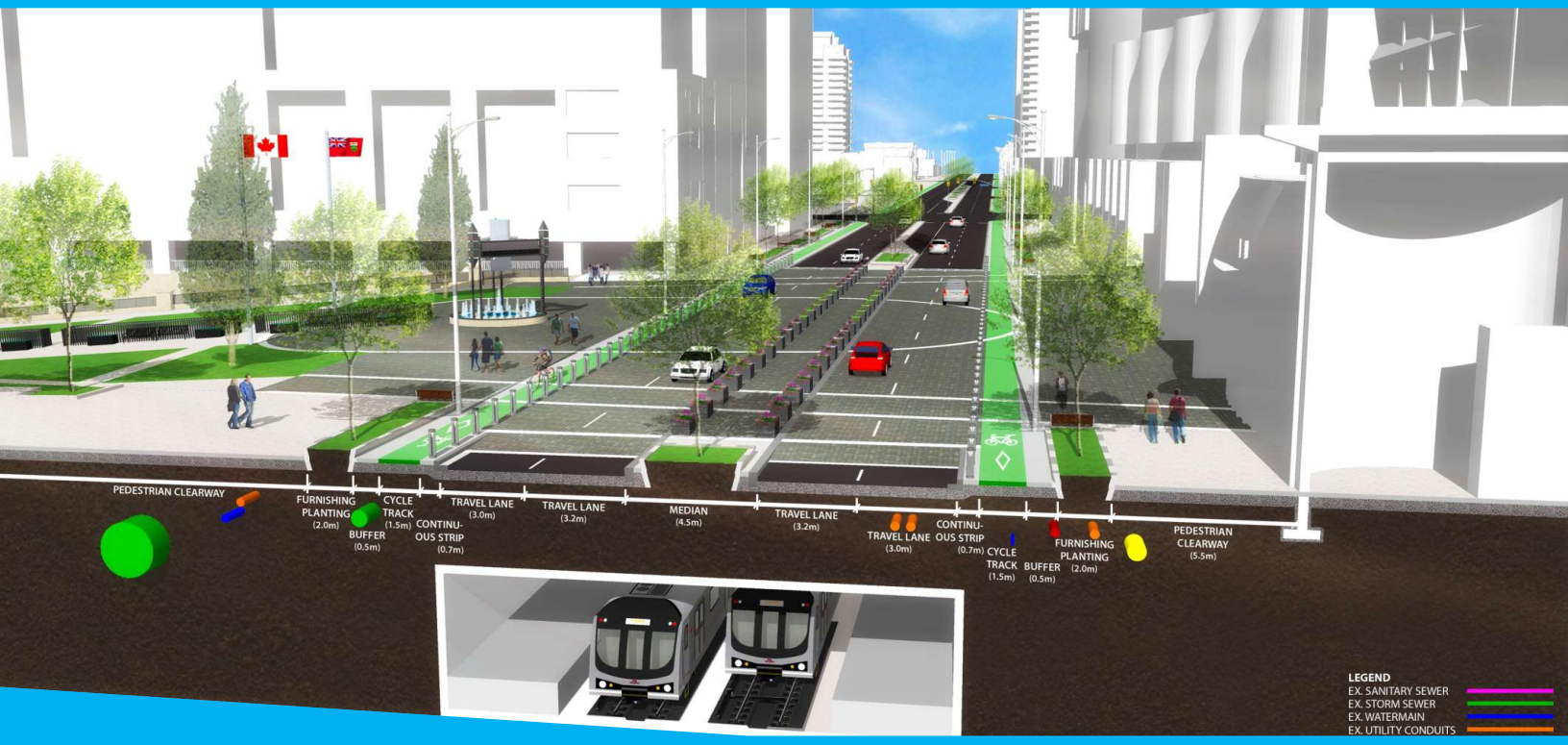
REimagining Yonge Street

Sheppard Avenue to Finch Avenue



Municipal Class Environmental Assessment

Environmental Study Report

March 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Background to the Environmental Study Report

