



1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The new Official Plan for the City of Toronto calls for transit to have much-greater priority on city roads to attract people out of their cars, so that the City will grow in an environmentally sustainable way. In support of the Plan, TTC staff have been studying ways to improve the speed and reliability of the transit service on a number of key routes and have placed a high priority on significantly improving the operation of the 196 YORK UNIVERSITY ROCKET – the express bus service between Downsview Subway Station and York University.

Buses on the express bus service between Downsview Subway Station and York University – 196 YORK UNIVERSITY ROCKET – are often delayed on sections of the route that experience chronic traffic congestion in the morning and afternoon peak periods. This causes the whole route to operate slowly and unreliably, making transit less attractive as a travel choice in this corridor. In addition, both York Region Transit and GO Transit have plans to begin operating higher quality express bus service from north of Steeles to Downsview Subway Station. A higher quality surface transit connection in this corridor would significantly improve the quality of these planned inter-regional services.

The new Toronto Official Plan that has been approved by City Council designates this corridor for “higher-order transit”. The TTC has recently initiated an Environmental Assessment study on an extension of the Spadina Subway line to Steeles Avenue, including York University. However, it would take nine years to study, design and construct a subway extension. Significant improvements to transit service in this corridor are required now, to offer a more-attractive alternative to the automobile and to build up ridership in advance of a subway.

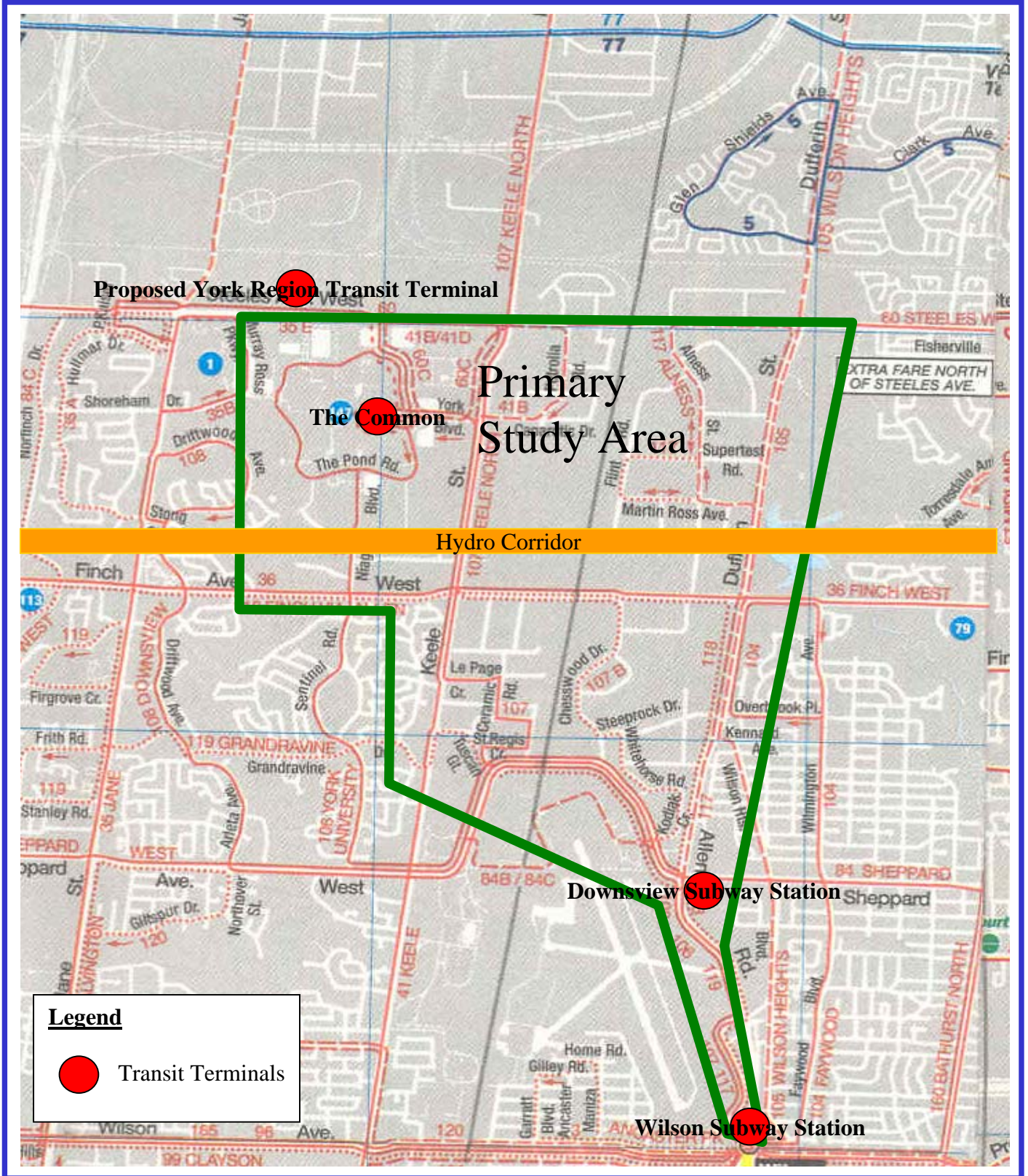
In support of this shorter-term initiative, the TTC and the City of Toronto have jointly undertaken a Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) study of an improved surface transit connection between Downsview Subway Station and York University. The Municipal Class EA process undertakes planning in accordance with the Environmental Assessment Act as legislated by the Province of Ontario to ensure that certain types of projects are evaluated within an approved procedure that has been designed to protect the environment.

