



REPORT FOR ACTION

Health and Safety Impacts of REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch)

Date: February 14, 2018

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: Ward 23 - Willowdale, Ward 24 - Willowdale

SUMMARY

North York Centre, Yonge St. (Sheppard to Finch) is at the end of its lifecycle, and the Official Plan and North York Secondary Plan support a vision for multi-modal travel, improved road safety and a healthy and vibrant public realm. A Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) identified two preferred options for improving the area during reconstruction. The Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to conduct a public health assessment of the proposed options.

Based on a review of published research about health impacts of various street design elements, Toronto Public Health found that both preferred options for REimagining Yonge have the potential to support safe, active travel and improve walkability. Both include design elements that make active transportation the convenient and safer choice for people of all types of mobility, reducing the risk of serious injury or death from collisions and increasing physical activity, which reduces the risk of over 25 chronic health conditions.

Differences in health impacts between the two preferred options cannot be predicted with certainty as this is dependent on many inter-related decisions that will occur during implementation. Regardless of which option is selected, it is critical that decisions that arise during implementation preserve the original intent of the Official Plan and do not compromise the neighbourhood's functionality as a safe and active neighbourhood. During implementation, ongoing monitoring and adaptation will be required to ensure the vision is achieved and health benefits are maximized.

In the process of becoming more urbanized, cities similar to Toronto have successfully managed the transition to increased active transportation and compact, walkable neighbourhoods. The benefits to health of realizing such transformations are well supported by published literature. Therefore, moving in the direction of creating streets that promote safe, active transportation will promote population health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health request that the Medical Officer of Health to collaborate with Transportation Services and support monitoring and adaptation for REimagining Yonge as plans are implemented, to ensure health benefits are maximized.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of January 22, 2018, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to report to the March 5, 2018 meeting of the Board of Health with a public health assessment of the safest and healthiest option of those outlined in the *REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study*.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL24.10>

At its meeting of January 19, 2018, the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee began considering the report *REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study* and deferred it for the purpose of hearing speakers and Committee debate on the item.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.PW26.6>

COMMENTS

The REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study identified two preferred options for reconstruction

Yonge St. between Sheppard to Finch is coming to the end of its lifecycle and requires full reconstruction within five to ten years. A vision for this North York Centre area supported by the Official Plan and North York Secondary Plan includes multi-modal travel, improved road safety and a healthy and vibrant public realm. A Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study identified two preferred options for reconstructing the section of Yonge Street south of Sheppard Avenue to north of Finch Avenue:

- "Transform Yonge"; and
- "Enhance Yonge and Transform Beecroft".

Street design that promotes active transportation and walkability is good for health

Toronto Public Health has previously reviewed evidence on the association between street design elements and health outcomes. Evidence consistently shows that it is beneficial for health to design transportation networks and public spaces to make active transportation such as walking or cycling the convenient and safer choice for people of all types of mobility. Compact neighbourhoods with walkable streets and a variety of destinations (retail, open spaces such as parks, cafes) within walking distance of housing are associated with more walking, lower rates of obesity, higher rates of physical activity, and have the potential to increase social activity which in turn contributes to positive mental health¹. Torontonians living in more walkable neighbourhoods use transit more, drive less and have lower body weights². Designing the built environment for active transportation modes can greatly increase safety for all modes of transportation³.

As well, vehicle transportation is associated with emissions of air pollutants, greenhouse gases, and noise, which have negative health impacts. Design that encourages a shift away from vehicles to active transportation also helps mitigate these impacts.

Based on available evidence, both preferred options for REimagining Yonge support safe, active travel and improve walkability

Toronto Public Health's 2014 *Healthy Streets: Evidence Review*¹ summarized published research about health impacts of various street design elements. Based on those findings, both preferred options for REimagining Yonge have the potential to:

- Increase safety and opportunities for physical activity for pedestrians by extending the raised centre median, narrowing lanes, enhancing pedestrian crossings, and widening sidewalks;
- Increase safety and opportunities for physical activity for cyclists by introducing on-road cycling facilities including raised cycle tracks; and
- Increase safety for motorists by introducing narrower lane widths.

The differences in health impacts between the two preferred options are difficult to predict with certainty because they depend on many inter-related decisions that will occur during implementation. Design differences relate to the number of vehicle lanes retained on Yonge, the location of cycle tracks, and the degree to which sidewalk space is widened. These changes will occur over a relatively small distance and within an existing complex, connected built environment; therefore, it is not possible to compare potential health outcomes of each option. The health impacts will ultimately depend on how the various design elements work together for this location, and on how well the implementation of the selected design preserves its original intent.

Implementation decisions need to preserve the vision for the neighbourhood and ongoing monitoring and adaptation will be required

Either option for REimagining Yonge needs to be implemented in a way that preserves the integrity of the vision in the Official Plan and North York Secondary Plan, and promotes full neighbourhood functionality aligned with the principles of an Active City

(see Attachment 1). Thoughtful, creative problem-solving and innovation will be needed to address competing factors while ensuring the end result is functional for all users. During implementation, ongoing monitoring and adaptation will be required to ensure the vision is achieved, to assess how all users respond to the changes, and to ensure the health benefits are maximized. Toronto Public Health can provide ongoing input as these plans are implemented.

Similar cities have successfully managed the transition to active transportation and compact, walkable neighbourhoods

In the process of becoming more urbanized, cities similar to Toronto have successfully managed the transition to increased active transportation and compact, walkable neighbourhoods^{4,5}. The benefits to health of realizing such transformative visions and achieving a cohesive, vibrant, active and safe space, are significant and well supported by published literature. As such, both preferred options for REimagining Yonge can improve health by improving the pedestrian realm, providing new cycling facilities and creating a more vibrant public space. Because differences occur in a larger context and are inter-related it is not possible to compare the future health outcomes of these two designs. It is clear that both options advance the City's objectives in the Official Plan to create walkable neighbourhoods that promote active transportation which, in turn, promote the health of Toronto residents.

CONTACT

Gayle Bursey, Director, Healthy Public Policy, Toronto Public Health, Phone: 416-338 0661, Email: Gayle.Bursey@toronto.ca

Stephanie Gower, Manager (Acting), Healthy Public Policy, Toronto Public Health, Phone: 416-338-8101, Email: Stephanie.Gower@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Dr. Eileen de Villa
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Principles of an Active City

REFERENCES

1. Toronto Public Health. Health Streets: Evidence Review. October 2014. City of Toronto.
2. Toronto Public Health. The Walkable City: Neighbourhood Design and Preferences, Travel Choices and Health. April 2012.
3. Toronto Public Health. Road to Health: Improving Walking and Cycling in Toronto. April 2012.
4. New York City Department of Transportation. The Economic Benefits of Sustainable Streets. December 2013.
5. New York City Department of Transportation. Protected Bicycle Lanes in NYC. September 2014.

Ten Principles For An Active City

- 1. An Active City shapes the built environment to promote opportunities for active living.**
- 2. An Active City has diverse mix of land uses at the local scale.**
- 3. An Active City has densities that support the provision of local services, retails, facilities and transit.**
- 4. An Active City uses public transit to extend the range of active modes of transportation.**
- 5. An Active City has safe routes and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.**
- 6. An Active City has networks which connect neighbourhood, to city-wide and region-wide routes.**
- 7. An Active City has high quality urban and suburban spaces that invite and celebrate active living.**
- 8. An Active City has opportunities for recreational activities and parks that are designed to provide for a range of physical activities.**
- 9. An Active City has buildings and spaces that promote and enable physical activity.**
- 10. An Active City recognizes that all residents should have opportunities to be active in their daily lives.**