



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Davenport Community Rail-Rail Grade Separation

Date:	November 13, 2015
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	Ward 17 and 18
Reference Number:	P:\2015\ClusterB\PLN\PGMC\PG15133

SUMMARY

The Davenport Community rail-rail grade separation initiative on the Barrie line is part of the Metrolinx Regional Express Rail (RER) program, which envisions the expansion of GO Transit rail service across all corridors. RER will provide two-way, all day, GO service as frequent as every 15 minutes through electrification of provincially owned GO rail corridors. The RER program is expected to be delivered over the next ten years by Metrolinx. The City of Toronto supports this overall commitment to transit expansion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

City staff and the public were advised by Metrolinx in the spring of 2015 of their intention to conduct an Environmental Assessment under the streamlined Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP) for the grade separation of the Barrie GO rail line and the CP rail line north of Dupont St, and that the option under consideration is to elevate the GO line on an overpass structure (i.e. the proposed Davenport Corridor Overpass). The preliminary design for the overpass structure is approximately 1.4 km in length, beginning just north of Bloor St W, rising to a rail elevation height of approximately 8.4 m at the CP corridor, and returning back to the existing grade just south of Davenport Rd.

In considering this initiative, City Council adopted motions in March (MM5.33) and July (MM8.40) of this year, supporting a list of issues that Metrolinx needs to address regarding the proposed Davenport Community Overpass, and also requesting that Metrolinx extend its project schedule by two to three months to provide more time to address City staff and community comments.

City staff have subsequently reviewed information provided to date in support of the elevated option, as well as additional work on the assessment of trench and tunnel options, and determined the tunnel option, on balance, represents greater long term City building benefits compared to the overpass option. Key benefits are the removal of visual and noise impacts compared to the overpass, and the translation of these benefits into positive long term societal impacts. However, additional time is required in advance of issuing the TPAP (Transit Project Assessment Process) Notice of Commencement to complete this review and to work with the local community to achieve a balanced solution.

In late October, Metrolinx agreed to pause TPAP Notice of Commencement until Spring 2016, however, in a November 12, 2015, letter from Bruce McCuaig, President and Chief Executive Officer at Metrolinx, this timing was advanced to January, 2016, citing any postponement beyond January would result in delays to increase transit service and electrify the corridor within the 10-year program established by the Province of Ontario.

There is a need to seek clarification from Metrolinx on how pausing this study for a period of 4-5 months to complete a comprehensive review of the options and address community concerns might impact the 10-year service expansion plans on this corridor. Given the fact that the next reporting cycle to bring this matter before Committee and Council will be in January, which is too late to take action on the current Metrolinx TPAP timelines, this report recommends staff be directed to immediately engage Metrolinx to seek clarification on the timing for commencement of the TPAP process, and prepare a supplementary report to City Council's December meeting to provide information on the outcome of these discussions and any further action as may be appropriate.

Concurrent with the Metrolinx Davenport Community Overpass initiative, earlier this year the City of Toronto, in partnership with Mississauga, Milton and Cambridge, contributed funding to retain IBI Group consultants to undertake a study to determine the feasibility, costs and business case of constructing a bypass route north of the City for freight rail on the CP line. The study was recently completed and notes there is a compelling case to engage Metrolinx, CN, CP and the concerned municipalities in further discussion of this initiative. . This could dramatically alter train activity at the Davenport Diamond and hence the need for a rail grade separation at this junction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Planning and Growth Management Committee direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division, to further engage Metrolinx representatives to seek clarification with respect to the commencement of the Davenport Rail Grade Separation TPAP process in January, 2016, rather than commencement in Spring, 2016, as originally committed by Metrolinx, and report directly to the December meeting of City Council on the outcome of those discussions and any further action as may be appropriate.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On March 31, April 1 and April 2, 2015, City Council adopted Motion MM5.33, "Metrolinx GO Train Bridge Plan", directing the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to ensure that land-use planning (including grade separation underground or above ground) and urban design considerations are part of the EA process being carried out by Metrolinx for the rail grade separation project at Dupont St. and Lansdowne Avenue.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.MM5.33>

