

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

MEETING DATE: DECEMBER 16, 2009

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF THE
ETOBICOKE-FINCH WEST LRT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT STUDY

ACTION ITEM

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Commission:

1. Approve the recommendation of the joint City/TTC Etobicoke-Finch West Light Rail Transit (LRT) Transit Project Assessment Study, for a LRT line from Finch Station to Humber College including the alignment, stops, stations (and related surface facilities), and traffic management, as described in the attached "Etobicoke-Finch West Light Rail Transit, Environmental Project Report, Draft Executive Summary";
2. Note that eleven formal public consultation meetings and six community meetings were held;
3. Forward this report to the Toronto Executive Committee for its meeting on January 4, 2010 and subsequently submit it to the January 26, 2010 meeting of Toronto City Council recommending that City Council approve the recommendations of the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT Transit Project Assessment Study and authorize staff to submit the Environmental Project Report (EPR) to the Ministry of Environment; and
4. Forward this report to Metrolinx, Humber College, City of Mississauga, City of Brampton, York Region, GO Transit, and the Ontario Ministry of Transportation for information.

FUNDING

Funding for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT was included under Transit City Approved Priority Projects shown "below the line" in the TTC 2010-2014 Capital Program, as approved by the Commission on September 24, 2009. Approval of a further \$134.5 million (in addition to the existing approval of \$29.9 million) in project expenditures and commitments for 2009 was approved by the Commission on July 9, 2009 and by City of Toronto Council on September 30 and October 1, 2009 bringing the total approved budget to \$164.4 million.

The current City of Toronto Council approved funding for this project is \$11.5 million. The Interim Funding Memorandum of Agreement to provide funding to the end of 2009 is currently being negotiated with Metrolinx, the City and the TTC for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT and three other Transit City priority lines. A Performance Agreement for the full funding of the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT will be negotiated by TTC and Metrolinx.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of March 21, 2007, the Commission endorsed the *Toronto Transit City Light Rail Plan* as the basis for rapid transit expansion in the City of Toronto. This plan included the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT line as one of seven lines forming a network of fast, reliable, environmentally-sustainable light rail transit throughout the City. Subsequently at its meeting of November 14, 2007, the Commission received the staff report entitled, *Transit City Light Rail Plan – Evaluation and Ranking of Routes*, which assessed all seven of the light rail lines which comprise the Transit City plan, and confirmed the earlier staff conclusion that the Sheppard East, Etobicoke-Finch West, and Eglinton Crosstown LRT lines are the priority projects for the start of implementation of the plan.

On June 15, 2007, the Province of Ontario announced the *MoveOntario 2020* rapid transit plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area (GTHA). *MoveOntario 2020* includes the TTC-City of Toronto *Transit Light Rail Plan*, which includes the proposed Etobicoke-Finch West LRT line. In the spring of 2009 the Province announced funding of \$1.2 billion for the Finch LRT project. The Finch-Sheppard LRT is included as a priority project in the *Metrolinx Big Move Transit Plan* for the GTHA.

In the spring of 2008, the City of Toronto and Toronto Transit Commission initiated preliminary planning for a Transit Project Assessment Study for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT line. The Transit Project Assessment is conducted in accordance with the Transit Projects Regulation of the *Environmental Assessment Act* (EA). Under this Regulation, transit projects, such as the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT, are exempt from the requirements under Part II of the *Act*. The new regulation has created a process which allows for an assessment of potential environmental impacts to be completed and approved within six months.

This report provides a summary of the public consultation process, results of the Transit Project Assessment Study and the rationale supporting the various elements of the recommended preferred design for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT line.

DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT Project

The objective of this project is to provide LRT service in the Finch Avenue West corridor that would be a cost-effective way of providing excellent, reliable, high-capacity, environmentally-sustainable transit service thereby reducing auto dependency and creating a more liveable, attractive, and sustainable city.

