



Walk Toronto Comments on IE18.1 REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study

To: Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)

Date: November 30, 2020

Walk Toronto is a grassroots, volunteer pedestrian advocacy group that works to improve walking conditions and pedestrian safety in Toronto.

Walk Toronto strongly supports the recommended design for the reconstruction of Yonge Street from Florence Avenue / Avondale Avenue to the Finch Hydro Corridor in the report (November 17, 2020) from the General Manager, Transportation Services.

Yonge Street, between Sheppard Avenue and Steeles Avenue, has been identified as a priority corridor for safety improvements under the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan. Walk Toronto appreciates the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment performed by Transportation Services, "REimagining Yonge," as it brings possible improvements to the street at the time of reconstruction. To ensure that the transportation network within the REimagining Yonge Study area is modified in a way that is responsive to broad changes and growth over the next several decades, Walk Toronto strongly supports the recommended options: a cross-section reduction from six to four lanes, wider sidewalks and boulevards, new and enhanced pedestrian crossings, traffic signals and turn restrictions at some intersections, and a central landscaped median will emphasize pedestrian and active transportation use in this critical stretch in North York Centre.

The population density in this area has become comparable to Toronto's downtown core, with high volumes of people moving by all modes. One of the reasons for North York Centre's rapid population growth is because of the proximity of amenities (such as rapid transit, shopping, entertainment and trails), which enables many residents to dispense with owning a car. Vehicle-based commuters originating outside city boundaries contribute significantly to traffic volumes in the area, and accommodating growing volumes of commuters moving through and within communities by private vehicle is not a sustainable approach.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us more than ever the need for walkable streets, which becomes even more important in densely populated spaces such as this area. In particular, physical distancing has become a priority — something that the "Transform Yonge" option facilitates by making Yonge's pedestrian clearway more

consistent and eliminating sidewalk pinch-points. Installing and encouraging use of infrastructure for walking and cycling will become increasingly important to realize an affordable, environmentally-responsible and functional transportation network across our city.

The staff recommendations address future conditions in North York Centre by creating a multi-modal complete street that will accommodate increasing numbers of pedestrians and cyclists, while still allowing for the efficient movement of vehicles. The recommended changes would reduce a travel lane in each direction, and implement wider sidewalks for pedestrians, making Yonge Street a safer and more comfortable environment for everyone, regardless of age or ability.

The current configuration of Yonge jeopardizes safety for pedestrians and cyclists and privileges traffic throughput. This does not work for a dense, mixed-use neighbourhood where over half of residents are using non-driving modes of transportation. The inadequate sidewalks, absence of cycling infrastructure, and lack of seating and trees send the message that street life is not welcome.

There are three public elementary schools and two high schools along the Yonge corridor between Finch and Sheppard, including the largest high school in the TDSB, Earl Haig. Their thousands of students need adequate walking infrastructure, and should not be forced to run across a street that is far too wide to navigate safely.

Most residents who have expressed an opinion indicated that Yonge should become a community Main Street, rather than a six-lane highway, which jeopardizes safety and divides the area. Vulnerable road users, in particular pedestrians with disabilities, require infrastructure to allow them to get around safely. If reconfigured as recommended by City staff, Yonge Street will truly offer active transportation options that will in turn generate health, social, economic and environmental benefits.

“Transform Yonge” is consistent with the City’s Vision Zero road safety plan, narrowing crossing distances for pedestrians, adding signalized crossing locations and giving pedestrians adequate and safe space to travel. “Transform Yonge” is a perfect example of Vision Zero in action, moving beyond words to results, as is happening in other Vision Zero cities including New York and San Francisco.

Walk Toronto also supports the many improvements to the public realm associated with the “Transform Yonge” option and recognizes their vital role in more seamless access and greater safety for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. In addition, the many changes contemplated will foster a more attractive environment for North York’s cultural sector and businesses serving a very diverse population.

This is an opportunity for the City of Toronto to create a safe, efficient, multi-modal, barrier-free street in the heart of North York. Walk Toronto urges members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee to rely on the evidence presented in the staff report, to govern in accordance with City of Toronto approved policies, and to support the recommended option that would see Yonge Street reimaged.

Sincerely,

Daniella Levy-Pinto
Member of the Steering Committee, Walk Toronto