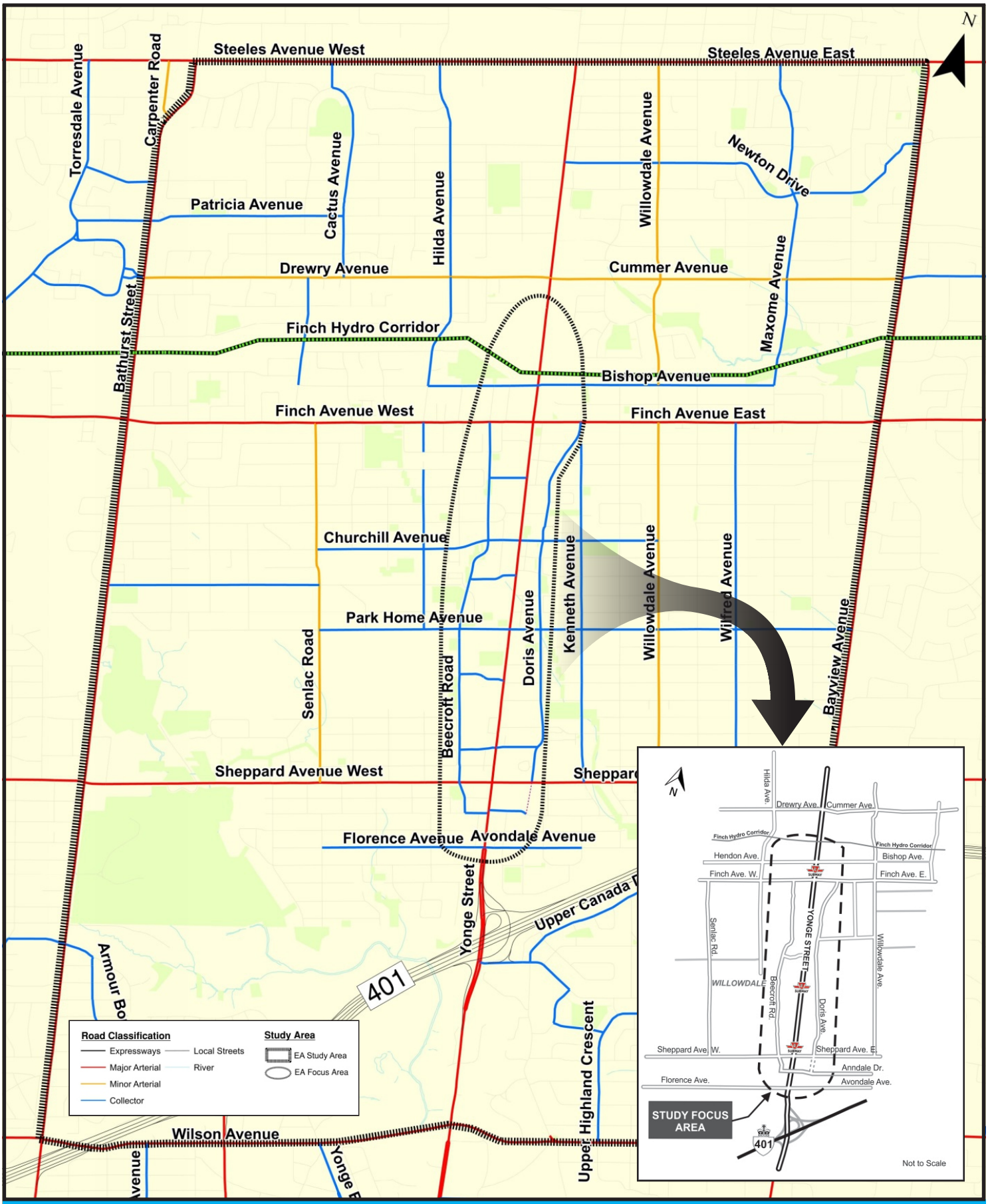
Yonge Street from south of Sheppard Avenue to north of Finch Avenue is the heart of North York Centre. Despite being second to Downtown in civic importance, scale, and growth, investment in the state of good repair and the quality of the Yonge Street streetscape has not kept pace with the area's transportation network and the scale and density of development. As a transportation asset, Yonge Street is at the end of its lifecycle - with full reconstruction for Yonge Street required within five to eight years.

