

22 January, 2016

## **REVIEW OF THE CITY OF TORONTO STAFF REPORT: SCARBOROUGH TRANSIT PLANNING UPDATE RELEASED ON 21 JANUARY, 2016**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Scarborough's "Institute for New Suburbanism" concurs with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division that the Scarborough Transit Optimized Solution represents a sound transit solution for Scarborough residents and businesses.

The Optimized Solution provides for: 1) an extension of the Bloor-Danforth Subway to the Scarborough (Town) Centre from Kennedy Station based on a McCowan Road Alignment; 2) an extension of the Crosstown East Light Rapid Transit Line (LRT) past Kennedy Road, along Eglinton Avenue to the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC) via Kingston Road and Morningside Avenue; 3) a Smart Track Station at Lawrence Avenue East (in addition to other Scarborough stations); and 4) Rapid Transit on the Sheppard East Corridor. Under the Optimized Solution the existing Scarborough Rapid Transit system (Line 3) would be removed. See figure 1.

This report is a high-level analysis based on an examination of the 21 January, 2016 Staff Report and Appendices. Detailed analyses of supportive technical studies have not been completed.

The Institute for New Suburbanism (INS)\* is a suburb-focused think-tank located in Scarborough that gathers the ideas of academics and practicing urban planners. Globally, 'new suburbanism' holds that the health and vitality of suburban areas is essential to the overall health of urban core areas and rural areas.



Figure 1: Map of Scarborough Transit Optimized Solution

## COMMENTS

### Overview

**Methodology:** Engineering assessments of the feasibility of transit improvements are based on criteria of cost, ridership, constructability and other technical metrics. City-wide public debate about the merit and mode of transit for Scarborough has in the past, focused on these metrics. Yet, transit also creates land-use demand and provides social and economic benefits. Simply arguing about the cost and technical merit of a multi-stop Scarborough subway vs a multi-stop Scarborough LRT has not allowed either meaningful discussion or consensus positions to emerge.

The INS is pleased that the Staff Report and supporting documents point out that transit investment is a contributor to social and economic development. This is good and desirable planning practice. As a result, we conclude that the

City's analysis and evaluation of transit options also using land-use planning outcomes and social and economic criteria has merit and represents a sound analytical methodology.

**Goals and objectives:** Past discussion of transit options for Scarborough occurred without clarity about goals and objectives. *What is it that the Scarborough Transit Plan must achieve?* The Staff Report clearly states the goals the plan must achieve, which staff refer to as *principles*. The objectives of the transit plan are described as planning *priorities*. Priority 1 is: *supporting the development of the Scarborough Centre as a vibrant urban node*. Criteria<sup>1</sup> include:

- Does it connect Scarborough Centre?
- Is there good connectivity to the network?
- Does it provide fast, frequent service where people want to go?
- Does it encourage development and jobs?

Priority 2 is: *Support the development of complete communities along the Avenues and improve local accessibility*. Criteria include:

- Is there connectivity to local destinations and the broader network?
- What is the speed and frequency for mixed-use growth areas?
- Does it provide service to neighbourhood improvement areas?
- Does it support local jobs and existing built form?
- What is the relationship to the local environment?

**Getting on with it:** The Staff Report cites some delays due to the completion of the Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP) and being granted the Authority to Construct (p. 19). With the 'express' subway extension, staff anticipate that *construction time would be reduced due to the reduced complexity of the build* (p. 19). In addition, while further evaluation of cost estimates is required; the Crosstown East LRT has an approved environmental assessment process and is closer to being shovel ready. 'Reducing construction time' is a desirable objective.

