

yongeTOMorrow

yongeTOMorrow

Environmental Study Report

November 2021




Prepared by

steer

L U R A
LISTEN • UNDERSTAND • RELATE • ADVANCE

The Planning Partnership

yongeTOmorrow Environmental Study Report



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Executive Summary

Background to the Environmental Study Report

Yonge Street is an iconic destination in the heart of downtown Toronto. The overall objective of this Environmental Assessment (EA) Study is to improve the pedestrian experience on Yonge Street between Queen Street and College / Carlton Street by increasing pedestrian space through various means, including sidewalk widening and traffic lane reductions. A range of alternatives have been considered and evaluated to increase pedestrian space and improve the way people move through and experience downtown Yonge Street.

The City of Toronto has undertaken a Schedule 'C' Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) Study to evaluate potential improvements to the Yonge Street public right-of-way, consistent with the City's objectives and policies for this area, and to recommend improvements that best serve the needs for the street today and into the future.

The Study Area is bounded by University Avenue to the west, Jarvis Street to the east, Roxborough Avenue to the north and King Street to the south. This Study Area correlates with the geographic limits of data collection and public consultation for the project.

The Preferred Design Concept for Yonge Street, as documented in the Environmental Study Report (ESR), includes increasing sidewalk widths and providing other improvements to the public realm by reducing the existing four driving lanes cross section to two lanes and introducing separated cycling facilities north of Gerrard Street to College Street.

The City of Toronto issued the Notice of Commencement for the Study in April 2019. This has been referred to as "yongeTOmorrow" throughout this process. The Study was undertaken in collaboration with key stakeholders at the City of Toronto, partner agencies and other important stakeholders through an extensive program of public and agency consultation.

The ESR outlines the Preferred Design Concept and its development as a result of the planning, design and consultation which has been undertaken in accordance with EA guidance. This ESR documents each phase of the Study and will be placed on the public record for 30 calendar days to provide agencies and interested parties an opportunity to review and comment.

Note: For the purposes of where Dundas Street and Yonge-Dundas Square are referenced in the yongeTOmorrow Environmental Study Report, it is important to acknowledge that on July 14, 2021 City Council approved that staff move forward with the City's Recognition Review¹ and the renaming of Dundas Street and other City properties bearing the Dundas name, including Yonge-Dundas Square. This furthers the City's commitment to confronting anti-Black racism, advancing truth, reconciliation and justice, and building a more inclusive and equitable Toronto.

¹ City of Toronto [Recognition Review](#), 14 July 2021

Public and Agency Consultation

Consultation and engagement have formed an integral component of the EA Study. A multi-faceted consultation approach was implemented throughout which involved identifying and engaging key stakeholders and the general public through complementary communication and promotional tasks, as well as consultation activities. The consultation aimed to solicit feedback and direction from a range of stakeholders on proposals developed, assessed and recommended throughout the EA process.

Three rounds of public meetings, three online questionnaires, and seven Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings were held over the course of the EA Study. Consultation took place in three rounds between Spring 2019 and Winter 2020. Additionally, the Project Team held more than 60 individual stakeholder meetings with specific organizations or groups (e.g., property owners, businesses, third-party proposal proponents, community organizations, etc.) throughout the EA Study. A Technical Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of City of Toronto Divisions and partner agencies, informed the EA Study. The Committee reviewed and commented on materials and provided advice throughout the EA process.

Public and stakeholder engagement during the three rounds of consultation was used to seek feedback as the study progressed. The three rounds of consultation were as follows:

- Round 1 – held in May 2019 and engaged over 3,000 individuals. This round gathered feedback on current conditions and future priorities for Yonge Street as well as seeking feedback on possible changes to Yonge Street, and to inform the Problem and Opportunity Statement for the project.
- Round 2 – held in November 2019 and engaged over 3,000 individuals. This round sought feedback on four Alternative Solutions for Yonge Street to address the Problem and Opportunity Statement. This round informed the identification of the Preferred Solution to address the Problem and Opportunity Statement.
- Round 3 – held virtually (due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic) in September 2020 and engaged over 1,300 individuals. The Project Team developed and evaluated three Alternative Design Concepts to implement the Preferred Alternative Solution identified in Phase 2 and for each block of Yonge Street in the Study Area. The Alternative Design Concepts, along with the detailed evaluation of each and the Recommended Design Concept, were presented during this round of consultation. Feedback received subsequently informed the selection of the Preferred Design Concept for Yonge Street in late 2020.

