



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East Corridors - Planning Study Approach

Date:	October 13, 2015
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	1, 7, 8, 33, 39, 40, 41, 42
Reference Number:	P:\2015\Cluster B\PLN\PGMC\PG15114

SUMMARY

As a result of investment in rapid transit along the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors, City Planning initiated a review of these corridors. This report recommends areas for planning study on a priority basis in order to leverage investment in rapid transit and to encourage transit supportive development. The recommended future studies will implement the Official Plan's policy direction to integrate land use and transportation.

To prioritize areas along the corridors for future planning study, each corridor was divided into segments and reviewed through three streams of work: corridor profiles consisting of demographics, employment and built fabric; a real estate market conditions study; and a planning overview, social equity scan and case studies of similar rapid transit lines. These three streams of work represent background research in the prioritization process, which was completed in partnership with Metrolinx. The next step involved analyzing findings based on an evaluation matrix, consisting of criteria in four categories: social equity, planning framework, city building objectives and market potential. The final step in this process is a prioritization approach and schedule for conducting future planning studies along each corridor.

For the Finch Avenue West corridor, staff recommend that the area around Keele Street and Finch Avenue West be studied first, followed by areas around Jane Street and Finch Avenue West and the area around Albion Mall. For the Sheppard Avenue East corridor, work is already underway through the recently commenced ConsumersNext study at Sheppard Avenue West and Victoria Park and the on-going transit planning initiatives for the Scarborough Subway and SmartTrack/Regional Express Rail (RER). Outcomes of

these transit planning initiatives will help inform future planning study work in the Agincourt and McCowan segments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division recommends that City Council:

1. Request the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to initiate a planning study along the Finch Avenue West corridor, focussed on the area around Keele Street and Finch Avenue West.
2. Approve two subsequent areas for future planning studies along the Finch Avenue West corridor focussed on Jane Street and Finch Avenue West and focussed on Albion Road, Kipling Avenue and Finch Avenue West.
3. Extend an invitation to Metrolinx to participate, support, and contribute to the area planning studies along the corridors.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

In March 2011, the Toronto Transit Plan was announced by the Provincial Government, Metrolinx and the City of Toronto. The Plan includes light rail transit (LRT) lines for Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East. Metrolinx is responsible for building these lines. The first phase of the Finch Avenue West LRT is expected to run from Keele Street (where it will connect to the Line 1 subway), to Humber College, a distance of 11 kilometres. The Finch Avenue West LRT is expected to have 18 stops on opening day in 2021. The Sheppard Avenue East LRT is expected to run from Morningside Avenue to Don Mills Road (where it will connect to the Line 4 subway), a distance of 13 kilometres. The Sheppard LRT is expected to have up to 26 stops. Maps showing the generalized locations of future stops are included in Figure 2.

The construction of the two LRT lines implements portions of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) released by Metrolinx in 2008 and endorsed by Council in 2009. In 2010, an Environmental Assessment for the design of the Finch Avenue West LRT was completed and in 2008 an Environmental Assessment for the design of the Sheppard Avenue East LRT was completed.

Along with investment in LRT, Metrolinx provided the City with funding to improve the public realm in conjunction with transit. Allocation of this funding among the LRT projects and for what purposes, is the purview of the City. In May 2014, Council allocated funding among the three lines (Eglinton Avenue, Finch Avenue West and

Sheppard Avenue East) based on corridor length. For detail on Council's decision visit: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.EX41.2>.

On April 27, 2015, the Ministry of Transportation re-confirmed funding for the Finch Avenue West LRT project, with construction expected to begin in 2016 and completion by 2021. Construction on the Sheppard Avenue East LRT would begin once the Finch Avenue West LRT is operational.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Planning Framework

Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) advances the Province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe by implementing part of the long-term vision for coordinated transportation across the entire Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. The RTP identifies intensification corridors – areas that will have upgraded transit services – as places that can accommodate increased growth and development. The RTP directs municipalities to assess these corridors for their potential for higher density mixed-use development in a transit supportive urban form. Both Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East are identified as intensification corridors in the RTP.