This report documents that study process, its findings, and the resulting recommendations.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In keeping with the new Official Plan’s broader goal of increasing transit use, the purpose of this study is to identify the best way to significantly improve the speed and reliability of the surface transit connection between Downsview Subway Station and York University (see **Exhibit 1-1: Study Area**), in the interim period until the subway is extended. This will assist the TTC, York Region Transit, and GO Transit in providing higher quality service that is more competitive with the private auto. At the same time, any recommendations must be sensitive to impacts on adjacent properties, other users of the road, and the natural and social environment in this area.

Exhibit 1-1 Study Area



URS

THE PLANNING
PARTNERSHIP

CONSULT
Engineers and Project Managers

LGL

Class Environmental Assessment
Bus-Only Lanes
Downsview to York University



TORONTO



1.3 Background and Related Studies

The Downsview-Station-York University-Vaughan Corridor has emerged as a priority corridor for rapid transit that is supported by the City of Toronto, the City of Vaughan and York Region. However, they also recognize the need for an interim transit service solution in the Downsview-York University Corridor, recognizing that a subway extension, the agreed-to long term solution, will require several years to plan, design, construct and commission.

The proposed bus-only lanes between Downsview Station and York University/Steeles Avenue are intended to not only improve transit services to York University, the major traffic generator in the study area, but also to allow YRT/VIVA and GO to also provide a higher quality connection from north of Steeles Avenue to the Downsview Subway Station.

1.3.1 The New Toronto Official Plan

Toronto's new Official Plan (OP), which has been approved by City Council, is a logical extension of the transportation policies of the still in-force 1994 OP, the Livable Metropolis. It is very explicit about the need for reduced dependence on the private automobile. This is to be implemented by making more efficient use of the existing road infrastructure by making transit, cycling and walking more attractive alternatives, compared to driving. The achievement of these planning objectives requires improved public transit services and supportive land use planning policies.

The new Toronto Official Plan identifies specific Higher Order Transit Corridors, as candidates for surface rapid transit (bus or rail) or subway expansion. It also defines a Surface Transit Priority Network, which includes road segments where existing bus and streetcar services would be given priority treatment. The Higher Order Transit Corridors include Dufferin Street from Sheppard Avenue to Steeles Avenue and the Hydro corridor, just north of Finch Ave¹, in addition to the alignment of the proposed subway extension to York University and Vaughan. Transit Priority Segments identified for Surface Transit Priority Network include Dufferin Street, Sheppard Avenue and Finch Avenue².

1.3.2 Recommendations for a Subway Expansion

An extension of the Spadina Subway has been proposed as the ultimate transit solution in this corridor.

- By the TTC and the City of Toronto

¹ The new Toronto Official Plan, Map 4 – Higher Order Transit Corridors, November 2002.

² The new Toronto Official Plan, Map 5 – Surface Transit Priority Network, November 2002.



