

City Planning

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June 16, 2015

Mr. James T. Purkis  
Executive Vice President  
Regional Express Rail  
Metrolinx  
97 Front Street West  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5J 1E6

Dear Mr. Purkis,

**Subject: Davenport Community Rail Overpass Environmental Assessment**

The purpose of this letter is to set out key City concerns that have been identified in review of the Metrolinx Davenport Community Rail Overpass Environmental Assessment (EA) information received to-date.

As you are aware, City staff first met with Metrolinx representatives on April 1, 2015 (Technical Advisory Committee meeting #1), at which time the project was identified as one of several Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP) studies in support of the Province's Regional Express Rail (RER) program. The project proposes a rail/rail grade separation which would raise the Barrie rail corridor north of Bloor Street on structure to overpass the east-west CP freight line. It's my understanding the decision to proceed to a TPAP based on this option was a result of prior feasibility studies that were completed in-house at Metrolinx and not shared with the City nor the adjacent community.

Staff of my Division are required to review projects of this nature, which are potentially impactful to the surrounding local communities, in the context of the City's Official Plan (OP), including city building objectives aimed at improving the quality of life and economic competitiveness of Toronto and the surrounding region.

The OP identifies the importance and supports the expansion of passenger rail service while also recognizing the importance of protecting sensitive land uses. The following relevant Official Plan references are provided for your information:

Section 2.1 Policy 1(e)

*"Toronto will work with neighbouring municipalities and the Province of Ontario to address mutual challenges and to develop a framework for dealing with growth across the GTA which increases the efficiency and safety of the road and rail freight networks in the movement of goods and services."*

Section 2.2 Policy 3(g)

*"The City's transportation network will be maintained and developed to support the growth management objectives of this Plan by supporting the increased use of existing rail corridors within the City for enhanced local and inter-regional passenger service."*

Section 3.4 Policy 21

*"Major facilities such as airports, transportation/rail infrastructure, corridors and yards, waste management facilities and industries and sensitive land uses such as residences and educational and health facilities will be appropriately designed, buffered and/or separated from each other to prevent adverse effects from noise, vibration, odour and other contaminants, and to promote safety. To assist in identifying impacts and mitigative measures, the proponent may be required to prepare studies in accordance with guidelines established for this purpose. The proponent will be responsible for implementing any required mitigative measures."*

The OP also summarizes existing and potential expansion of higher order transit corridors within the City on Map 4 – Higher Order Transit Corridors:

[http://www1.toronto.ca/static\\_files/CityPlanning/PDF/4\\_hi\\_trans\\_oct2009.pdf](http://www1.toronto.ca/static_files/CityPlanning/PDF/4_hi_trans_oct2009.pdf)

As you know, Toronto is experiencing significant change and growth, and the local community along this section of the Barrie Corridor is no exception. This presents challenges as well as opportunities when planning for long term infrastructure and considering how to implement design excellence in a local community context.

The challenges in this case are significant from a planning and community impact perspective. A number of the issues reflective of the challenges have been discussed in recent meetings of our respective staffs, and I am documenting them below for your further consideration.

I should note that identification of these issues, implications and community impacts has occurred in an extremely compressed time frame, particularly when considering the scale of the infrastructure and the long term implications this option presents. Given the complexity of this project, this "Key Issues" list may be added to as further information becomes available.

## **Key Issues**

### **The Vertical Alignment of the Barrie Corridor – Overpass vs. Trench**

This is the most critical design consideration of the grade separation project. However, the decision to move forward with an overpass rather than a trench was made by Metrolinx without consultation with City representatives, the local community or Ward Councillors. The history of this decision is being revisited at the request of the City, with the intent of having a coordinated City/Metrolinx understanding of the prior decision making.

To-date, this coordinated understanding has not been achieved. The key concern at this time is that the benefits and impacts of the overpass and trench options, and the resulting decision making on these options, are not fully understood. This is particularly true in the context of how the prior assessment considered the Official Plan and related city-building objectives.

