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March 10, 2020

Infrastructure and Environment Committee

**Re: Item IE12.14, Right-turns-on-red in Toronto**

Dear Chair Pasternak and Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee:

I am the Director of The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT), a project of the registered charity Clean Air Partnership. TCAT's mission is to advance knowledge and evidence to build support for safe and inclusive streets for walking and cycling. On behalf of TCAT, I'm writing in support of Councillor Layton's motion regarding a right-turn-on-red prohibition in Toronto.

In 2016, Toronto City Council adopted a five-year plan with the goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries. In 2018, TCAT led a community coalition response to build momentum and support for the City of Toronto's Vision Zero Road Safety Plan. TCAT and our coalition partners (8-80 Cities, Cycle Toronto, Friends and Families for Safe Streets, and Walk Toronto) are supportive of the City's Vision Zero goals but are concerned the plan is not being implemented quickly enough.

In advance of the 2018 municipal election, our coalition issued a call to action called #BuildTheVisionTO in which we identified 15 priority actions within five themes. One of these priority actions was to prioritize the safety of vulnerable road users by outlawing motor vehicle right turns on reds. We surveyed all councillor and mayoral candidates and found overwhelming support for the priorities we identified, including 64% in support of a right-turn on red ban.

In 2019, Toronto City Council adopted the Vision Zero 2.0 Road Safety Plan Update. The plan described a set of the most effective actions to prevent traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries that have been on the rise since 2012, particularly among vulnerable road users. One effective, low cost safety feature is pedestrian and bicycle head start signals, that provide people walking and cycling with an additional few seconds to cross the street, thus increasing their visibility to drivers, particularly with turning vehicles. TCAT welcomes the City's proactive implementation of pedestrian head start signals at most signaled intersections across the city as a default safety feature. We encourage the City to adopt a similar default implementation for bicycle head start signals

Right-turn-on-red prohibitions are an ideal complement to the pedestrian and bicycle head start signals and would increase the safety benefits of each. The City's Road Safety Plan update recognizes that these prohibitions protect pedestrians and cyclists at intersections by reducing potential conflicts with right-turning vehicles. However, rather than adopting this prohibition as a widespread safety measure across the City, currently it is only being strategically deployed at select intersections. This piecemeal approach could lead to confusion, lack of compliance, and increased danger especially for people walking who are visually impaired.

Drivers who make a right turn on a red light without coming to a complete stop first, as established in the Highway Traffic Act, create a particularly dangerous environment for vulnerable road users, especially

people with visual impairments, children and seniors. As drivers look left for a gap in traffic, they are more likely to strike a pedestrian or bicyclist crossing on their right. Prohibiting turning right on red in Toronto is a simple, cost-effective way to make intersections safer for vulnerable road users.

Other large cities in North America such as New York, Montreal and Mexico City have implemented a city-wide ban on right turns on red. Toronto is actually out of step with much of the world in allowing cars to turn right on reds. In Europe, most countries forbid it unless a specific signal or sign says otherwise, including Poland, Germany, Russia, the Netherlands, France, the Czech Republic and many others. The same is true for New Zealand, Australia, the UK, Ireland and Singapore for left turns on red, since they drive on the left-hand side of the road.

In the US, the move to permit turns on red was sparked by the OPEC oil crisis. The Energy Policy and Conservation Act in 1975 tied federal funds to a requirement that states permit the maneuver, and by 1980, every state had complied. Ontario followed a few years later, amending the Highway Traffic Act in 1984 to allow right turns after coming to a complete stop and yielding to pedestrians.

Following the change, a number of studies looked at the safety consequences. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found in the 1980s that collisions with people walking increased by 60% and with people cycling by 100%. In 1982, another study of four states found increases in collisions involving right-turning vehicles and pedestrians ranging from 40% to 107%. Observations of drivers also revealed that over half failed to come to a complete stop before proceeding through the intersection.

Restricting these turn movements is a simple way to reduce conflicts between people walking and cycling and people driving. As a regulation, it's in keeping with the goals of Vision Zero, by putting the onus of responsibility for safety where it belongs – on those who design the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Smith Lea". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nancy" being the most prominent.

Nancy Smith Lea, Director  
The Centre for Active Transportation,  
Clean Air Partnership