled meeting is March 19, 2012. Therefore, there was not a regularly scheduled meeting of the DRP between the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee on February 15, 2012 and the City Council meeting on March 5, 2012 and thus, no opportunity for staff to meet with the DRP to present and discuss the recommended reconfiguration of Front Street West, between Bay and York Streets.

Staff did attempt to arrange a meeting with the Chair and Vice-Chair to review the proposal. Although the Chair and Vice-Chair do not have authority to make decisions or recommendations on behalf of the DRP, staff felt that it would be beneficial to receive their input and comments about the proposal. Unfortunately, neither of them was available to meet.

It is important to note, however, that a version of the recommended Front Street reconfiguration was presented to the DRP at its regularly scheduled meeting on April 21, 2010. Renderings of the reconfiguration of Front Street West similar to those that were presented to the DRP are included as Attachment 1. The following is a sample of comments from the Panel, in considering this plan, as extracted from the Minutes of their meeting:

- The Panel was very encouraged to see an Environmental Assessment program with such a significant Urban Design component, and were supportive of the goal to create a monumental space;
- The Panel suggested that this project was a good example of how the City can work to create good public spaces; and
- The Panel felt that the raised platform/table-top was a positive feature within the design and that it would contribute to informing vehicles of the "special" nature of the zone that they were within.

Other comments were predominantly related to the detailed design of the proposed reconfiguration, particularly to the use of distinctive surface materials, paving patterns, placement and species of trees, design of the median, street and pedestrian-scale lighting, etc. Since the DRP meeting in April 2010, there has been significant work on the preferred alternative that was presented to them. However, the general concept and configuration have remained the same and any changes that have been made would be considered refinements.

Should City Council approve the recommended proposal, staff will consult further with the DRP on the detailed design of the reconfiguration. Staff will seek DRP input on the various elements, treatments and enhancements to the detailed design and to address the specific comments provided by the Panel at the April 21, 2010 meeting. Specifically, while supportive of the project, several Panel members expressed concerns about the possibility of the proposal being "too controlling and organizational". In moving forward, the Panel urged staff to be cautious about the possible "sanitization" of space which could result from the over-programming of each element. The Panel was concerned that the "over-control" of this space could have the effect of losing the vibrancy, dynamism and quality associated with such a public space.

As a result of these comments and advice, staff will consider ways, as part of the detailed design process, to ensure the proper balance and flexibility between the programming and functional needs of this space. There will likely be times when it will be necessary or desirable to close off to vehicular traffic the mid-block or "table-top" portion of Front Street in front of Union Station for special events, in a configuration similar to one of the other alternatives that was considered as part of the EA process. This could be achieved through the installation of moveable bollards, mountable curbs or other such measures that could quickly and safely facilitate the conversion of this space from a functional linear facility to a vibrant civic space for special events.

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SIGNATURE

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JM/

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – Renderings of the Front Street Reconfiguration

Attachment 1
Renderings of the Front Street Reconfiguration



Eastbound approach to the mid-block crossing area



South side of Front Street looking west