Toronto's Official Plan directs that municipal land, infrastructure and services be used efficiently, which can be achieved by directing growth to those areas that have the capacity for it. This includes areas with higher-order transportation capacity. The introduction of rapid transit along the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors will increase each corridor's transit capacity. The Plan also directs the concentration of people and jobs to areas well served by transit and does this by integrating land use direction with transportation. This integration also offers the opportunity to move less by increasing opportunities to live close to work and to facilitate social interaction, public safety and cultural and economic activity.

Portions of the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors are identified as *Avenues* or *Employment Areas* in the Official Plan. Along with *Centres* and the *Downtown and Central Waterfront*, *Avenues* and *Employment Areas* form part of the City's growth management strategy in the Official Plan. These elements are identified in Map 2 Urban Structure of the Plan. *Avenues* represent segments of main commercial streets that can accommodate new housing and jobs while improving the public realm. *Employment Areas* along rapid transit corridors can accommodate new business and employment growth in more intensive transit-supportive forms, thereby providing greater accessibility to jobs.

Policies to guide growth and change are also set out through land use designations in the Plan. Some land use designations emphasize stability (for example, *Neighbourhoods*, and *Apartment Neighbourhoods*), whereas others support growth (such as *Mixed-Use Areas* and *Employment Areas*). Both the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors have large areas of designations emphasizing stability, with large groupings of designations emphasizing growth.

COMMENTS

Transit investment in the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors will act as a stimulus for change. However, many other factors will impact how much change there may be and the form it will take. These other factors include market conditions, the planning policy context, built form, demographic change and employment opportunities. Additionally, there are opportunities to leverage investment for the benefit of existing communities to result in improved quality of life.

Through proactive planning studies, the City can help guide and shape growth that may be generated through the infrastructure investment. Planning studies can also recommend measures, such as community services, built form guidelines and streetscapes that, combined with the LRT stimulus, may result in catalyzing pro-active city-building.

Planning Study Approach

The Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors differ markedly from the Eglinton Avenue corridor, including their planning frameworks, market conditions, built form and built form patterns, demographics, employment and other conditions. For example, a large continuous portion of Eglinton Avenue is flanked predominantly by shallow-lotted *Mixed-Use Areas* designated parcels. This reflects the history and existing condition of Eglinton Avenue as a traditional main street. In contrast, both Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East have large areas of lands designated *Neighbourhoods* or *Apartment Neighbourhoods* abutting them, along with nodes of large, deep-lotted parcels designated *Mixed-Use Areas* or *Employment Areas*. This is reflective of their more recent development.

The differences between the Eglinton Avenue corridor and the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors necessitate different planning approaches. For both Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East, there is an opportunity to adopt an area-based approach for planning studies rather than a corridor-wide planning study. This area-based approach allows for targeted, detailed examination in areas where change is encouraged and to help stimulate growth and change where it is warranted. Unlike the Eglinton Avenue corridor, Metrolinx has not funded a corridor-wide planning study of Finch Avenue West or Sheppard Avenue East. However, there may be opportunities to partner with Metrolinx on area based studies, in addition to Metrolinx's current work with City Planning on the streetscape plan for Finch Avenue West.

Area Identification

To identify and prioritize areas along the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors for future planning study, each corridor was divided into segments and reviewed through three streams of work: corridor profiles, a real estate market conditions study and a planning overview. Findings were then used to analyze each segment based on an evaluation matrix consisting of criteria in four categories: social equity, planning framework, city building objectives and market potential. Based on this process (see Figure 1), a prioritization approach for conducting future planning studies along each corridor has been identified.

