



Setting the Stage:

Encouraging Transit Supportive Places on the Sheppard East LRT Corridor



METROLINX

August 2015

The “Setting the Stage: Encouraging Transit Supportive Places on the Sheppard East LRT Corridor” report was prepared by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The proposed LRT along the Sheppard Avenue East corridor will catalyze change, delivering convenient and reliable higher-order transit to area residents, businesses and institutions – improving connections across the corridor and beyond. This investment will create a generational opportunity to reimagine the shape and character of the corridor, address long-standing issues, and welcome new residents and businesses.

Demographically, the area is changing. The population is aging and households are getting smaller. Employment is shifting away from traditional manufacturing and while average private household incomes are increasing across the corridor, they are still lower than the city average. New developments, concentrated in the western half of the corridor, are also changing the demographic profile of the area, introducing many younger and smaller households. The corridor performs generally well in terms of social need, and is generally in line with city-wide averages for most criteria, with the exception of localized issues related to diabetes and low income.

The corridor hosts a mature real estate market with strong demand for single-family grade-related homes and a productive market for high-rise building types. Construction of the LRT is expected to accelerate the demand for both types and further accelerate existing demand for high-rise housing types.

Goals and Objectives of the Study

The Study purpose is to identify approaches to maximizing the benefits of investment in LRT infrastructure along the Sheppard Avenue East corridor. It includes a detailed analysis of the real estate market conditions along the corridor and a review of the existing planning framework, physical conditions, and demographic trends. A series of case studies from jurisdictions across North America highlight approaches to leveraging LRT investments. Together, this analysis and these case studies aim to identify those areas along the corridor that may experience market pressure, provide planning and public realm considerations to support reinvestment and to remedy social need along the corridor.

Key Considerations for the Sheppard Avenue East Corridor

Below is a summary of the key considerations from this study for the overall corridor. The considerations are a result of information gathering and analysis, a detailed real estate market conditions analysis, case study review, collaboration with City Staff, and a review of existing conditions along the Sheppard Avenue East corridor.

Market

- The Sheppard Avenue East corridor in the area of the LRT proposal is already a moderately strong real estate market characterized by high resale prices and new investment in high density residential development. Investment and re-investment in commercial and office uses is also evident. The impact

of the LRT will likely help support new higher density developments where market conditions are currently marginal.

- In general, the western segment of the LRT corridor is beginning to emerge as a more complete community with a healthy mix of employment and residential uses in a variety of building types and densities. However, there is an apparent lack of park space in certain segments and a very car dominated street environment that likely needs improvement for the corridor to meet its full market potential.
- The accessibility and exposure to 400 series highways and the DVP initially underpinned the success of the Consumers Road Business Park Area (CRBPA). The introduction of the Sheppard Subway at Don Mills Station was the catalyst for high density residential development along the Sheppard frontage of the CRBPA. The introduction of the new, connecting LRT service is likely to enhance the market demand for new high density developments in this area.
- The new transit line will also help support reinvestment, primarily in residential uses, but also some office demand eastward to the Agincourt GO Station. Here there is an opportunity for a significant amount of new investment given the potential for several current or planned higher order transit lines (GO, LRT and subway) nearby. The area has already proven a successful high density market with several developments over the past 15 years. The opportunity for significantly intensified development in this area is very strong.

- Agincourt Mall occupies the northwest quadrant of Sheppard Avenue East and Kennedy Road, representing another important redevelopment opportunity. As the transit improvements become closer to reality, its demand for intensification for this property and others surrounding will become strong.
- The Employment Area between Brimley Road and Markham Road lacks the market position it once had which is reflected in low rents, high vacancies, and the low density/intensity nature of the uses. New transit will improve the appeal of the area; however there are other market issues that may need to be addressed to maximize the future potential of these lands.
- Beyond Markham Road, the opportunities for reinvestment are limited, due to the nature of development. The remainder of the corridor is dominated with stable, single family detached residential neighbourhoods abutting Sheppard Avenue East, which restricts new investment.

Physical/Public Realm

- Currently, the corridor offers little amenity or interest to passing pedestrians and/or cyclists, particularly along the eastern portion of Sheppard Avenue East. The corridor would benefit from the preparation of a detailed public realm plan in tandem with LRT design to identify streetscape improvements along Sheppard Avenue East, with regards to pedestrian crossings, improved comfort, landscaping, street furniture, way-finding, tree canopy and integration with active retail and/or residential uses.