Today, Yonge Street has sidewalks that are narrow and substandard, boulevards that have deteriorated to such a degree that full reconstruction is necessary. There is a lack of safe pedestrian crossing locations, inconsistent lane widths and medians, and no dedicated cycling facilities. There are also concerns related to traffic movement.

This REimagining Yonge Street Environmental Assessment (EA) provides an opportunity to create an attractive and consistent streetscape for Yonge Street with a design that achieves the civic goals of the North York Centre, and will serve people of all ages as they travel in and around the area for work, school and leisure. This REimagining Yonge Street EA satisfies the MCEA process, which is approved under the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act*. This study is being carried out as a Schedule 'C' project in accordance with the MCEA process.

The Study Focus Area consists of the Yonge Street corridor from south of Sheppard Avenue (Avondale Avenue and Florence Avenue) to north of Finch Avenue (the Finch Hydro Corridor), between Doris Avenue on the east and Beecroft Road on the west. A larger Study Area, extending from Bathurst Street to Bayview Avenue, and Wilson Avenue and York Mills Road to Steeles Avenue, has been assessed with respect to potential traffic impacts. This larger Study Area also reflects the consultation area. **Exhibit ES-1** displays the extended Study Area and Study Focus Area.

The REimagining Yonge Street EA was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 involved the examination of alternatives for Yonge Street. As a result of direction from City Council, a Stage 2 study was added to examine alternatives for cycling facilities on Beecroft Road and/or Doris Avenue.



TORONTO

Re-Imagining Yonge Street
Sheppard Ave To Finch Ave EA Study

Exhibit ES-1
Study Area

Stage 1

The Stage 1 study identified the “Transform Yonge” alternative as the preliminary preferred alternative involving full reconstruction of Yonge Street, including:

- Between Sheppard Avenue and Finch Avenue: a reduction of Yonge Street from six (6) to four (4) lanes, and addition of one-way cycle tracks on each side of the street, a centre landscaped median and wider boulevards.
- Between Florence Avenue / Avondale Avenue and Sheppard Avenue: six (6) lanes, one-way cycle tracks on each side of the street, a centred landscaped median and wider boulevards, where feasible.

Stage 2

In February 2017, City Council directed staff to undertake further review to assess additional alternatives, as follows:

- A more comprehensive review of options to implement cycling facilities on Doris Avenue and / or Beecroft Road, and on Willowdale Avenue from Bishop Avenue to Steeles Avenue, rather than on Yonge Street; and
- Additional project development to determine an option for a secondary preferred alternative that does not reduce traffic capacity on Yonge Street.

Following City Council’s direction to complete a second stage of work, the project was taken to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee (formerly Public Works and Infrastructure Committee) in May 2017, where direction was provided to complete Stage 2 through the release of the Interim Project Status Update – REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environment Assessment Study: Report for Action.

On November 17, 2020, the project was taken to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee to present the completed MCEA that identified “Transform Yonge” as the recommended preferred alternative as it best supports the goals of the REimagining Yonge project, as well as the City’s broader policy objectives, such as the City’s Climate Action Strategy – TransformTO.

In December 2020, City Council endorsed the recommended design for the reconstruction of Yonge Street from Florence Avenue / Avondale Avenue to the Finch Hydro Corridor and refinements as outlined in the November 17, 2020 report. City Council also authorized the issuance of the Notice of Study Completion and the filing of the REimagining Yonge Environmental Assessment Study in the public record for a 30-day review period, in accordance with the MCEA.

II. Problem and Opportunity Statement

Under the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) process, proponents are required to develop and document problems and opportunities that provide reasonable justification to proceed with the project.

