

ActiveTO on Lake Shore Boulevard West

Date: June 15, 2022
To: City Council
From: General Manager, Transportation Services
Wards: Ward 4 Parkdale-High Park and Ward 3 Etobicoke-Lakeshore

SUMMARY

This report provides information requested by the Infrastructure and Environment Committee about the potential for ActiveTO weekend closures on Lake Shore Boulevard West (LSBW) during the summer of 2022, as well as the potential for reducing motor vehicle lanes on LSBW to accommodate the regular usage pressures on nearby public spaces, such as the Martin Goodman Trail. ActiveTO Major Road Closures were initiated in 2020 in response to public health restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that limited opportunities for physical activity. With most recreational facilities closed due to indoor gathering restrictions and heavy demand on city parks, there was a significant need for additional outdoor recreational space and reduced travel demand enabled the City to repurpose select major roadways as recreational spaces on summer weekends.

Toronto businesses, workplaces and major street events have now re-opened and residents are returning to pre-COVID-19 pandemic activities and travel patterns. As a result of resuming these activities, the ActiveTO Major Road Closures on LSBW are in conflict with the access needs for establishments in the neighbourhood and scheduled events. Two LSBW ActiveTO events have already taken place this year on May 23rd and 29th, and provided staff with an opportunity to assess the traffic impacts of closures under an environment without public health restrictions. The delays to nearby traffic experienced in 2022 were measured to be greater than those in 2020 and 2021 due to the return of pre-pandemic motor vehicle volumes and patterns. As a result, Transportation Services is recommending that the ActiveTO Major Road Closures on LSBW be treated as limited special events to be planned and advertised in advance, rather than operated as regular recurring weekend events.

In addition to single-day or weekend closures, and at the request of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, staff have conducted a preliminary review of the possibility of prohibiting motor vehicles from using a portion of LSBW for a longer duration. While a lane closure could increase the buffer between the Martin Goodman Trail and LSBW, and potentially support expanded public space for trail users, staff do not recommend implementing interim design changes to LSBW in advance of an update to the Western Waterfront Master Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Transportation Services, recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

Revisiting ActiveTO Interventions on Lake Shore Boulevard West

On May 25, 2022, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee requested an update on the potential for recreational road closures on Lake Shore Boulevard West on weekends this summer, and the potential for reducing motor vehicle lanes on Lake Shore Boulevard West to accommodate recreational opportunities.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.IE30.19>

Status Update on the Western Waterfront Master Plan

On May 25, 2022, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee adopted without amendment the report which provides an update on the Western Waterfront Master Plan (2009). The report recognized the progress that has been made since the 2009 Plan and the new interests and opportunities that have emerged in the 13 years since the Plan was established, including a motivation to rethink where and how active transportation is enabled within the corridor. The report outlines a commitment from City staff to undertaking an update of the Western Waterfront Master Plan. The project will be an interdivisional collaboration led by the Waterfront Secretariat and will involve stakeholders in the decision making process.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.IE30.15>

COMMENTS

LSBW ActiveTO Summer Road Closures from 2020 to 2021

Due to public health restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the summers of 2020 and 2021 had annual street events halted and regional travel diminished causing traffic volumes to significantly decrease across the city. These conditions enabled the City to repurpose a few major roadways as recreational spaces on summer weekends as part of the ActiveTO Major Road Closures program. With most recreational facilities closed due to indoor gathering restrictions and heavy demand on city parks, there was a

significant need for additional outdoor recreational space where people could walk, cycle, run, or skate while social distancing.

Lake Shore Boulevard West (LSBW) from Windermere Avenue to Stadium Road was the most used of the ActiveTO Major Road Closures in 2020, which saw up to 36,000 daily people cycling and thousands of daily pedestrians access the roadway, Martin Goodman Trail, and nearby boardwalk on weekends throughout the summer. Extensive monitoring was conducted again on closure weekends in 2021 which found that almost the same volume of cyclists, and only slightly fewer pedestrians, used these spaces over a number of 15-hour periods. On weekends without ActiveTO programming, pedestrian volumes were about the same; however, the number of people cycling was measured to be between two to five times higher on weekends with ActiveTO programming.

In addition to pedestrian and cyclist usage counts, ActiveTO monitoring included an assessment of impacts on motor vehicle traffic. ActiveTO included short and long closures of LSBW, with short closures of 2.5km from British Columbia Drive to Stadium Road and long closures of 5.8km from Windermere Avenue to Stadium Road. In 2021, Gardiner Expressway travel times were tracked and compared between no-closure, short-closure, and full-closure days. Between 12pm and 7pm on no-closure dates from May 15 to September 26, the average eastbound travel time on the Gardiner Expressway from Highway 427 to York St was 14.5 minutes. On short-closure days, this time increased to 20.1 minutes, and the average travel time was 33.6 minutes on full-closure dates.