Study Area

The study area for this project extends from just east of Yonge Street, along Finch Avenue West and Highway 27, to the area around Humber College, located at Highway 27 and Humber College Boulevard. The study area encompasses the majority of the existing 36 Finch West bus route and intersects with many local and regional transit services. The western terminus at Humber College is designed to allow possible future extensions of the line to the vicinity of the Woodbine Live! development and Pearson International Airport.

The Process to Date

The process to date has involved a number of study phases to develop a preferred LRT alignment and to assess the impacts of its construction and operation. These phases included:

- A Feasibility Study was completed to assess the implementation of an LRT line within the defined Finch Avenue West corridor. It identified key issues to be analyzed during the transit project assessment process.
- Data collection and analysis on transportation facilities, the natural environment, and the social environment was completed for the entire corridor.
- For those areas where issues had been identified, alternative solutions were developed and analyzed. The preferred option was incorporated into the preferred project design.
- Environmental issues were identified and alternative elements were selected for the alignment to minimize and/or mitigate adverse impacts.
- At the beginning of the process, various agencies and stakeholder groups were canvassed to determine interest in the project. Meetings were held with City departments, interested stakeholders (e.g., Humber College), and utility companies.
- A comprehensive public consultation program was developed to allow the public to review the proposed project and provide comments. Two series of public consultation open houses have been held. Information was posted on the City and TTC websites. Opportunities were provided for the public to comment verbally, by

email or by fax. In addition, meetings arranged by local Councillors provided additional opportunities for the public to receive and respond to detailed information similar to the open houses. In total, twenty meetings will have been held with the public, with Councillors, and with community groups about the project. Responses to questions received from individuals have been provided where requested and public consultation records prepared summarizing concerns and comments.

- The full process has resulted in the development of a preferred alignment and associated facilities for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT line to operate from Finch Station on the Yonge Subway to Humber College.

The Preferred Design

The design proposed for the majority of Finch Avenue West and Highway 27 consists of two LRT tracks operating on a raised median, of approximately 150 mm in height, in the middle of the road. Midblock, there will be two traffic lanes, a bicycle lane, and a pedestrian clearway on either side of the LRT. At signalized intersections, the raised right-of-way will be lowered to the adjacent road height and the cross-section will accommodate left-turn lanes and LRT passenger platforms.

LRT stops will generally be provided every 400-to-600 metres. Passenger platforms will be approximately 60 metres long to accommodate two-car LRT operation.

Other road traffic will be permitted to cross the tracks at signalized intersections only. Unsignalized intersections and driveways will be limited to right-in/right-out operation. U-turns will be permitted from left-turn lanes.

The urban design element of this project recognizes the importance of designing an “entire street”. As outlined in the City’s *Vibrant Streets* document, a key objective is to create a street that is accessible, more attractive, and pedestrian-friendly. Urban design, cycling, and pedestrian-realm issues have been paramount throughout the development of the project. During the detailed design phase, urban design considerations will continue to be integrated throughout the project. The focus will be on accessibility, treatments in areas such as LRT platforms, crosswalks, and boulevards that will be unique to *Transit City* LRT lines, provision of adequate space for street furniture, as well as incorporating special urban design treatments where possible. The project will also include a public art component.

Special Design Areas

Connection at Finch West Station: The preferred option is a grade separated connection to the future Finch West subway station on the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension (TYSSE) project in the interests of passenger transfer convenience and expediting LRT vehicles through the Keele Street intersection. Further work in coordinating with TYSSE

design staff and evaluation of the technical feasibility needs to be done to confirm the validity of this concept. In the event that the technical challenges of this proposed design prove to be unjustified by cost, the project team has an alternative design consisting of a surface LRT platform with direct passenger access to underground walkways connecting to the subway station mezzanine. The grade separated connection is being carried forward as the preferred option and the at-grade platform is being carried forward as an alternative.

Connection at Finch Station: A grade separated connection to Finch Station at Yonge is also recommended in the interests of passenger convenience and expediting the LRT vehicles through the Yonge Street intersection. Further work on optimizing the passenger transfer tunnels needs to be done.