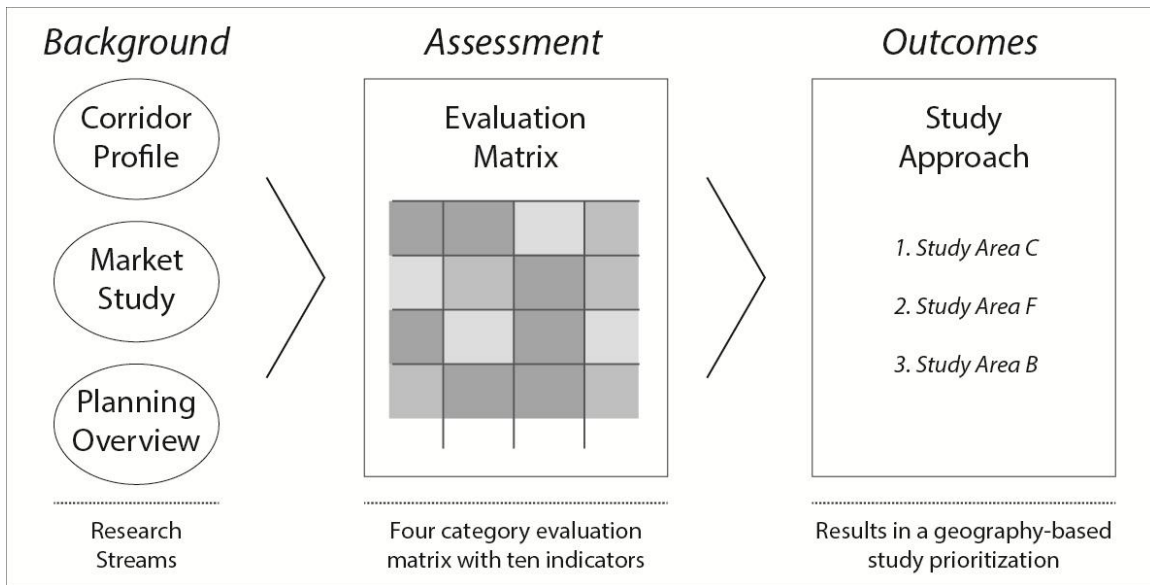


Figure 1 - The three step prioritization process

City Planning partnered with Metrolinx to deliver the background's three research streams. City Planning also benefited from work carried out by three major universities: the University of Toronto, Ryerson University and York University. The university collaborations helped inform the background streams and identification and evaluation of potential indicators for conducting the assessment.

Background – Corridor Segments and Research

To better understand corridor characteristics and how they could inform an approach for conducting planning studies along the corridors, City Planning and Metrolinx initiated work involving three research streams:

- corridor profiles consisting of demographics, employment and built fabric;
- a real estate market conditions study; and
- a planning overview including a social equity scan and case studies of similar rapid transit lines.

To initiate this work, City Planning undertook an exercise to determine the segment boundaries for the corridors (see Figure 2), based on the following criteria:

- land forms, including natural features;
- man-made barriers, including highways and rail corridors;
- Official Plan land use designations;
- built form, including the heights and sizes of buildings and their locations;
- distance from LRT stops;
- consideration for major streets; and
- Community Planning knowledge and experience.

Based on the criteria above, the boundaries were further refined and aligned as much as possible with Census Dissemination Area (CDA) boundaries, in order to obtain

information and data. The only exceptions to this are areas where there are no residents (e.g. *Employment Areas*) where following the CDAs was not necessary.