Problem & Opportunity Statement

The first phase of the EA process included a thorough review of the policy and planning context and the completion of supporting studies. This review found that this section of Yonge Street has become an international, regional, and local destination for retail, entertainment, education, residential living, and leisure, as well as the city's primary street with internationally known tourist destinations. However, this part of Yonge Street requires improvement to maintain its attractiveness and develop future potential. At the same time, rapid and dramatic growth along Yonge Street is changing the character of the street and local neighbourhoods, influencing the quality of life at street level.

Following this review, the following Problem & Opportunity Statement for Yonge Street was developed in collaboration with stakeholders and the public.

“Yonge Street is iconic – the street plays a significant role in the cultural and economic identity of Toronto and forms the spine of the city’s transportation network. Dramatic growth is changing the character of the built form along the street and the needs of its users, placing increased demands on aging infrastructure.

This provides an opportunity to re-examine how Yonge Street can best respond to our diverse and changing city. This presents the opportunity to elevate Yonge Street’s physical form and the experience it brings to its users to reflect the significance it holds in both the city’s landscape and in our minds.”

Additionally, a set of objectives of the EA Study were used to support the development of proposed solutions to help meet the needs of the future Yonge Street. These objectives focus on Mobility, Liveability, Prosperity and Sustainability to address the Problem & Opportunity Statement.

Existing Conditions

Data collection and analysis of existing conditions in the Study Area informed the development of Alternative Solutions capable of addressing the Problem and Opportunity Statement. The data collection and analysis included reviewing existing transportation infrastructure, travel patterns and traffic conditions, existing socio-economic conditions and land uses, existing cultural and natural environment resources, and utilities and other infrastructure conditions.

The Study Area is recognized as an increasingly mixed-use north-south spine within the city which has undergone significant intensification in recent years. As such, development adjacent to Yonge Street is changing in form and density, resulting in changes to the character of the streetscape. The Study Area also has a long history as a civic and cultural stage. It is home to many key institutions, centres of commerce and economic activity and is a key part of the urban fabric of the city. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more people were using the street and street users’ needs and priorities were shifting.

Key findings from the data collection, analysis and review of existing conditions outline the already urbanized nature of the Study Area. The significant growth in population and employment in recent years is expected to continue through this decade and beyond, with the Study Area’s population expected to accommodate a minimum density of 400 residents and jobs per hectare by 2031.

Data showed that, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, between 50-75% of people using the street were pedestrians, while less than 25% of the right-of-way space is dedicated to pedestrian movement. With the population and employment within the downtown core expected

to nearly double by 2041, the existing infrastructure will be critically deficient and may risk pedestrian safety without change. The cycling environment within the Study Area and along Yonge Street is also poor. In addition, there is a need to upgrade utilities in the corridor, principally the requirement to replace and relocate two watermain that run along the corridor on either side of the street.

Together, these conditions all influence the operations and success of the numerous businesses in the Study Area, the large and growing residential community, and the many tourism and recreation attractions within downtown Toronto. These findings, along with input gathered through stakeholder consultation, were used as key inputs in the development and evaluation of Alternative Solutions for the Study Area.

Development of Alternative Solutions

Alternative Solutions to address the Problem and Opportunity Statement developed in Phase 2 of the EA Study took into consideration the detailed analysis of the Study Area's existing environment and included the development and assessment of a long-list of 14 potential Street Design Options for this section of Yonge Street. These long-listed Options were introduced at the first round of consultation.

Feedback received from the consultation and a review of the Options against the EA Study's objectives informed a short-list of Options – Pedestrian Priority, One Way, and Two Driving Lanes – for further development and analysis.

Overview of Shortlisted Street Design Options

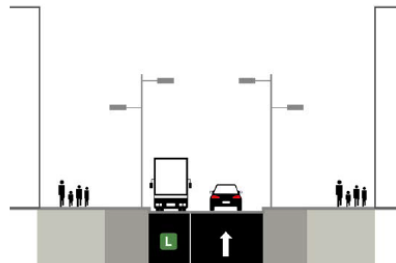
Pedestrian Priority

(Car Free A)



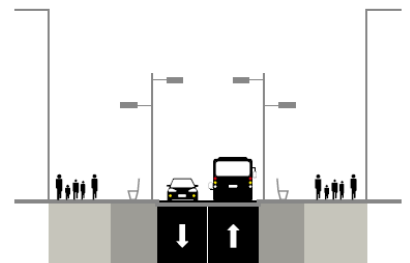
One Way

(One Driving Lane D)



Two Driving Lanes

(Two Driving Lanes D)



These Street Design Options were applied to each “block” within the Study Area in varying combinations and then reassessed against the study objectives. From this, four Alternative Solutions for addressing the Problem & Opportunity Statement were developed and presented during the second round of consultation. The four Alternative Solutions included:

Alternative Solution 1 – Prioritizing driving access

Alternative Solution 2 – Addressing short term needs

Alternative Solution 3 – Destination street – planning for growth and change

Alternative Solution 4 – Balancing future growth with driving access

A detailed evaluation of the four Alternative Solutions was prepared using a custom evaluation framework, using quantitative and qualitative indicators to inform the assessment of each

Alternative Solution against each criterion. The evaluation of the four Alternative Solutions also took account of transportation modelling that highlighted potential traffic and transit impacts of each Alternative Solution.