### **Bloor Street GO Rail Station at Lansdowne**

Map 4 – Higher Order Transit Corridors of the OP identifies a GO Rail Station at Bloor Street on the Barrie Corridor. This is also supported by the OP policy that supports enhanced local and inter-regional transit. Good transit includes connections at key locations and a GO station on the Bloor-Danforth subway line is seen as an important transit node. It is my understanding that Metrolinx is presently reviewing the feasibility of a GO Rail Station at this location as a result of City staff raising this issue. In order to ensure a comprehensive and collaborative review that includes City OP considerations, the City should be an active participant in this review.

### **Bloor and Dupont Grade Restoration – with Under and Over Options**

The grade separation of the Barrie Corridor and the CP North Toronto creates the opportunity to restore and improve the road grade at Bloor Street and Dupont Street. Opportunity for grade restoration at Bloor Street may be limited as the overpass option begins at Bloor Street. However, improving pedestrian connectivity to the transit node must be considered in the case of a GO Rail Station at Bloor Street. For Dupont Street, the grade restoration will greatly improve pedestrian and cycling connectivity, safety and aesthetics at the street level, as well as other urban design elements.

## **Other Issues**

In addition to the key issues listed above, the following is a list of other issues that should be considered. The issues listed below are in no particular order of priority:

- Potential to connect Sterling Road to Lansdowne Avenue
- Potential to grade separate Wallace Avenue
- Ability to achieve enhanced park connections
- Opportunities for a cycling connection with the Railpath and Extension
- Potential need to update current Planning Studies
- Impacts to existing and new development

## **Timing**

As noted, timing of this project has been another concern. This project assumes an approximate twelve month process including the six month review period following Filing of Notice of Commencement for the TPAP process (final project review) at the end of August.

In advance of this Notice, City staff will be required to comment on the draft environmental project report including several detailed chapters respecting community impacts, participate in discussions aimed at achieving design excellence for the overpass option, and represent the City's position on controversial planning issues as part of the public consultation process.

However, the relationship and timing of City staff input to the process and related public engagement events is not clear. In order to have a coordinated and clear message to the community and local councillors, it is important to ensure the reviews and comments necessary for input to project milestones and public meetings is planned and deliberate.

The remaining ten week period of time prior to issuance of Notice of Commencement is an extremely compressed period in which to undertake these activities given other concurrent transit planning initiatives and work programme priorities. This is further challenged by the need of City staff to fully understand the background feasibility studies that provided an assessment of the options available, and led to the rejection of the trench option.

## **Process for Successful Completion**

In order to plan for successful completion of this project, there is a need for City staff to:

have the same level of understanding on this project including understanding the decision points that lead to the current option under review;

work in a coordinated manner with Metrolinx on the review and completion of the technical and design work;

attend public meetings fully briefed and aware of the milestone decisions, and be able to respond to the community on questions related to the City's position and involvement in the work under discussion;

have sufficient time and resources to provide meaningful input to the technical, design and public processes, in particular related to those activities occurring in advance of the Notice of Commencement.

My expectation is that we can work together to achieve success, however, there is a need to consider what is realistically achievable in the current time lines of this project.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

In terms of City Division roles and responsibilities, this project will be managed through the City Planning Division, Transportation Planning Section, and the Major Capital Infrastructure

Coordination (MCIC) Office. The Transportation Planning Section will act as the one-window to other City Divisions on all aspects of the environmental assessment, planning and design work.

The MCIC office will coordinate on all issues of capital planning and oversight of financial implications. It is understood that these responsibilities have already been confirmed. Following from that, it would be prudent given the nature of City issues this project presents to also consider regular reporting on this study to the Toronto, TTC and Metrolinx Executive Coordination Committee (TTMECC).

Through this process we look forward to ensuring the best outcome that achieves Metrolinx's objectives for the Regional Express Rail (RER) initiative and the separation of the existing CP North Toronto and Barrie Corridor at-grade rail crossing, as well as the City's goals for the community and beyond. I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with you to realize the success of this project in the context of the RER program.

Yours truly,



Jennifer Keesmaat, MES, MCIP, RPP  
Chief Planner & Executive Director  
City Planning

Copy: John Livey, Acting City Manager