On July 7, 8 and 9, 2015, City Council adopted Motion MM8.40, "Metrolinx Davenport Community Rail Overpass", endorsing the list of issues that Metrolinx needs to address and properly fund regarding the proposed Metrolinx Davenport Community Overpass identified in the letter (June 16, 2015) from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to Metrolinx; and requesting Metrolinx to extend its project schedule by two to three months to provide more time to address City staff and community comments on the proposed Metrolinx Davenport Community Overpass prior to the Notice of Commencement for the Transit Project Assessment Process.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.MM8.40>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Project History

In 2009, Metrolinx initiated an Environmental Assessment study to consider options for separating the Barrie GO Line and the CP North Toronto Subdivision, which currently operate as a level interchange crossing just north of Dupont Street. The proposed plan at the time, to elevate the Barrie GO line over the CP line received critical comment from the public and the City regarding visual impacts, noise and air quality related to diesel trains, impacts on neighbourhood connectivity, property values, redevelopment opportunities, public realm impacts, construction pile driving methods, lack of opportunity for new stations, and other concerns.

As a result, the Environmental Assessment study was suspended and the work was continued as an internal Metrolinx feasibility study. This study was finalized in 2010 but the findings were not publicly released for comment/input, and upon completion the document was never circulated to the City for review.

Following completion of the 2010 study, an update was prepared in 2014 to include additional variations of the overpass structures, and provided to the City for the first time in April 2015. At this time Metrolinx also announced to the City and the public their intention to conduct an Environmental Assessment under the streamlined Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP)

for the grade separation, and that the option under consideration is to elevate the GO line on an overpass structure (i.e. the proposed Davenport Corridor Overpass).

COMMENTS

The City of Toronto supports the Province of Ontario's overall commitment to transit expansion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). This direction is supported by the City's Official Plan, Section 2.2 Policy 3(g), which states that:

3. The City's transportation network will be maintained and developed to support the growth management objectives of this Plan by:

g) supporting the increase use of existing rail corridors within the City for enhanced local and inter-regional passenger service;

The RER is a bold plan for regional transit expansion, but it also presents significant City building challenges where major infrastructure incursions, such as the Davenport rail-rail grade separation, impacts established communities that have already been subjected to similar projects of this nature.

Davenport Community Rail-Rail Grade Separation Proposal

Barrie GO train service commenced in 1982 and now spans 101 km of rail line with 10 existing stations outside of Toronto. The service is provided between Union Station and Barrie and operates in the weekday rush hour periods. The service currently generates approximately 4 million boardings annually. The proposed grade separation of the Davenport Diamond level crossing of the CP Line and Barrie Line will eliminate the ground level interchange and help to increase the reliability, efficiency and safety of the crossing as passenger trains will no longer need to stop to let an oncoming freight train cross the interchange.

City staff and the public were advised by Metrolinx in the spring of 2015 of their intention to conduct an Environmental Assessment for this project under the streamlined Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP). The project is currently in the preliminary planning stage, in advance of issuing the TPAP "Notice of Commencement" for final project review. Once the Notice of Commencement is issued, currently proposed by Metrolinx as early as January, 2016, there is a very limited opportunity to effect change. Following that, the project can proceed to implementation.

The preliminary design for the overpass structure is approximately 1.4 km in length, beginning just north of Bloor St W, rising to a rail elevation height of approximately 8.4 m at the CP corridor, and returning back to the existing grade just south of Davenport Rd.