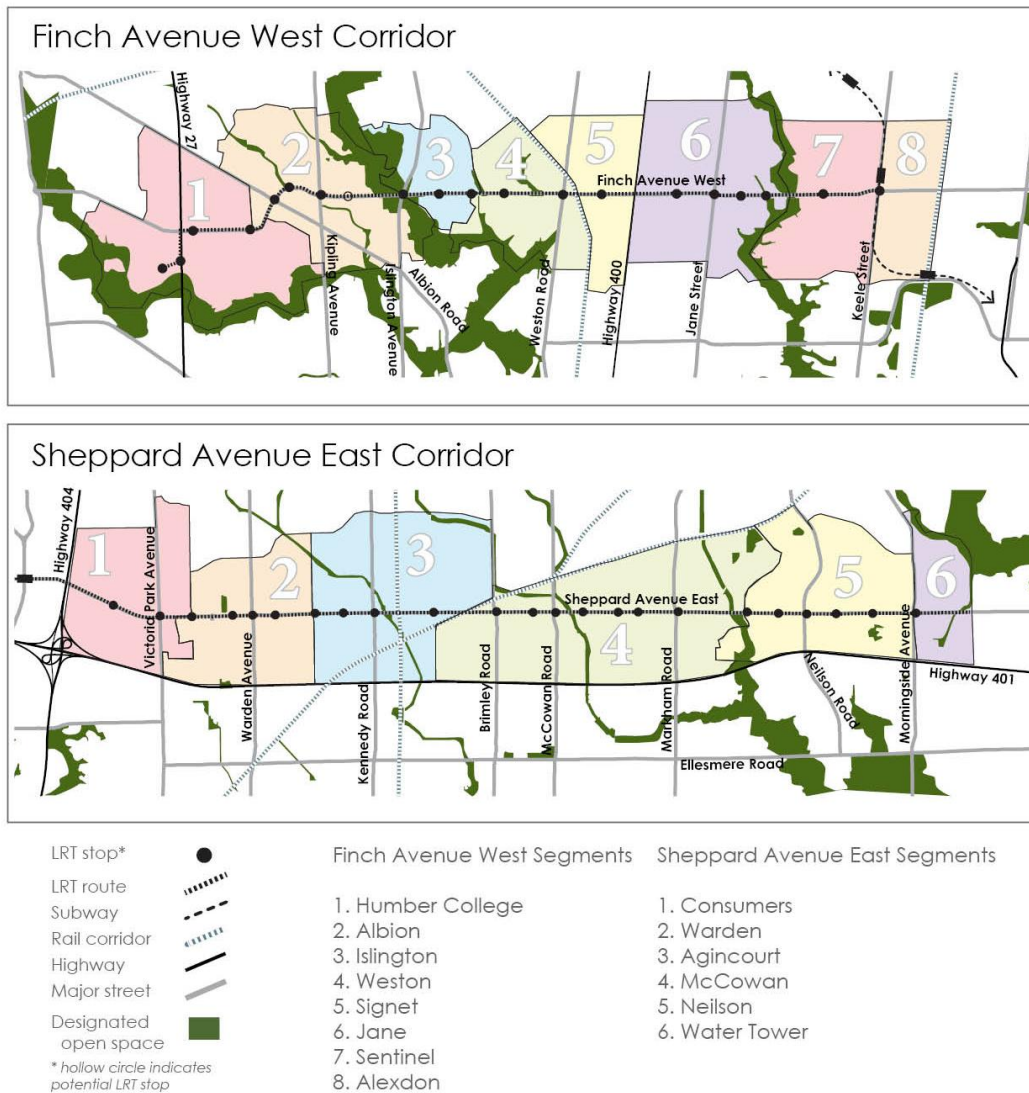


Figure 2 - Corridor Segments and general location of planned LRT stops

Using the segments identified, City Planning prepared the profiles and Metrolinx commissioned planning and market consultants to conduct real estate market conditions studies, as well as the planning overviews described below.

a) Corridor Profile

City Planning's profiles of Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East provide a corridor-wide summary and a snapshot for each segment. Each profile includes:

- Demographic data from 2001, 2006, and 2011;
- Employment data over the same periods;
- Employment establishment data over the same periods; and

- Mapping exercises (including figure ground, and public realm interface).

A map of each corridor, including segment boundaries is located in Figure 2. To help understand the corridors for the purpose of creating these profiles, City Planning staff conducted site visits along the corridors. Excerpts from each of the profiles are appended as Attachments 1 and 2.

b) Real Estate Market Considerations

Metrolinx's market consultants N Barry Lyon (NBLC) conducted a real estate market evaluation of each segment. The consultants evaluated each segment based on existing market conditions and potential market conditions (post LRT operation) and provided commentary regarding potential future built form and demand for land uses. These conditions factored in the existing planning framework and included consultation with land owners. A summary of NBLC's reports for both Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East are included as Attachments 3 and 4. Generally, the studies conclude that market interest is strongest toward the eastern end of the Finch Avenue West corridor, and toward the western end of the Sheppard Avenue East corridor. In addition, the Sheppard Avenue East corridor market is already moderately strong, with the Finch Avenue West market maturing at a steady rate (though not currently as strong as Sheppard Avenue East). Both corridors are expected to see increased demand for residential, office, and commercial uses in the future with the addition of LRT service.

c) Planning Framework Overview

Metrolinx's planning consultants, Planning Alliance, prepared a planning framework review through their "Setting the Stage: Encouraging Transit Supportive Places" reports. Summaries of these reports are attached as Attachments 5 and 6. Each report included a social equity scan and examination of case studies of rapid transit corridors throughout North America, including best practices and lessons learned that could be applied to the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors. As well, future planning considerations (both short and longer term) were identified for each corridor segment. Examples of these considerations and lessons include:

- better connections to existing parks and open spaces, future LRT stops, etc;
- development of a planning framework for identified areas, such as large Mixed-Use Areas sites;
- the positive impact of as-of-right zoning toward incenting market interest, as illustrated through case studies; and
- the need to develop a transit-supportive planning framework prior to the completion of the transit infrastructure.