Based on the results of the evaluation and round two of consultation feedback, Alternative Solution 4 was selected as the Preferred Solution to address the Problem and Opportunity Statement. Alternative Solution 4 has the following design options:

- Between College Street and Gerrard Street, two driving lanes
- Between Gerrard Street and Walton Street, pedestrian priority
- Between Walton Street and Elm Street, two driving lanes
- Between Elm Street and Edward Street, one driving lane
- Between Edward Street and Dundas Street, pedestrian priority
- Between Dundas Street and Dundas Square, pedestrian priority
- Between Dundas Square and Shuter Street, one driving lane
- Between Shuter Street and Queen Street, two driving lanes

Alternative Solution 4 most appropriately addressed the project objectives and balanced stakeholder priorities:

- It provides a good balance between improving Yonge Street as a destination for pedestrians, tourism, and events
- It encourages walking, cycling and transit use
- It provides more opportunities for driving access to support businesses relative to the other, previously identified alternatives
- It provides good support for active modes in areas experiencing crowding and development and best addresses crowding and crossings at the busiest locations

Development of Alternative Design Concepts

The next phase of the EA Study – Phase 3 of the MCEA process – involved the identification of three Alternative Design Concepts to best implement the Preferred Solution. The three Alternative Design Concepts have some basic similarities, such as a two-lane configuration and widened sidewalks, with the differences largely being the extent of pedestrian focus and cycling infrastructure within different blocks. The extent of pedestrian focus within each the blocks is intended to be flexible and can be achieved through operational strategies that lie outside the MCEA process. However, the extents were nonetheless studied as part of the Alternative Design Concepts to assist in understanding potential environmental effects and in determining a Preferred Design Concept.

Block-by-block Summary of Alternative Design Concepts

Block	4a Most Pedestrian Priority	4b Pedestrian Priority with Two-Way Driving Access	4c Pedestrian Priority with One-Way Driving Access & Cycle Tracks
College Street to Gerrard Street			
Gerrard Street to Walton Street			
Walton Street to Elm Street			
Elm Street to Edward Street			
Dundas Square to Edward Street			
Dundas Square to Shuter Street			
Shuter Street to Queen Street			

The performance of each of the Alternative Design Concepts was measured against the study objectives using a set of criteria developed for each objective. Feedback on the Alternative Design Concepts was also gathered in round three of consultation in September 2020, which included feedback from the Stakeholder Advisory Group, the City's Design Review Panel, meetings with individual stakeholders and feedback from the general public.

Alternative Design Concept 4C emerged as the Recommended Design Concept. It provided a balanced design with acceptable performance, enabling meaningful improvements to be made across all objectives, while allocating limited right-of-way space in a way that is balanced between different demands.

Development, Selection & Evaluation of the Preferred Design Concept

Feedback received during the third round of consultation confirmed Alternative Design Concept 4C as the Recommended Design Concept, and informed refinements to its design prior to its consideration by Toronto City Council in February 2021. However, it also became clear that additional attention to the operational plan was needed. There was an insufficient level of consensus among stakeholders on the operational plan, and business stakeholders continued to express concern for the economic impacts of removing daytime vehicular access on sections of Yonge Street. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted transportation volumes across all modes, as well as the economic viability of many businesses and the Project Team recognizes this uncertainty.

Flexibility was identified as a key priority for how Yonge Street will operate in the future. Therefore, the Recommended Design Concept put forward to Toronto City Council for consideration and approval consisted of the physical design associated with the Alternative Design

Concept 4C, for which EA approval was recommended, along with a flexible operations approach that was not tied to the physical design. This will enable the City to be agile in advancing operational approaches during the day, weekends or for special events.

On January 11, 2021, the City of Toronto's Infrastructure and Environment Committee (IEC) considered the Recommended Design Concept. At the next stage of the project, the detailed design phase, the Project Team will consult on operations to develop a more detailed operational plan for consideration by City Council prior to construction. City Council adopted the yongeTOmorrow Recommended Design Concept at its February 2021 meeting.