In considering this initiative, City Council adopted a motion in March (MM5.33) supporting a list of issues that Metrolinx needs to address regarding the proposed Davenport Community Overpass. Given the scale of the proposal and the significance of potential long term community impacts, a further request was made by City staff to step back in the evaluation process to bring

forward additional information on alternative solutions to the overpass, including a trench option and a tunnel option. A further motion (MM8.40) adopted by City Council at its meeting of July 7, 8 and 9, 2015, requested Metrolinx extend the project schedule to October, 2015 to consider additional information.

Since that time, City staff have reviewed a number of Metrolinx documents and received additional information on the assessment of alternative solutions to the grade separation, including the trench and tunnel options. Based on the information provided to date, City staff have determined the tunnel option, on balance, represents greater long term City building benefits compared to the overpass option. The key benefit of the tunnel is the removal of visual and noise impacts compared to the overpass, and the translation of these benefits into positive long term societal impacts. However, additional time is required in advance of commencing the TPAP process to continue this assessment, and to work with the local community to achieve a balanced solution.

In late October, Metrolinx agreed to pause TPAP Notice of Commencement until Spring, 2016, however, in a November 12, 2015, letter from Bruce McCuaig, President and Chief Executive Officer at Metrolinx, this timing was advanced to January, 2016, citing any postponement beyond January would result in delays to increase transit service and electrify the corridor within the 10-year program established by the Province of Ontario.

There is a need to seek clarification from Metrolinx on how pausing this study for a period of 4-5 months might impact the 10-year service expansion plans on this corridor. Given the fact that the next reporting cycle to bring this matter before Committee and Council will be in January, which is too late to take action on the current Metrolinx TPAP timelines, staff need to engage Metrolinx immediately to seek clarification on the timing for commencement of the TPAP process, and prepare a supplementary report to City Council's December meeting to provide information on the outcome of these discussions and any further action as may be appropriate.

The "Missing Link"

Concurrent with the Metrolinx Davenport Community Overpass initiative, earlier this year the City of Toronto, in partnership with Mississauga, Milton and Cambridge, contributed funding to retain IBI Group consultants to undertake a study to determine the feasibility, costs and business case of constructing a bypass route north of the City for freight rail on the CP line. This could dramatically alter train activity at the Davenport Diamond and hence the need for a rail grade separation at this junction.

The completed IBI report notes from the initial feasibility analysis that the "Missing Link" can be constructed without major impacts on the urban fabric and would incur approximately the same cost as the present Metrolinx plan to add tracks and widen corridors to implement the Regional Express Rail (RER) concept within the study area. There is a compelling case to immediately engage Metrolinx, CN, CP and the concerned municipalities in further discussion of this initiative.

Public Consultation

Community reaction to the elevated option has raised a number of concerns. Comments at the most recent public consultation, hosted by Christina Martins, Member of Provincial Parliament for Davenport, on October 13, 2015, indicated the overpass is unacceptable and the tunnel was preferred, and further evaluation of the options is required.

CONCLUSION

In late October, Metrolinx agreed to pause TPAP Notice of Commencement until Spring 2016, however, in a November 12, 2015, letter from Bruce McCuaig, President and Chief Executive Officer at Metrolinx, this timing was advanced to January, 2016, citing any postponement beyond January would result in delays to increase transit service and electrify the corridor within the 10-year program established by the Province of Ontario. There is a need to seek clarification from Metrolinx on how pausing this study for a period of 4-5 months might impact the 10-year service expansion plans on this corridor. The next reporting cycle to bring this matter before Committee and Council will be in January, which is too late to take action on the current Metrolinx TPAP timelines. Staff need to engage Metrolinx immediately to seek clarification on the timing for commencement of the TPAP process, and prepare a supplementary report to City Council's December meeting to provide information on the outcome of these discussions and any further action as may be appropriate.

CONTACTS

Tim Laspa
Director, Transportation Planning
Tel. No.: 416-392-8100
Fax No.: 416-392-3821
E-mail: tlaspa@toronto.ca

Harold Madi
Director, Urban Design
Tel. No.: 416-392-1126
Fax No.: 416-392-1744
E-mail: hmadi@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

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