The full version of the Corridor Profiles, Real Estate Market Conditions, and "Setting the Stage" documents are available on the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East – Planning Approach page listed here: toronto.ca/planning/sipa.

Assessment - Evaluation Criteria

To identify areas along the corridor that should be prioritized for planning study, City Planning developed indicators for evaluating corridor segments based on findings from the background research streams. These indicators are housed in four categories:

- Social equity (Indicator: Neighbourhood Equity Score)
- Planning Framework (Indicators: Urban Structure, Land use, Mobility Hubs)
- City Building Objectives (Indicators: Transit routes, Animation and street edge, Capacity for increased density, Access and connectivity potential)
- Market Potential (Indicators: Current market, Market potential post LRT)

Attachment 7 provides an explanation of these categories and indicators.

Corridor segments were assessed against each indicator and assigned one of three descriptions: more likely to be prioritized for study, somewhat likely to be prioritized, and least likely to be prioritized at this time. The indicators were used collectively to identify segments that should be prioritized for study first. Other factors, such as the existence of a recent study (for example, a secondary plan) were considered.

Outcomes – Study Area Prioritization

A number of areas along the two corridors will benefit from future planning studies. Three levels of consideration were developed by factoring all the criteria, background research, policy and previous recommendations in order to initiate an area-based study work program along the corridors. The three levels are:

- primary consideration for study (i.e. to be prioritized first);
- secondary consideration for study; and
- do not proceed at this time.

The above categories also recognize that not every area can be studied concurrently given the cumulative workload and the need to incorporate these new studies into the Division's Study Work Program over multiple years.

Based on the analysis, the areas identified as 'primary consideration for study' along the Finch Avenue West corridor are:

- Segment 2 (Albion)
- Segment 6 (Jane)
- Segment 7 (Sentinel)
- Segment 8 (Alexdon)

Of the remaining segments, Segment 4 (Weston) already has a Secondary Plan in place, and as such does not require a planning study at this time. It is also worth noting that two major institutions (Humber College and the Etobicoke General Hospital/William Osler Hospital) in Segment 1 are currently undergoing site plan approvals with City Planning Staff.

For the Sheppard Avenue East corridor, the following segment was identified as 'primary consideration for study':

- Segment 3 (Agincourt).

Of the remaining Sheppard Avenue East segments, Segment 1 (Consumers) and Segment 2 (Warden) may have been identified as 'primary consideration for study', but a study is already underway called ConsumersNext in Segment 1 and an Avenue Study was recently completed in Segment 2. Segment 4 (McCowan) was identified as 'secondary consideration for study'. The importance of studying areas within Segment 4 (McCowan) will change pending Council's direction with respect to the Scarborough subway extension report.

Although these recommendations are segment-based, the actual future study area boundaries need to be determined as a first task of a study's future scope of work.

Timing

Staff recommend that Finch Avenue West Segments 7 and 8 (Sentinel and Alexdon) be studied first as pressure for change is imminent. Specifically, the intersection of Keele Street and Finch Avenue West is currently under construction as the Line 1 subway extension is being built. Similarly, construction of the Finch Avenue West LRT is expected to begin in 2016. The construction of these two rapid transit lines establishes the identified Mobility Hub at Keele Street and Finch Avenue West. In addition, a study for Keele Street and Finch Avenue West is consistent with a 2001 Toronto Transit Commission recommendation for a planning study to coincide with the development of the subway.

Transit infrastructure is already manifesting itself in new market and development interest. Examples include the Council-approved mid-rise office building at 35 Tangiers Road within an *Employment Area*. This is evidence of the need to develop and guide a vision for the area including built form and how to transition between the *Employment Areas*, *Neighbourhoods*, and newly redesignated *Mixed Use Areas* lands on the southeast corner of Keele Street and Finch Avenue West (completed via Official Plan Amendment 231).

Segment 3 (Agincourt) along the Sheppard Avenue East corridor was identified as having 'primary consideration' for study through the prioritization process. This, despite the existence of the Agincourt Secondary Plan, as the context under which the plan was developed has changed. However, a review and/or study of Segment 3 should follow the outcomes of future Feeling Congested reports (i.e. the ongoing review of the Official Plan's transportation policies) and the SmartTrack/Regional Express Rail (RER) transit planning initiative.