### **Extension of Line 2: Single Stop Extension to Scarborough Centre**

- The advancement of higher order transit connections (Bloor-Danforth Extension, Smart Track extension and Crosstown East extension) will increase density and attract employers to the **Kennedy Mobility Hub** (Kennedy & Eglinton). Redevelopment of the Kennedy Station Area as a nodal town centre employment area would be desirable. These investments are long overdue.
- Advancing the connections of the Bloor-Danforth Subway to the **Scarborough Centre Station** is essential to the overall economic, residential and cultural aspirations of suburban residents in Scarborough and the Eastern GTA (eastern York and Durham Regions). The Subway Stop at Scarborough Centre will stimulate considerably more

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<sup>1</sup> City of Toronto, Scarborough Transit Planning Update, Appendix 2, "High-Level Evaluation of Possible Transit Solutions for Scarborough" pgs. 33 and 34.

investment in the area and result in social, cultural and economic benefits for all of the City of Toronto and the Eastern GTA.

- The **Sheppard Avenue East Station** is proposed to be eliminated under the Optimized Option. However, the Staff Report notes the uncertainty involved with this decision pending the completion of the Finch West LRT and additional analysis of short-term options for rapid transit in the corridor (P. 25). The delay and reconsideration represents a sensible decision in light of other parts of the system on hold.
- The **Lawrence East Station** has been removed. However the Staff Report states, *the elimination of this potential in-line station does not preclude its later consideration. Further review of this issue is required as part of the next steps in this work* (P. 24). The INS is pleased to see the door open for additional analysis. This analysis should also consider the following:

- **Constructability.** The City of Toronto is characterized by its north-west to south-east ravine systems associated with its rivers. In particular, Scarborough is characterized as Canada’s largest urbanized watershed. While this report did not review engineering documents pertaining to constructability, we do accept the challenges of the West Highland Creek Valley that require deep station construction. Two observations are offered:

1) Given the topography of the City of Toronto, engineers often have to anticipate deep station construction as part of building out the transit system. Transit engineers have done well in addressing similar (or perhaps greater) challenges at the York Mills, Leslie and St. Clair West Subway Stations.

2) The Scarborough Express Subway route will cross the West Highland Creek Valley (along McCowan and north of Lawrence) regardless of whether a station is constructed.

Even if the station is not constructed, engineers should be requested to prepare ‘detailed design’ documents for the Lawrence East Station under the proposed funding envelop so as to expedite construction should a decision to proceed be made in the future.

- **Support for future Land-Use and Economic Development.** The proposed Lawrence East Station would be located at both Thompson Park and the Scarborough General Hospital. Thompson Park is a major cultural and recreational area. Indeed, at 150,000 visitors, the Thompson Park Rotary Ribfest is referred to as the largest annual cultural attraction in the Eastern GTA.

The Scarborough General Hospital is the anchor of The Scarborough Hospital (TSH) System and is a major employer in Scarborough. Medical clinics, outpatient services and long term care facilities are located close to the hospital as part of a medical cluster. Remnant land associated with the Gatineau Hydro Corridor, nearby aging institutions with land holdings and retail plazas also offer additional opportunities for growing medical entrepreneurship as part of the economic development of Scarborough. A Secondary Plan pertaining to a future medical cluster in this area should be considered.

The recent Scarborough / West Durham Panel report<sup>2</sup> on how to reconfigure acute healthcare programs in Scarborough and West Durham has recommended a new health corporation that would include TSH Birchmount, TSH General, and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) Centenary sites.

The Panel further recommends that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and LHIN begin planning for *the siting and construction of a new comprehensive acute care hospital*. (Panel Report, P. 7). Whether a new hospital is located at the General site or a new Scarborough Town Centre site or elsewhere is yet to be decided. Regardless, the Panel recommends investment at the General Site with respect to surgical suites and emergency department investment at the Birchmount and Centenary sites. A Subway Station at this site would likely enhance: hospital investment; employee and patient access; medical entrepreneurial expansion; and health research investment.