As the project proceeds to detailed design, additional attention and consultation will occur to develop the final operational plan. These types of plans may include elements such as timed closures, signage, pavement markings, turn restrictions, signal timings, loading areas, and time-based pedestrian priority zones. These can remain flexible as they do not require significant construction and are routinely amended by Committees and Council to improve future local needs and operations.

Summary of the Preferred Design Concept

The City Council endorsed the Recommended Design Concept as the Preferred Design Concept for the EA Study. It addresses long-standing policy objectives and the Problem & Opportunity Statement. It elevates Yonge Street's physical form and improves mobility for users of the space reflecting observed usage patterns, creates additional space in the public realm to enhance Yonge Street's role as an economic and cultural hub, and creates a more sustainable experience to accommodate its growing population. It also aligns with policies and programs delivered by the City of Toronto, including its response to COVID-19 recovery.

The Preferred Design Concept proposes a consistent, yet flexible road design that can accommodate different operations and programming. The roadway and streetscape will look and feel the same throughout the corridor with the ability to be configured to accommodate pedestrian priority, one-way and two-way vehicular operations. The following design elements are consistent for the full length of the corridor from College / Carlton Street to Queen Street:

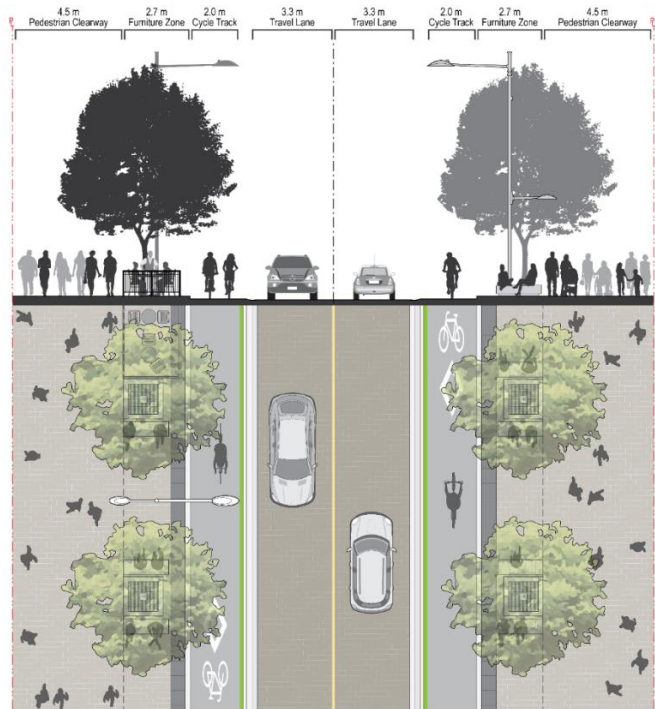
- 6.6m wide, two lane roadway with mountable curbs and vehicular unit paving
- 2.7m wide furnishing, planting, café and curbside activity zone on each side of the street
- 4.0m wide (minimum) pedestrian clearway with pedestrian unit paving, on each side of the street

From College / Carlton Street to Gerrard Street, the right-of-way is six metres wider than the rest of the corridor. The character of the adjacent properties is also less focused on tourism and entertainment than those to the south of Gerrard Street. This additional space will be used for separated cycle tracks on both sides of the street, providing links to the existing cycling facilities on Gerrard Street.

Preferred Design Concept: Typical cross-section



Preferred Design Concept: Typical cross-section with bicycle lanes



The overarching theme of the Preferred Design Concept's intended operational function is that from College / Carlton Street to Queen Street, Yonge Street is a place focused on the movement and experience of people walking, cycling and connecting to transit, rather than a way to get across the downtown core by driving. The flexible approach has been designed to provide sufficient vehicle access to support parking garages, loading, deliveries, ride hail, tour buses, Wheel-Trans and municipal services while maintaining a pedestrian focused streetscape.

The Project Team comprehensively evaluated the potential environmental interactions and impacts of the Preferred Design Concept in collaboration with specialists in the respective fields of assessment for projects of this nature. The evaluation considered the natural, socio-economic, cultural, and built environments within the Study Area. There were no significant environmental effects identified. The identified potential environmental impacts can be mitigated, with appropriate mitigation measures identified and documented in this ESR.

Next Steps

This ESR summarizes the extensive work undertaken to ensure that the future vision for Yonge Street between College / Carlton Street and Queen Street meets the needs of the present and future users of the space. Following completion of the EA Study, the City of Toronto will, in collaboration with public agencies, undertake detailed design, operational planning, and associated consultation with stakeholders to refine the physical design elements into tender-ready construction drawings.

During the detailed design phase, the operational elements will continue to be considered and developed. The construction of the Preferred Design is anticipated to take approximately 3 years upon completion of detailed design. Various commitments to future work are documented in this ESR.