The remaining two segments identified as 'primary consideration' for planning study are both along Finch Avenue West: Segment 2 (Albion) and Segment 6 (Jane). The beginning of construction of the Finch Avenue West LRT in 2016 necessitates study of these areas in the near term, unlike any of the segments along Sheppard Avenue East, as

the Sheppard Avenue East LRT is anticipated post-2021. However, unlike the Keele Street and Finch Avenue West intersection, neither the Albion or Jane and Finch areas will result in a completed Mobility Hub and neither is anticipated to experience the same market pressure. Staff recommend that Segment 2 (Albion) and Segment 6 (Jane) be prioritized second (after Keele Street and Finch Avenue West) for study.

The order by which the Segment 2 (Albion) and Segment 6 (Jane) studies proceed is dependent on outside factors, such as the outcome of the current planning process regarding the Infrastructure Ontario lands formerly occupied by the Thistletown Youth Centre. City Planning requested Metrolinx to preserve an additional stop on the Finch Avenue West LRT corridor to serve future occupants of the lands (identified as 'potential LRT stop' in Figure 2). Metrolinx has agreed. This or other significant events in either segment may serve to elevate the need for study in the respective segment.

City Planning's recommended area-based approach to planning studies along the corridors presents an opportunity to further collaborate with Metrolinx. Staff recommend that Council extend an invitation to Metrolinx to continue the partnership formed in this study prioritization process. The level of participation and involvement of Metrolinx will be negotiated as part of study initiation.

Moving Forward

The purpose of any future study identified in this report is to develop a planning framework to support and guide change toward more transit-supportive places. This framework will be developed with the intent of leveraging public investment in transit infrastructure for the benefit of local communities and the city at large. Similarly, any future study will result in implementation measures that make it easier for city-building and transit-supportive development to be created. A work plan will be developed for each study including but not limited to the following:

- study area boundaries;
- consultation including area to be consulted and whom;
- a vision for the area;
- built form now and options for future built form;
- infrastructure needs, including transportation, and community services and facilities;
- transit investment and community building;
- general recommendations; and
- implementation measures, which may include Site and Area Specific Policies, updated zoning and urban design guidelines, among other guidelines or strategies.

Participation across City divisions and agencies is essential to advancing the City's planning studies. City Planning anticipates working with divisions on the studies identified in this report, including: Toronto Water; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Economic Development; Transportation Services; Toronto Community Housing Corporation; and the Toronto Transit Commission.

CONCLUSION

A planning review was initiated as a result of planned investment in rapid transit along the Finch Avenue West and Sheppard Avenue East corridors. Based on the background work conducted and evaluation process, City Planning recommends commencement of a study of the area around the Keele Street and Finch Avenue West intersection. The area is recommended to be studied first, as a subway extension is under construction and construction for an LRT is anticipated to begin next year, it is identified as a Mobility Hub, there is current development pressure and there is opportunity to improve quality of life through improved access and the creation of a more complete community.

Subsequent to the Keele Street and Finch Avenue West study and as resources allow, City Planning recommends studies of the Jane Street and Finch Avenue West area, and the area around Albion Road, Kipling Avenue and Finch Avenue West. Future studies along the Sheppard Avenue East corridor will align with Council's upcoming direction on the SmartTrack/Regional Express Rail and the Sheppard subway extension.

All studies recommended through this report will benefit from the involvement and participation of Metrolinx, City divisions, agencies and public participation.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Finch Avenue West Light Rail Transit Corridor Profile Excerpt
- Attachment 2 – Sheppard Avenue East Light Rail Transit Corridor Profile Excerpt
- Attachment 3 – Finch West LRT Real Estate Market Conditions Study – Executive Summary
- Attachment 4 – Sheppard East LRT Real Estate Market Conditions Study – Executive Summary
- Attachment 5 – Setting the Stage: Encouraging Transit Supportive Places on the Finch West LRT Corridor (Executive Summary)
- Attachment 6 – Setting the Stage: Encouraging Transit Supportive Places on the Sheppard East LRT Corridor (Executive Summary)
- Attachment 7 – Evaluation Criteria Explanation

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