### **Crosstown East Light Rapid Transit Line (LRT) to the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus**

- The Crosstown East extension to the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus will provide a much needed boost for one of Toronto’s largest universities and one of Scarborough’s largest employers. The UTSC Master Plan promises a prominent new vision of the Campus which will also go a long way toward rebranding Scarborough and the Eastern GTA. This would enhance Scarborough’s image as a place to learn, conduct research, live and invest. Integration between the development of the Campus with stations for both the new LRT and existing bus rapid transit (BRT) (P. 26) is welcomed as sound planning.
- The Crosstown East is close to being shovel ready and (p. 19) and will allow the expediting of benefits for Scarborough residents and businesses.
- We are pleased that the Staff Report examined the role of transit infrastructure and transit alternatives in relation to poverty reduction. Enhanced transit infrastructure will provide significant support for people on low incomes who spend a large proportion of their incomes on transit for getting to school, work and/or accessing community services (P. 11). The Crosstown East LRT will directly serve five Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (Eglinton East, Kennedy Park, Morningside, Scarborough Village and West Hill).
- The GTA East economic region (York Region, Durham Region including Scarborough) is the poorest performing area in the Greater Toronto Area. Part of its poor performance in terms of jobs, incomes and investment is due to underinvestment in transportation infrastructure. While new transportation investment is occurring through the expansion of the 400 series highway system and Regional Express Rail, new transit investment is required. The INS is pleased that the Crosstown East line will *provide a connection to Durham Region Transit’s PULSE bus rapid transit (BRT) line...* (P. 26).

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<sup>2</sup> “Report of the Scarborough/ West Durham Panel”, Report Submitted on October 30, 2015 to The Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long Term Care, Province of Ontario.

## AREAS OF FURTHER ANALYSIS AND ACTION

- **Brimley and Eglinton Subway Station.** The INS observes that while a Brimley and Eglinton Station is not being proposed at this time, the area may be a potential location for higher densities and or a central location for cultural facilities (museum, art gallery or concert hall) in the future.

The Crosstown East LRT will enhance this area. However, ‘new suburbanism’ holds that as the City ‘flattens’ (i.e. core area land uses move to suburban areas), urban design, cultural facilities and social investment needs to occur in suburban areas. These amenities are a positive outcome for neighbourhoods adjusting to higher densities along avenues. Land uses in the Brimley and Eglinton area involve older retail plazas in need of re-investment and a vacant school site that can be enhanced over the next 25 to 40 years. These land uses would be further leveraged by a subway transit stop. The City of Toronto should continue to study these possibilities.

- **Ellesmere / Progress BRT.** The Optimized transit solution also includes BRT along Lawrence Avenue East, BRT to Durham Region from UTSC and Finch East BRT. All of the BRT routes proposed in the Staff Report have merit and provide enhanced ridership and socio-economic benefits for Scarborough and City-wide residents.

Two of Scarborough’s anchor institutions - Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital and Centennial College - are major employers and trip generators that require additional attention. Centennial College (Progress Campus) is about to open North America’s largest culinary arts school and is currently pursuing the start-up of a tech incubator in Scarborough in the support of job creation. Centenary Hospital (RVHS) has land available for future development and the Scarborough / West Durham Panel report<sup>3</sup> is recommending significant investment at the site. The Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital is a dominant hospital in the Central East LHIN – stretching out to encompass Peterborough and Cobourg. The INS recommends that future studies examine the feasibility of connecting these institutions to higher order transit through a possible Ellesmere/ Progress BRT.

## Conclusion

The foregoing has been a very high level analysis and conclusions may change upon reviewing detailed planning and engineering reports. However, upon reviewing the information in the Staff Report, Scarborough’s INS concurs with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division that the Scarborough Transit Optimized Solution represents a sound transit solution for Scarborough residents and businesses. It represents investment that helps to allow Scarborough, as one of Toronto’s legacy suburban Cities, to join North York, Etobicoke and others as a full contributor to the future of the City of Toronto.

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*\*Formally incorporated as a New Suburbanism Research Group*

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<sup>3</sup> “Report of the Scarborough/ West Durham Panel”, Report Submitted on October 30, 2015 to The Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long Term Care, Province of Ontario.