While the travel time impacts were significant, they were outweighed by the need generated from pandemic-related restrictions, particularly for those residents who were unable to leave the city for nearby recreational areas. In 2020 and 2021, the ActiveTO program provided this much needed and affordable opportunity for socially distanced outdoor exercise, while creating a joyful and motivational experience at a time when it was most deeply needed.

LSBW ActiveTO Road Closures in 2022 to-date

In 2022, LSBW ActiveTO Major Road Closures took place on Monday, May 23 (Victoria Day), and Sunday, May 29. Each closure lasted 12 hours and also supported additional attractions, including an on-site vaccination clinic held in partnership with Toronto Public Health on May 23, and coordinating with the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Ride for Heart event on May 29.

Data was collected on the number of pedestrians and people cycling during the Victoria Day closure. From 7am to 10pm, 17,000 cyclists and 4,000 pedestrians were observed using the roadway, Martin Goodman Trail, and nearby boardwalk. These volumes indicate that the closure attracted more than four times the number of cyclists and 25% more pedestrians than what was observed on the average of the two previous days of the long weekend.

The Resumption of Street Events and Festivals in 2022

In the summer of 2022, Lake Shore Boulevard West will resume its place as a host venue and key access route for large-scale events. The total number of permitted street

events in this area in 2020 was zero, with only one event in 2021, and ten events so far for 2022. In addition, there are 250 major events planned in the vicinity until the end of the year, many of which will take place on summer weekends. These events include the following: concerts and events at Ontario Place venues, major sporting events, the Toronto Waterfront Marathon, the Honda Indy, the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, and the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE).

Further to the traffic impacts of re-opening from pandemic restrictions, the return of street events and activities, including an unprecedented level of construction, also limits the availability of resources for ActiveTO closure support such as paid duty officers, Transportation Standards Officers, traffic agents and other staff resources necessary for operating a major road closure.

LSBW Business and Public Space Access Impacts

A number of businesses and stakeholders in the area have raised concerns about the impact on patrons and residents in accessing local properties and public spaces as a result of the May 23rd and 29th ActiveTO closures on LSBW. These locations include the Sunnyside Paddling Club, Sir Casimir Gzowski Park, Sunnyside Park, and Budapest Park - all of which had access to motor vehicle parking blocked during the closures. Other establishments along the waterfront such as Ontario Place, Exhibition Place, Hotel X, Sunnyside Paddling Club, Argonaut Rowing Club, The Boulevard Club, Palais Royale, and The Royal Canadian Legion have either limited or no motor vehicle access during ActiveTO events.

As businesses, workplaces, and events continue to re-open, travel patterns and traveller volumes are seen to be returning to the pre-pandemic levels across the city and are creating greater pressures on the available roadway network. After the May 29th LSBW closure, and for the first time since the program began in 2020, staff received hundreds of complaints requesting that the closures end and that the road be re-opened to motor vehicles citing frustration with traffic delays and lack of access to the aforementioned locations.

Proposed Approach for LSBW ActiveTO Closures 2022 and Beyond

Given the concerns around access conflicts for businesses and attractions, as well as the resumption of the ten planned street events in the area, many of which would come into direct conflict with the LSBW ActiveTO closures, Transportation Services staff are recommending against regular recurring weekend closures in favour of an approach that allows for a limited number of ActiveTO closures on LSBW. These would be implemented as special events that are planned and well-advertised in advance.

In identifying dates for any future ActiveTO closures on LSBW, staff will take into consideration the number and location of planned street events on that weekend, construction impacts on parallel corridors, access to adjacent venues and impacts to traffic. Staff will also consider coordinating with other event organizers, such as was done this year with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Additionally, Transportation Services is continuing ActiveTO programming on Bayview Avenue and The Meadoway throughout the summer of 2022.

Potential for Reducing Lanes on Lake Shore Boulevard West

At its meeting of May 25, 2022, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee requested Transportation Services staff to report on the potential for reducing lanes on Lake Shore Boulevard West to accommodate the pressures on public spaces, while fulfilling the intent of ActiveTO with protected recreational opportunities. Through a preliminary review, staff have assessed that while a lane closure on LSBW could increase the buffer between the Martin Goodman Trail and the road, and potentially support expanded public space for trail users, the existing volumes do not require the implementation of temporary design changes to expand trail capacity onto LSBW at this time.

Further, the design and implementation of expanded public space for trail users would not be feasible as an interim measure at this time. Any interim lane closure would require geometric changes to intersection and driveway access points along the trail to minimize turning conflicts, as well as adequate sight-lines and turning radii to ensure safety for bi-directional trail users.

Future planning for an expanded recreational corridor along the waterfront will be considered through the development of an update to the Western Waterfront Master Plan. The project will be an interdivisional collaboration led by the Waterfront Secretariat and will include stakeholder engagement and options for reconfiguration of Lake Shore Boulevard West to better accommodate active transportation on a permanent basis.

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SIGNATURE

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