To: Mayor Tory and members of the Executive Committee
From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)
Re: EX21.19 - Establishing a Commuter Parking Advisory Group
Date: January 18, 2017

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Walk Toronto is a grassroots, volunteer pedestrian advocacy group that works to improve walking conditions and pedestrian safety in Toronto.

CONGESTION & HEALTH ISSUES

Commuter parking lots induce high volumes of traffic that have to be accommodated by the local street network. This has negative implications for the safety of pedestrians, who suffered a record number of fatalities in the year 2016. Road congestion, and the noise and pollution it causes, are also a threat to the long-term health and comfort not only of people walking on the street, but also of all other people using the road and living on it. For these and many other reasons, it is crucial that Toronto reduce reliance on private motor vehicle travel.

TRAVEL DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Councillor Pasternak's letter of Dec. 15 makes the inherent assumption that building commuter parking capacity is the only solution to improving commuters' access to rapid transit stations. But if our goal is to get people to take transit, it is counter-productive to build extra parking that will only encourage more driving. Instead, Walk Toronto recommends that we should be looking at options for more sustainable solutions. This is a core principle of Travel Demand Management ("TDM"), which is explained in Toronto's Official Plan (2015):

> *TDM measures are aimed at encouraging people to take fewer and shorter vehicle trips to reduce congestion, energy consumption and pollution. In the past, transportation planning has often focused on supply-side solutions by identifying where additional transportation capacity is needed to satisfy forecast travel demands. TDM, in contrast, puts the emphasis on changing travel behaviour to modify and reduce our demand for vehicular travel in cities.* [Chapter 2-27]

Accordingly, the TTC has been reducing the number of parking spots in its system. The savings, as well as the parking fees collected at TTC parking lots, can potentially be spent improving TTC feeder routes, which encourage travellers to leave their cars at home. In contrast, we have heard that when Metrolinx expanded the number of parking spaces at the Oakville GO station, Oakville public transit lost a significant number of riders who used to reach the station by bus. As they say, "if you build it they will come".

GO Transit concentrates on building more parking spaces for its commuters, even in urban settings, such as Downtown Brampton. The cost of building and maintaining parking lots is included in GO Transit's fares, while the TTC charges for parking at all of its lots. Walk Toronto believes that Toronto should avoid following the Metrolinx example, and instead remain true to the policies of Toronto's *Official Plan* (2015), which states that:

> *The City will show leadership within the region in the implementation of TDM measures to reduce auto dependence and rush-hour congestion in the road and transit networks by actively pursuing measures which will:*
> i) *increase the proportion of trips made by walking, cycling, and transit;*
> ii) *increase the average automobile occupancy rate;*
> iii) *reduce the demand for vehicular travel; and*
> iv) *shift travel times from peak to off-peak periods;* *(Chapter 2-27, Policy 3a)*

Instead of pouring money into increasing the size and number of parking lots, we should be making it easier for people to take the TTC and SmartTrack for their entire trip by investing in improvements to surface transit feeder routes. As part of their TDM strategies, the City of Toronto and Metrolinx should also be promoting walking and cycling as means of accessing rapid transit stations. **This means investing in 'first and last mile' measures such as local neighbourhood walkability** and improvements to local bike infrastructure.

COMPOSITION OF COMMUTER PARKING ADVISORY GROUP

Increasingly, commuters who use transit will be arriving at rapid transit stations not by automobile, but by various other transportation modes. People approaching a station on foot or by a transit feeder route do not need to use any commuter parking facilities, while those arriving by bicycle require bike parking that is far less expensive to provide than car parking spaces. The perspective of all three groups will be different from that of motorists. Therefore, the full spectrum of transportation mode users should be properly represented at the consultations of the Commuter Parking Advisory Group. The following advocacy groups have expertise in regards to the needs of a broad range of transit passengers, and their names should be included on the invitation list of the advisory group:
- TTC Riders
- Walk Toronto
- Cycle Toronto

We would also recommend that at least one City of Toronto staff member from the Public Realm section of Transportation Services be invited to participate in the advisory group.

RAPID TRANSIT STATION DESIGN

Rapid transit stations should be designed to prioritize active transportation, and the needs of pedestrians and cyclists should be accommodated ahead of those of motorists.

As much as possible, stations should have direct and visible access for pedestrians and cyclists from the street, and should be easily accessible to surrounding land uses. The addition of motor vehicle parking lots should not increase pedestrian walking distances from the street sidewalk to rapid transit station entrances. Walk Toronto supports station layout that locates commuter parking behind the main entrance.

GO STATION DESIGN

Although Councillor Pasternak's main focus is on the University-Spadina section of Subway Line 2, he does mention a concern that "the recently approved SmartTrack plan comes with little to no commuter parking". From the pedestrian point of view, it is just as well that SmartTrack stations minimize parking. This is because, unlike relatively compact TTC stations, those designed for GO are not pedestrian-friendly. They are laid out like big-box stores. Their defining features are massive parking lots and/or multi-story parking garages, and gigantic passenger pick up and drop off areas. Bus loops designed for stations such as Finch East are oversized in relation to the number of bus routes using the station. It is often a long walk from the street through a parking lot to get to the train. (Only a few stations in the GTA, like Union, Exhibition, Downtown Brampton, and Hamilton do better). GO bus loops have platforms on the outside, with longer walks between bus loading areas, and with minimal comfort. Shelters are provided, and little else.

Many of the SmartTrack designs lack proper integration with the TTC surface network, including easy and attractive transfer opportunities. Transfers between transit modes should be barrier-free and minimize walking distance. The TTC builds its subway stations with these crucial surface transit connections in mind. We urge Metrolinx to do the same at its new GO stations.

STREETSCAPE

Another problem associated with large rapid transit station parking lots is that they turn what could be vibrant streetscapes into desolate, not very walkable, car-dominated zones that have no visual or shopping interest for people going through them on foot. If car parking capacity is reduced, this opens up opportunities for built form within the close vicinity of stations that is devoted to shopping, employment, entertainment, education, etc.– functions that are useful for pedestrians and also that can potentially generate more money for the City or Metrolinx than grade-level parking (which is extremely inefficient at monetizing valuable station property holdings).

EMPLOYMENT NODES

Finally, we should note that if the City did a better job attracting employment to areas being intensified on rapid transit lines (such as North York Centre), then there would be less transit commuting to the downtown – which in turn would reduce the demand for commuter parking at stations like Wilson and Downsview.

Michael Black,
and the other members of the Steering Committee of Walk Toronto