

Planning Review Panel

Re: Official Plan, Transportation Policies Review, Phase 2

Summary of Advice from the Planning Review Panel meeting held March 2, 2019

Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of 32 randomly selected Torontonians that help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

Advice re: Official Plan, Transportation Policies Review, Phase 2

The City of Toronto is currently reviewing certain aspects of the Official Plan that relate to transportation. The transportation policies currently under review are related to transit, cycling, automated vehicles (AV), shared mobility services, and are generally found in sections 2.2 and 2.4 of the Official Plan. Panelists were presented with the proposed revisions and were asked:

1. To consider whether the policy changes presented were appropriate and likely to meet the expectations of Torontonians; and
2. To explain why or why not, and to suggest changes and additions.

Panelists reached broad agreement that all policies presented, as far as they were able to understand them given the time available, were generally appropriate and likely to meet the expectations of Torontonians.

With respect to transit policies, Panelists supported the idea of a more systematic process for planning higher-order transit improvements, and agreed that greater emphasis on the work of the bus and streetcar network was important. They also suggested there be greater clarity and consistency concerning the way “quality transit” was described, and suggested including more consistent reference in transit policies to a transit system that is accessible, affordable, equitable, safe, and resilient.

With respect to cycling policies, Panelists agreed with the Official Plan’s expanded focus on growing cycling infrastructure throughout the city, and supported the policy that would seek to locate bicycle lanes within one kilometre of every Toronto resident. They also offered a number of suggestions for how to improve Draft Policy #14, with particular focus on increasing access to bike sharing and other cycling support facilities.

With respect to automated vehicles (AV) and shared mobility services, the Panel broadly agreed that these were important issues to address in the Official Plan. There was consensus among the Panelists that the City is taking the right approach by emphasising the need to first assess the impact of these new technologies before drafting further policies. They also supported improvements to curbside management and access to shared parking. The Panel also suggested that road safety and reduced congestion could be given greater emphasis as primary policy goals for AV and Shared Mobility Policies.

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Detailed Summary

The City of Toronto is currently reviewing certain aspects of the Official Plan that relate to transportation. These revisions are a part of the Official Plan Review which occurs every five years. The transportation policies currently under review are related to transit, cycling, automated vehicles (AV), shared mobility services, and are generally found in sections 2.2 and 2.4 of the Official Plan. Proposed changes are currently available here: www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/official-plan/official-plan-review/

Michael Hain from the City Planning Division's Transportation Planning Team visited the Panel on March 2, 2019, to share the changes staff are considering proposing to City Council, and to receive feedback from the Panel on the current version of their proposed changes. Michael shared copies of the new draft policies, pointed Panelists to specific draft text where major changes are being proposed, and explained the relevance of these major proposed changes.

After hearing these presentations, the Panelists were asked to consider:

1. Are the policy changes presented today appropriate and likely to meet the expectations of Torontonians? Why or why not?
2. What are the critical issues you think Torontonians expect the Official Plan to address related to transit, cycling, automated vehicles (AV), shared mobility services?

Panelists worked in small groups to consider and make recommendations on these two questions.

Results: Transit

Key Policies Presented: Section 2.2 - Draft Policies 6 (develop and implement a comprehensive transit network plan), 7 (improve and expand the higher-order transit network by... establishing priorities for new higher-order transit services), and 8 (maintain and enhance bus and streetcar services through various measures).

Panelists reached broad agreement that these policies, as far as they were able to understand them given the time available, were generally appropriate and likely to meet the expectations of Torontonians. They recognized the value of a more systematic process for planning higher-order transit improvements, and agreed that greater emphasis on the work of the bus and streetcar network was important.

However, individual and small groups of Panelists raised a number of questions, comments, concerns and suggestions regarding the language of Draft Policies 6, 7, and 8.

Many Panelists noted a lack of consistency and clarity in these policies with regard to the desired characteristics of quality transit. Policy 6 describes a "fully integrated, comprehensive transportation system" and the goal of delivering "accessible, frequent, reliable, fast and comfortable travel options that serve all areas of the city". Policy 7 describes "a comprehensive planning process which considers value-for-money and broader city-building objectives, including that transit should be built to serve people, strengthen places and support prosperity"; Policy 8 describes the goal of "seamless, convenient, frequent, fast, reliable and comfortable transit service to all parts of the city"; Policy 4 describes a transportation system that provides "safe, reliable and attractive movement". Why certain characteristics were desired in certain policies was unclear, and certain valued characteristics were either not included anywhere or not consistently listed across all policies. Various Panelists suggested that:

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- Toronto's desired transportation system should be described as 'resilient' (e.g. in Policy 6);
- Quality transit should be consistently described as accessible (not included in Policy 8); as well as affordable, safe, and equitable (not included in Policies 6,7, or 8) - these are important priorities for Torontonians;
- The notions of 'serving all areas of the city'; 'serving people'; 'city-building objectives' and 'value-for-money' are insufficiently precise, especially given the different needs of different neighbourhoods and the geographic mismatch between transit service and the needs of less-privileged residents in the city (e.g. neighbourhood improvement areas). Does serving all areas of the city mean prioritizing improved services for communities who need it most? Would we generate more 'value-for-money' by doing so?
- That other key characteristics may benefit from clearer definitions (e.g. does accessibility refer to people with disabilities, how close transit is to my house, or financial accessibility?)