Initial Problems and/or Opportunities Statement (Stage 1)

The initial Problem and Opportunity Statement developed in Stage 1 for this study and presented at the first Public Event is as follows:

> *North York Centre is one of four centres in the City focused on transit-based employment and residential growth. At its core is Yonge Street from Sheppard Avenue to north of Finch Avenue, envisioned as one of the city's primary pedestrian promenades with a vibrant urban environment that promotes walking, cycling and safe passage across the street.*
>
> *Today, the area is faced with challenges from inconsistent features such as sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and medians to lack of dedicated cycling facilities and concerns over traffic movement.*
>
> *The City is looking at ways to create an attractive and consistent streetscape with design appropriate to the civic goals of the North York Centre that will serve people of all ages as they travel in and around the area for work, school and leisure.*

Revised Problems and/or Opportunities Statement (Stage 2)

As the study progressed into Stage 2, the statement was reviewed and revised to incorporate additional rationale for the study. The statement for the Stage 2 study is as follows:

> *North York Centre is one of five key centres in the City focused on transit-based employment and residential growth. This area is envisioned to be a vibrant urban environment that balances the transportation needs of all users, and promotes walking and cycling. To support growth, a street network was created, keeping Yonge Street as a central civic street supported by two parallel streets – Beecroft Road and Doris Avenue.*
>
> *Yonge Street requires reconstruction to address deficiencies and maintain a state of good repair. Today the study focus area is faced with challenges from inconsistent features such as sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and medians, lack of dedicated cycling facilities and concerns over traffic movement.*

The City of Toronto wants to create an attractive and consistent streetscape with design appropriate to the civic goals of North York Centre that will serve people of all ages as they travel in and around the area for work, school and leisure, and that will also support economic activity. Yonge Street, Beecroft Road and Doris Avenue each offer varying opportunities to enhance mobility and safety for all users - cyclists, pedestrians, transit riders and drivers.

III. Existing Conditions

The existing conditions of the study area, such as natural environment, cultural environment, socio-economic environment, traffic conditions, and transportation network, have been reviewed and summarized in **Section 3** of the ESR to define a baseline for assessment of potential impacts as a result of the proposed improvements.

IV. Consultation and Engagement

Consultation and engagement have been important components of this study, to provide opportunities for two-way communication with interested stakeholders. The consultation activities provided a forum for stakeholders to learn about the study, provide input, exchange information and dialogue, and identify potentially significant design and environmental concerns early in the decision-making process, to ensure that they were given appropriate consideration.

A variety of consultation techniques were applied during each phase, including Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings, stakeholder meetings, public events (e.g. street survey, design charrette, Jane's Walk, public drop-in events), a project website, and study notification through mailings, newspaper advertisements, as well as direct contact with the Project Team via mail, email, phone and fax.

Public and stakeholder consultation and engagement was used to seek feedback as the study progressed. Public and stakeholder consultation and engagement meetings included five (5) public open houses and five (5) Planners in Public Spaces events.

Federal and provincial external government agencies, school boards, emergency service providers, local condominium and resident associations, utilities, other potentially interested stakeholders, and Indigenous communities were notified at study commencement and of the five (5) Public Drop-In Events to inform them of the study, and to request for comments and feedback. Further details related to the fulsome consultation and engagement efforts are outlined in **Section 4**.

V. Evaluation of Alternatives

Evaluation criteria were developed in Stage 1 to assess the planning alternatives and design alternatives. These were refined through consultation with agencies and the public. The evaluation criteria were updated prior to proceeding with Stage 2, based on further consultations.

The **Stage 1** evaluation of alternatives for Yonge Street was completed and refined throughout phases 2 and 3 of the EA study in 2016. The **Stage 2** assessment evaluated options for Beecroft Road and Doris Avenue as well. The Stage 1 preferred alternative and the Stage 2 preferred alternative were then compared and an overall preferred alternative selected.