- In addition, given that existing residential neighbourhoods in the eastern half of the corridor are characterized by a street network that is discontinuous that also includes many cul-de-sacs, it would be beneficial to conduct a detailed public realm analysis that identifies opportunities to improve connections between proposed LRT stops and neighbourhood destinations (area schools, institutions, community centres, or parks) by upgrading pedestrian and cycling infrastructure as required.
- To further complement the proposed LRT, there should be consideration for ways to implement safe and continuous cycling infrastructure throughout the corridor and to the broader cycling network to increase accessibility to the transportation network and to surrounding communities.

Socio-Economic

- The corridor performs generally well in terms of social need, and is generally in line with city-wide averages for most criteria, with the exception of localized issues related to diabetes and low income, specifically around Neilson Road. Generally, the issues that may be most directly resolved as a result of the LRT are related to access (i.e. proximity to green spaces, employment opportunities, walkability, etc.).
- The corridor will benefit most through comprehensive planning and the extension of connections into the adjacent neighbourhoods including feeder bus routes, pedestrian connections to parks, employment areas, mixed use areas, and other community spaces. The coordination of this comprehensive planning and the provision of a planning and public realm framework which

serves to support the LRT and surrounding neighbourhoods will better address the issues faced along the corridor.

- In addition to larger-scale initiatives, a number of key considerations identified in the study analysis can also address these issues. They include: making Community Benefit Agreements mandatory for all infrastructure projects over a certain dollar value; consideration for local business supports (e.g. free advertising on transit vehicles, design contests and other forms of outreach to schools, seniors' centres, community groups etc.) and provision of support during construction.

Planning

- **Conduct a Gap Analysis at a Corridor Level:** The western half of the corridor is identified as an Avenue in Toronto's Official Plan, allowing the City to help determine and describe the built form requirements for the area. At this time, one Avenue Study and three Avenue Segment Studies have been completed along Sheppard Avenue East. Additionally, the ConsumersNext Study is underway. There are 'gaps' in the built form guidelines along the full segment of the corridor between these areas. The City should consider completing Avenue Studies to fill in these 'gaps', in particular at the intersections of Pharmacy Avenue and Birchmount Road.
- **Ensure Appropriate Density, Form, and Character of Development:** Future intensification along the corridor would benefit from a careful consideration of the physical characteristics of the Sheppard Avenue East corridor which include: wide right-of-way (36m planned as per the OP); LRT

stop spacing that is wider compared pre-war streetcar routes; Relationship with employment districts (either across Sheppard Avenue East or adjacent); tower-in-the-park sites that share the characteristics outlined in Tower Renewal; and surrounding stable neighbourhoods.

- **Consider Transit-Supportive Densities:** Consider transit-supportive densities in certain locations along the corridor which could include minimum heights and/or densities. There is also the potential to reserve areas along the corridor for higher density built forms (e.g. mid-rise and taller buildings) once the market becomes favourable for this type of development.
- **Opportunities for Infill or Redevelopment:** There are opportunities for increased density and intensification through infill and/or redevelopment, particularly around existing malls, in Mixed Use Area sites (first priority) and some apartment sites (second priority). Recent residential intensification efforts in the city have led to increased benefits for existing and future residents.
- **Provision of a Robust Public Realm:** A comprehensive Public Realm Plan that considers key origins and destinations within 500m of the corridor would provide a framework for the full integration of the LRT into the existing and planned communities. A Public Realm plan can provide guidance on the design of streets, parks, open spaces, bicycle routes, public art and community buildings so that they are responsive to the local context and to community interests and needs.
- **Support of Employment Uses:** The Employment Lands policies found in the Toronto Official Plan are strong and supportive of the preservation of employment lands throughout the corridor. With the introduction of higher order transit along Sheppard Avenue East and associated development pressures that will promote more distant commuting to places of employment, it will prove beneficial to explore streetscape improvements to these employment areas to provide safe, comfortable and accessible pedestrian connections.
- **Integration with Adjacent Uses:** Connections between the LRT itself and adjacent neighbourhood and/or employment uses can be strengthened through the provision of improved bus services, streetscape improvements, and/or cycling infrastructure.
- **Area-Specific Considerations:** There is a significant opportunity for transformative planning along Sheppard Avenue East should the Scarborough subway extend through the area between Brimley Road and Markham Road. Understanding the impact of this potential major infrastructure and how it may affect surrounding neighbourhoods will prove beneficial in the long run in determining the vision for this corridor and how it may develop in the future.