A few Panelists also suggested that language in Policy 8 should more explicitly reference the need for enforcement of certain measures; for example including "well-enforced HOV lanes" rather than "HOV lanes"

In some cases, Panelists were unsure if certain concerns or ideas were sufficiently addressed by the policies. Certain Panelists suggested that, in addition to the specific advice provided above, the Transportation Planning Team should consider how they address the following issues:

- Plan future transit services to respond to anticipated socio-economic needs of different communities, rather than merely considering how to provide optimized service given the number of people travelling to and from a neighbourhood;
- Ensure transit service levels better reflect irregular but predictable changes in volume (e.g. Blue Jays games);
- Recognize that it may be unrealistic to think Toronto's transit system will be reliable anytime soon, and so consider how to improve the passenger experience when inevitable delays occur. Information, transparency, and respect for riders are key desires of commuters, given expected reliability challenges.

Results: Cycling

Key Policies Presented: Section 2.4 – Draft policy 14 (guidelines, programs, and infrastructure to create a bicycle-friendly environment).

Panelists reached broad agreement that these policies, as far as they were able to understand them given the time available, were generally appropriate and likely to meet the expectations of Torontonians. They agreed with the need to develop and expand infrastructure (particularly bicycle lanes) across the city to support cycling. Panelists also appreciated the policy's focus on safety and education and agreed that there is a need to consider the impact on, and role of, all road users, including pedestrians and drivers.

However, individual and small groups of Panelists raised a number of questions, comments, concerns, and suggestions regarding specific sections of Draft Policy 14.

- Section A. of the policy describes the expansion of, "the Cycling network to make it possible for every resident of the city to be within one kilometer of a designated cycling route". While there was broad support for this recommendation, many Panelists noted the need for this initiative to

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also consider that, while proximity to residences is important, the city should prioritize new bicycle lanes in higher-traffic areas and near busy arterials;

- Subsection 4 of section B describes “expanding public bicycle-sharing facilities and programs in those areas where there is a high demand for short trips, including at higher-order transit stations”. Panelists noted the need to expand bicycle-sharing facilities throughout the city, and suggested this expansion plan be more tightly connected to the planned creation of bicycle lanes within 1 km of all residences, as outlined in section A. Aligning these expansion plans increase the likelihood that the newly-installed lanes will be used by surrounding residents. Panelists also noted the need to ensure that bicycle-sharing facilities be made more affordable to low-income residents, with some Panelists suggesting the need to expand acceptable payment methods beyond credit cards;
- Section D. describes expanding bike parking facilities throughout the city. Panelists noted that supporting the expansion of cycling support facilities must extend beyond a focus on parking facilities alone and should include other valuable amenities for cyclists. Suggestions included the provision of showers, air pumps, and charging stations for e-bikes.

Some Panelists made additional comments about Policy 16 of the transportation policy which describes improved connectivity for cyclists travelling in the vicinity of the 400-series highways. Some Panelists suggested the need to clarify the term, “improved connectivity” and for this policy to make direct reference to improving access to trails that run along the 400-series highways for cyclists.

In some cases, Panelists were unsure if certain concerns or ideas were sufficiently addressed by the policies. Certain Panelists suggested that, in addition to the specific advice provided above, the Transportation Planning Team should consider the following:

- Clarify and expand the definition of cyclists to also incorporate other similar modes of transportation (skateboards, e-scooters, etc.);
- Clarify how cycling infrastructure will be designed to be maintained throughout the year.

Results: Automated Vehicles (AV) & Shared Mobility

Key Policies Presented: Section 2.4 – Draft Policies 19 (determining the impact of these technologies), 22 (improving curbside management), 23 (increasing availability of shared community parking spaces)

Panelists reached broad agreement that these policies, as far as they were able to understand them given the time available, were generally appropriate and likely to meet the expectations of Torontonians. They recognized the value of integrating new technologies with the city’s transportation system. In particular, the Panel agreed with the policy’s focus on understanding the impact of these technologies and on improving curbside and parking management.

While there was broad support for these policies, several Panelists suggested that road safety and reduced congestion be given greater emphasis as primary policy goals for AV and Shared Mobility Policies. The Panel also noted that as the Transportation Planning team continues to consider how to integrate emerging mobility-related technologies, these policies must be flexible enough to keep up with the fast pace at which technology advances.

Through discussions, individual and small groups of Panelists raised a number of questions, comments, concerns, and suggestions regarding specific sections of Draft Policies 19, 22, and 23.

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- Policy 19 describes evaluating the impact of new mobility related technology and practices on, “urban travel conditions, the environment, public health safety, the economy and the policies of the Official Plan”. While there was broad support for this recommendation, some Panelists suggested explicitly including, “accessibility” as an assessment goal;
- Policy 22 and Policy 23 describe how developments will be encouraged to improve curbside management and provide shared community parking spaces. While there was broad support for both of these policies, some Panelists noted the importance of clarifying how these policies will be appropriately enforced. In addition, other Panelists suggested strengthening the language of both policies to “require” instead of “encourage” developments to provide these services.

In some cases, Panelists were unsure if certain concerns or ideas were sufficiently addressed by the policies. Certain Panelists suggested that, in addition to the specific advice provided above, the Transportation Planning Team should consider the following:

- Include policies that consider how old technology is phased out and not simply how new technology is implemented;
- Automated vehicles and shared mobility should be considered in how city roads are designed to be safer and more predictable;
- Treat policies and regulations about AVs, shared mobility, and taxis together.