Stage 1 Alternatives and Evaluation

Several alternatives were examined during the study to determine the best solution that meets the need and justification for the REimagining Yonge Study. The planning alternatives considered included: Do Nothing; Enhance; Modify; and Transform. The **Do Nothing alternative** would retain Yonge Street in its present form. The existing problems would persist. The **Enhance alternative** provides opportunities to enhance Yonge Street in strategic locations to create a more attractive and multimodal street. Enhance does not address the projected multimodal transportation needs or City objectives. The **Modify alternative** requires a minor reconstruction to improve streetscape and pedestrian and cycling facilities, with minimal curb relocations. This alternative would include bike facilities and wider sidewalks where redevelopment has not occurred. Six traffic lanes would be retained. This alternative provides some opportunity to address existing pedestrian facilities and enhances the level of design through the corridor from its existing state. However it does not provide the same opportunity to create a complete street or meet future multimodal needs. The **Transform alternative** involves a major reconstruction to create a multimodal street and enhanced streetscape. From Sheppard Avenue to Finch Avenue, traffic lanes on Yonge Street will be reduced from 6 to 4 lanes. South of Sheppard Avenue to Avondale Avenue, the number of lanes is proposed to remain at 6. Yonge Street would be redesigned to create attractive public spaces and include bike facilities, reconstruction of wider sidewalks throughout the corridor, and a total reconstruction of the curb. Transform provides the opportunities to create a complete street that serves multiple needs, while enhancing the attractiveness of Yonge Street. By transforming Yonge Street, there is the opportunity to create an identity and enhance public experience. The Transform alternative was selected as the preliminary preferred alternative and carried forward for the development of the design alternatives.

Design options for the Transform alternative were developed, recognizing the constraints and opportunities within the right-of-way. South of Sheppard Avenue,

volumes are higher, there are several closely spaced intersections where left and right turns to and from Yonge Street are permitted, and extensive weaving occurs northbound. Removal of a through lane in this section would lead to very poor traffic operations. Provision of additional control over mid-block turning movements would be beneficial in terms of promoting smoother traffic flow, and thus a southerly extension of the median has been considered. North of Finch Avenue, TTC buses must exit from the Finch Bus Terminal (located east of Yonge Street) via a right turn onto Yonge Street northbound from the mid-block driveway, into a dedicated bus lane. The geometrics of the exit require the curb lane to be maintained. Southbound, traffic demands for left and right turns indicate that Finch Avenue is the logical transition point from three to two lanes southbound. Between Finch Avenue and Sheppard Avenue, a four-lane cross-section is possible.

Stage 2 Alternatives and Evaluation

Stage 2 alternatives included selection of the appropriate type of cycling facility and street cross section for Beecroft Road and/or Doris Avenue, the preferred street for the cycling facility, and the preferred alternative for Yonge Street with no cycling facility. As part of the Stage 2 alternatives, Yonge Street would remain as six traffic lanes. The median would be extended as per the approved Secondary Plan.

The planning alternatives for Beecroft Road and/or Doris Avenue were as follows. Under the **Do-Nothing alternative**, no changes would be made and both streets would be maintained in their present configuration. Do Nothing would not provide multi-modal travel improvements. The **Enhance alternative** assumed that the number of travel lanes will be maintained, and due to limited available space on the roadway, the bike facilities would be conventional painted lanes without a buffer and would be added in a "split pair" configuration (a northbound bike lane on Doris Avenue and a southbound bike lane on Beecroft Road). This would not optimize safety or connectivity for cyclists. The **Modify alternative** assumed that only localized improvements would be made to the existing curb-to-curb road sections. Modify reconfigures Beecroft Road to one lane northbound and two lanes southbound, and it reconfigures Doris Avenue to two lanes northbound and one lane southbound. The **Transform alternatives** assumed that all or of part of the two roadways will be rebuilt, enabling raised unidirectional cycle tracks. Pedestrian clearways would be widened to the minimum standard of 2.1 m. The landscape buffer would be narrowed and would require at least partial reconstruction. This would provide the opportunity for street tree plantings and other public realm improvements such as seating and bike parking.

