



DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

January 18th, 2018

Dear Chair Robinson and Members of the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee:

Subject:

PWIC Meeting, January 19th, 2018 - Item PW26.6

REimagining Yonge Street Environmental Assessment Study and Support for Recommended “Transform Yonge” Option

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

Walk Toronto appreciates the comprehensive REimagining Yonge Study commenced by the City of Toronto in 2015. Our organization has participated in the public consultation process, reviewed the various materials and reports, and assessed the views of many other stakeholders. With this knowledge and involvement as our basis, **Walk Toronto strongly encourages PWIC to support and champion City Council’s adoption of the “Transform Yonge” option as recommended in the staff report dated January 5th, 2018.**

The population density within the REimagining Yonge Study area has become comparable to Toronto’s downtown core, and results in high volumes of people moving by all modes. “Through travel” by vehicle-based commuters originating outside city boundaries also contributes significantly to volumes. These conditions are indicative of those found in many parts of Toronto. Future growth in the GTA will bring more travellers of all kinds onto Toronto’s road networks that are close to or already beyond capacity. **Be it within the REimagining Yonge Study area or other comparable mixed-use centres, effectively accommodating growing volumes of travellers moving through and within communities by maintaining a private vehicle dominated approach is not sustainable and simply unworkable. One of the reasons for North York Centre’s rapid population growth is because of the proximity of amenities (such as rapid transit, shopping, entertainment and trails) make it possible for many residents to dispense with owning a car. We need to be looking for alternatives, and in North York Centre, these are provided by the “Transform Yonge” option.**

Installing and encouraging use of infrastructure for walking and cycling along with maintaining an efficient, cost-effective public transit system will become increasingly important to realize an affordable, environmentally-responsible and functional transportation network across our city. Advances in technology and energy are changing how people move and interact within urban environments; mode share shifts are expected to affect distribution of users of active and public transportation vis a vis occupants of traditional, individual-owned passenger vehicles.

With the objective to ensure that the transportation network within the REimagining Yonge Study area is modified in a way that is responsive to broad changes and growth over the next several decades, Walk Toronto strongly supports the recommended “Transform Yonge” option. As the Study report outlines, that option involves changing Yonge by reducing six vehicular lanes to four for most of its extent within the subject area, installing bike lanes on both sides, increasing sidewalk widths and incorporating a landscaped median. Moving parking to side streets and enhancing the public realm are further essential and integral changes.

As the additional analysis conducted by City staff in the later half of 2017 has demonstrated, the benefits of the “Transform Yonge” option outweigh those of the “Enhance Yonge/Transform Beecroft” option. Both options would have a negligible impact on traffic congestion, with average vehicular travel times estimated to increase by only one minute by 2031. Notably, however, the “Enhance Yonge/Transform Beecroft” option is estimated to cost \$71 million; a cost that would add \$20 million or 40% more to the \$51 million estimated for the “Transform Yonge” option.

The “Transform Yonge” option best addresses future conditions in North York Centre by creating a multi-modal ‘Complete Street’ that will accommodate increasing numbers of pedestrians and cyclists yet still allow for the efficient movement of vehicles. If reconfigured as recommended, Yonge Street will become a high-profile demonstration of the City of Toronto’s commitment to offering active transportation options that will help generate a myriad of health, social, economic and environmental benefits. Notably, the proposed facilities for Yonge Street will position the City to integrate the Study area travel network into the broader system. Building blocks will be in place to support users (commuters and recreationists who originate either within the community or elsewhere) seeking access to cycle and trail networks (existing and planned) situated in adjacent midtown communities, further south into the downtown core and northwards to the Finch Hydro Corridor and linking to York Region’s plans for Yonge Street.

Under Councillor Robinson’s leadership, Toronto has committed to the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan (see <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/streets-parking-transportation/road-safety/vision-zero/vision-zero-plan-overview/>). **Adopting the “Transform Yonge” option will be consistent with Vision Zero’s objectives and its inclusion of Yonge Street as a priority for safety improvements.** As the Study report mentions, Vision Zero lists Yonge Street from Sheppard Avenue to Steeles Avenue as one of 14 locations identified for undertaking a road safety audit due to the number of collisions resulting in people killed or seriously injured.

Walk Toronto also **supports the many improvements to the public realm associated with the “Transform Yonge” option and recognizes their vital role in more seamless access and greater safety for pedestrians of all ages and abilities.** In addition, the many changes contemplated will foster a more attractive environment for North York’s cultural sector and businesses serving a very diverse population. Improvements that draw locals onto Yonge Street more frequently and for longer periods will help create vibrancy that in turn entices visitors from further afield to visit. The overall effect is greater potential for entertainment, shopping and dining-related businesses, among others, to thrive and generate tax revenues and other economic benefits.

The City of Toronto has a rare opportunity to create a safe, efficient, multi-modal, barrier-free street and strengthen the heart of North York. **Walk Toronto urges PWIC members, all Council members and Mayor Tory to rely on the evidence presented in the Study’s final report, to govern in accordance with City of Toronto approved policies and support the recommended option to transform Yonge Street.**

Yours truly,



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c.c. Mayor John Tory

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