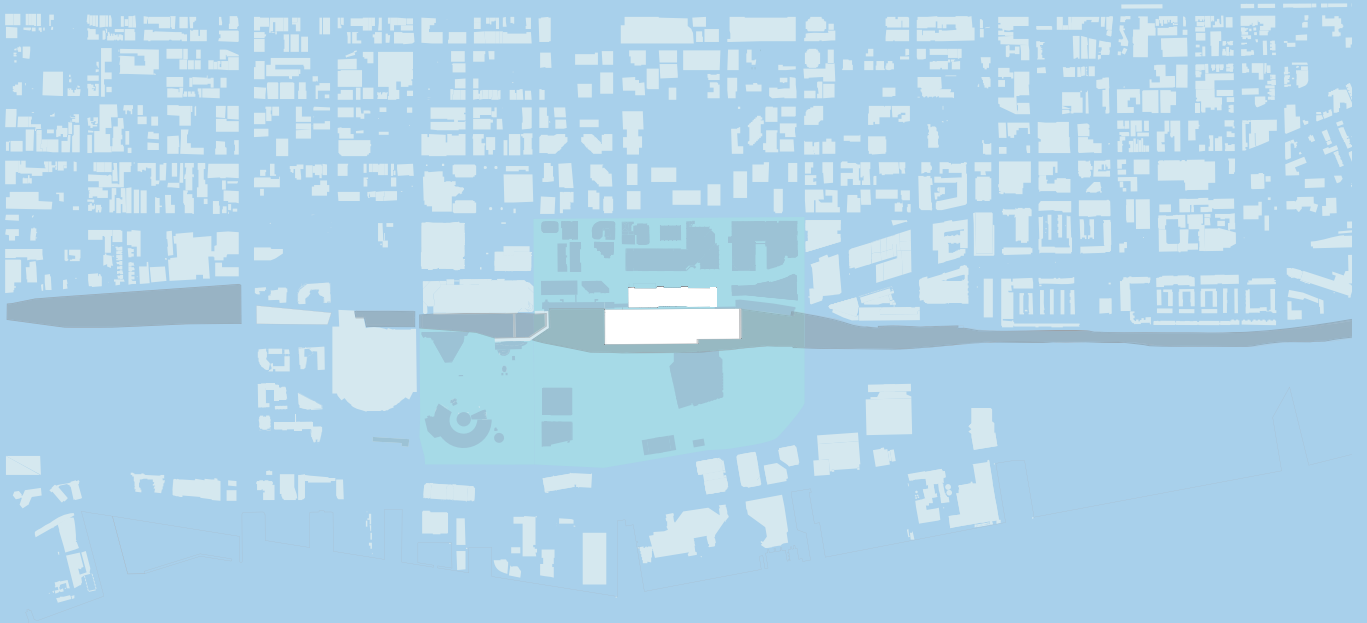


union station district plan
appendices



Appendix 10 - Development Over the Trainshed

Introduction

Union Station accommodates inter-city and commuter trains and provides a connection to TTC operations. As a result of its central function as a transportation hub, its downtown location between the central core and the Waterfront, and the surrounding high-density development, the trainshed over the tracks south of Union Station presents limited opportunities for intensification. While the ownership of the air rights suggest that development would have a high value associated with them, the physical constraints outlined below constrain this opportunity.

Because of Union Station's designation as a heritage site, development over the Union Station building (including the head house and the east and west wings) should not be permitted. GO Transit owns the trainshed, platforms, rail corridor, the tracks and within an envelope extending approximately 27 feet above the tracks. The City of Toronto retained the legal air space above the trainshed although such development would require rezoning and an Official Plan amendment. The City was first asked to consider developing the area above the trainshed in 1989 in an application by Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. The Master Plan envisions development options as a means of financing a major transportation upgrade to the station and providing alternative access to the tracks.

Currently, the trainshed is in serious disrepair, and has become a safety concern. GO Transit has stated it must address this issue immediately, regardless of development possibilities over the trainshed. As part of its Union Station Rail Corridor Infrastructure Improvement Program, GO Transit is investing a total of \$600 million in system upgrades, a portion of which will be used to restore the existing trainshed.

Challenges and Possibilities

View Corridor: Union Station sits in a place of prominence in Toronto's downtown core. The outline of the station, in its Beaux-Arts grandeur, should be preserved. The Royal York Hotel (also a designated heritage building) is a landmark site, particularly when viewed from the south. This portion of Front Street provides a relief to the public realm from the tall buildings of the Financial District; from this point heights are reduced moving south toward Toronto's Waterfront. Any long-term future development over the trainshed should preserve the view corridor as it exists.

Building Size and Scale: Any building should have a modest footprint and density, developed in tower form to allow for the preservation of view corridors between the lake and the Financial District. This type of development would maximize the use of the tracks

and the land underneath, although any proposed design would need to consider impact on Union Plaza.



Alternatively a development with a large floor plate covering all of the lands between York and Bay streets with a modest building height of 3 or 4 storeys could be built which would not negatively impact views of the station from Front Street or of the downtown core and the Royal York Hotel from the south. This built form might possibly accommodate the requirements of a shopping mall type structure, but it would again be difficult to service without being developed in conjunction with the lands to the south.

A Building With No Address: Unless the tracks are relocated underground, the main floor of any structure over the trainshed would be approximately 60 feet in the air. Without a street frontage the building would not have a street address as an independent building. Relocation of the tracks would require a major investment.

Structural Feasibility & Servicing Requirements: The structural feasibility of threading the structure and service core through the trainshed and rail corridor operations is extremely difficult without causing a significant imposition to rail operations and pedestrian movement at track level and in the concourse area. This is in direct opposition to the goal of GO Transit's Rail Corridor Infrastructure Improvement Program; to adequately support the expected doubling of volume on the network within the near future and the proposed air-rail link.

Recommendations

Based on the identified constraints and challenges, for the time being, development of the trainshed is not a viable option.

However, in the context of never knowing what the future may bring, nothing is impossible. Should Toronto continue to develop at its current rate, consequently creating a situation in which all land within its boundaries is developed at sufficient densities, it is possible that development over the trainshed may become more of a cost-effective prospect. In this case, development options would need to consider: 1) burying the tracks in order to give the building a street address; and 2) changes in transportation technologies to allow for the space required for a new building structure.