- In 1990, the “Let’s Move” program included a proposal for the construction of a Yonge-Spadina Subway Loop, linking the Yonge and Spadina subway lines.
- In 1993, an environmental assessment was completed for the proposed Yonge-Spadina Subway Loop.³ That EA concluded that the most effective way to address the transportation needs in the study area would be to extend the Spadina subway to York University. Although not part of the approvals secured in the EA, the report proposed that the Yonge Subway and Spadina Subway be connected via a “loop”.
- In 2001, the TTC identified the Spadina – York University Rapid Transit corridor as one of two short-listed subway extension projects, along with the Sheppard Subway extension, in the “TTC Rapid Transit Expansion Study.” That report recommended that both lines “be considered for implementation in the next 10-15 years” but stressed that there was an opportunity to “enhance the prospects of rapid transit in other corridors” in the interim period.
- In Winter 2004, an Environmental Assessment commenced for an extension of the Spadina Subway to Steeles Avenue via York University. This route is preferred over the 1993 recommended alternative because it: better supports the land use planning objectives in the City of Toronto, City of Vaughan and York Region; allows extensive terminal station commuter facilities to be located outside the York University campus core; facilitates improved transit links with York Region and does not preclude looping of the Yonge and Spadina subways in the long term. Completion date for this EA is scheduled for Winter 2005.
- By the City of Vaughan and York Region
 - The January 2001 “Higher Order Transit Corridor Projection Study – York University to the Vaughan Corporate Centre,” identified a preferred alignment and station locations within the City of Vaughan and York University, for a rapid transit connection to the Spadina subway line.⁴ This new proposal represented a change from the earlier Yonge-Spadina Subway Loop proposal, in that it extended rapid transit services into Vaughan as far as the planned Vaughan Corporate Centre development at Highway 7, to a location west of Jane Street.
 - The “Property Protection Study for Steeles Rapid Transit Terminal Facilities – Rapid Transit Extension to York University”⁵ identified the property requirements for a rapid transit station including bus terminal and commuter

³ Yonge-Spadina Subway Loop Environmental Assessment Report, for Toronto Transit Commission and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, McCormack Rankin, January 1993.

⁴ Higher Order Transit Corridor Protection Study, for City of Vaughan by Cansult Limited, January 2001.

⁵ Property Protection for Steeles Rapid Transit Terminal Facilities, for City of Vaughan by Cansult Limited, January 2001.



parking facilities north of York University. York Region has secured the required property for this facility.

- The 2002 York Region Transportation Master Plan⁶, subtitled, “On the Move...toward sustainable transportation” proposed the immediate implementation of rapid transit in four main corridors including Jane Street from Highway 7 to Downsview Subway Station via York University. This plan also called for the development of an ultimate rapid transit plan that would include the extension of the TTC subway to the Vaughan Corporate Centre, as proposed by the City of Vaughan.

1.3.3 Recommendations for Bus Rapid Transit

Since the completion of the Yonge-Spadina Loop Environmental Assessment, higher-speed surface transit connections between Downsview Subway Station and York University as a priority proposed in this corridor has been assessed by several transit authorities:

- By the TTC
 - The June 20, 2001 report “Expanding Transit Priorities in Toronto” recommended the creation of dedicated bus lanes between Downsview Subway Station and York University
 - The March 19, 2003 report “Ridership Growth Strategy” recommended that high priority be given to the implementation of Bus Rapid Transit to York University
- By York Region
 - York Region plans to implement limited stop express bus service to York University and Downsview Station as part of its “Quick Start” program, beginning in late 2005.
- By GO Transit
 - In 2002, GO Transit published its plan for an inter-regional BRT system for the Greater Toronto Area.⁷ The intent of the proposed BRT system is to link Toronto with the surrounding regions in the GTA and areas outside the GTA.

⁶ York Region Transportation Master Plan, Cansult Limited, June 2002

⁷ Inter-Regional Bus Rapid Transit Service, Volume 2 – BRT Plan, MRC, December 13, 2002.



- The GO BRT Plan proposes a BRT link between York University, the Vaughan Corporate Centre and Downsview Subway Station on the Spadina line that could utilize the proposed bus-only lanes.