Humber College-North Campus: The project team identified the north campus of Humber College, on the southwest corner of Humber College Boulevard and Highway 27 as the logical western terminus for this phase of the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT. Discussions with Humber College management have resulted in general agreement on the location of an LRT terminal stop on the campus grounds. The College is currently in the early stages of a campus redevelopment plan and the exact location and orientation of the LRT stop will be finalized as the campus plans are finalized. A formal agreement between the TTC and Humber College will be established.

Property Requirements

Approximately 200 properties will be affected for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT. Most of the impacts are partial frontage requirements to create the space necessary to accommodate stops. Every effort will be made to mitigate property requirements during design.

Included in the technical property requirements are twelve traction power substation locations along the route at approximately 1.5 kilometre spacing. There is some flexibility in locating substations and efforts will be made to mitigate these property requirements by situating them on TTC/City property where possible, and taking advantage of properties that become available during the design phase.

From Yonge Street to Bathurst Street, Finch Avenue West was originally laid out to a 30-metre cross section. The City's Official Plan designates a 36-metre street allowance for this section of Finch Avenue West, consistent with its designation as an Avenue. To date, the additional space for the 36-metre street allowance has been acquired on a piecemeal basis through development applications. As an integral part of this project, the acquisition of the 36m width from the segment from Yonge Street to Bathurst Street will be expedited to allow for the Transit City standard cross section to be implemented.

Schedule

Assuming all necessary approvals are received by the end of May 2010, construction is expected to begin in 2011 and continue until 2015, with public service on the new LRT line to begin in late 2015.

Official Plan Amendment

Map 5 of Toronto's Official Plan, "Surface Transit Priority Network" identifies Finch Avenue West and Highway 27 as Transit Priority Segments. However, an Official Plan Amendment to Map 5 is required to identify Humber College Boulevard west of Highway 27 to the proposed Humber College terminal (exact location still to be determined) as part of the City's "Surface Transit Priority Network."

Transit Project Assessment Process

Under the Transit Projects Regulation of the *Environmental Assessment Act* (EA), transit projects, such as the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT, are exempt from the requirements under Part II of the *Act*. The new regulation has created a process which allows for an assessment of potential environmental impacts to be completed and the report to gain approval within six months.

The preliminary planning has been completed for the project and the Transit Project Assessment Process Notice of Commencement was issued November 16, 2009. Public consultation has been included throughout the process. The attached report, entitled "Etobicoke-Finch West Light Rail Transit, Environmental Project Report, Draft Executive Summary" provides additional details on:

1. The process followed to develop the project;
2. The rationale for the design elements selected for the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT; and
3. A summary of the environmental impacts of the project and the net effects following proposed mitigation measures.

Complete details on the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT line, including plans of the 17-kilometre alignment from Finch Station to Humber College, will be contained in the project's Environmental Project Report, which will be finalized in early 2010. The Environmental Project Report will be placed on the public record for the mandatory 30-day review period in spring 2010.

Possible Future Extensions

A feasibility study to determine potential routings for the future westward extension of the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT to the vicinity of Woodbine Live! development and the Pearson International Airport has been completed and is under review. A planning study for the eastward extension of the LRT along Finch Avenue East and south on Don Mills Road to a connection with Don Mills Station and the Sheppard East LRT will commence in 2010. Both of these extensions, if approved, would be treated as future phases of the project and will not delay the current work.

JUSTIFICATION

The Etobicoke-Finch West Light Rail project is a component of the *Toronto Transit City Light Rail Plan*, the Province's *MoveOntario 2020* plan and Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan. The recommendations of the Etobicoke-Finch West LRT Transit Project Assessment Study should be approved by the Commission as a cost-effective way of providing excellent, reliable, high-capacity, environmentally-sustainable transit service thereby reducing auto dependency in this corridor and create a more liveable, attractive, and sustainable city.

December 4, 2009
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Attachments:
Etobicoke-Finch West Light Rail Transit, Environmental Project Report, Draft Executive Summary