Transform on Beecroft Road was selected as the preferred Stage 2 alternative. It does not reduce traffic capacity, it provides opportunities for wider sidewalks, it minimizes user conflicts and simplifies signaling requirements, it maintains parking supply similar

to the existing, and it maintains curbside access similar to the existing situation. Beecroft Road was selected as the preferred location for the Stage 2 cycling facility, as opposed to Doris Avenue or facilities on both Beecroft and Doris. This was based on criteria including cost (implementing the facility on only one street), impacts to private properties on Doris Avenue, and impacts on street trees.

For Yonge Street as part of Stage 2, only 'Do Nothing' and 'Enhance' were assessed, as cycling infrastructure was contemplated to be included in Beecroft Road and Doris Avenue. Under 'Do Nothing', the existing problems (which include inconsistent features such as sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and medians to lack of dedicated cycling facilities and concerns over traffic movement) would persist. The Enhance alternative provides opportunities to enhance Yonge Street in strategic locations to create a more attractive and multimodal street.

Based on the technical evaluation and feedback from stakeholder agencies and the public, the preferred Stage 2 option was '**Transform' on Beecroft Road and 'Enhance' on Yonge Street**.

Evaluation of Stage 1 vs. Stage 2 Preferred Alternatives

The preferred alternatives from Stage 1 (Transform Yonge) and Stage 2 (Transform Beecroft / Enhance Yonge) were then compared and evaluated. Key aspects of the evaluation of the alternatives were as follows:

- Accommodation of pedestrians: The Stage 2 alternative provides widened sidewalks on Beecroft Road as a result of boulevard reconstruction. However, Yonge Street is considered a priority corridor for pedestrian movement, and thus the expansion of pedestrian space under the Stage 1 alternative has a much greater benefit. With respect to crossing opportunities, Stage 1 is preferred, because the reduction from six to four lanes will narrow the crossing distance, and the median will provide mid-crossing refuge points. In the northern half of the corridor, there are currently large gaps between signalized intersection crossings, with the largest being a 350 metre gap between Churchill Avenue/Church Avenue and Kempford Boulevard to the north, and a 500 metre gap between Churchill Avenue/Church Avenue and Park Home Avenue/Empress Avenue. To reduce these gaps, it is recommended to signalize the intersections of Yonge Street at Horsham Avenue/Northtown Avenue and at Ellerslie Avenue, effectively cutting each gap by half. This will improve pedestrian access and safety across Yonge.
- Cycling: Stage 1, with the inclusion of cycle tracks on Yonge Street (the primary destination and most central and direct route for cycling), is the preferred

alternative for accommodation of cyclists, offering the greatest potential to divert trips to this mode from auto.

- Traffic: The magnitude of the impact for Stage 1 indicates that traffic operations will be manageable, with marginal increases in travel time and some increases in queuing. Travel time increases are minimal – generally under 1 minute for trips on Yonge (from Wilson to Steeles) or on Doris or Beecroft (from Sheppard to Finch). Average speed changes are minimal – 1 or 2 sec/km. Traffic on Yonge Street during weekday peak periods includes significant volumes travelling to/from York Region (over 70%). Longer distance trips can be served on parallel corridors. The pattern of traffic over 24 hours indicates that over the vast majority of the day, volume is substantially below capacity on a link basis.
- Transit: The Stage 1 alternative is projected to have minimal impacts on bus operations. The Stage 2 alternative would have little to no effect on bus operations on Yonge Street, but would not support the goal of increasing ridership on the subway system. For this latter reason, Stage 1 is preferred.

Conclusions

The comparison of the Stage 1 (Transform Yonge) preferred alternative to that for Stage 2 (Transform Beecroft and Enhance Yonge) shows that Transform Yonge has marginal negative implications for traffic operations, while it has benefits in terms of addressing all of the goals identified in the Problem and Opportunity Statement. Impacts on surface transit are projected to be marginal; the subways will benefit from additional ridership. Businesses along Yonge are expected to benefit from a more active pedestrian-oriented environment, and there will be additional space for civic events. The Stage 2 alternative, by contrast, has little or no impact on traffic, but also very few benefits. It would create safe and secure cycling infrastructure, but not on the street where high cycling demands would be expected. Thus Stage 1 (Transform Yonge) is concluded to be the overall preferred project alternative.

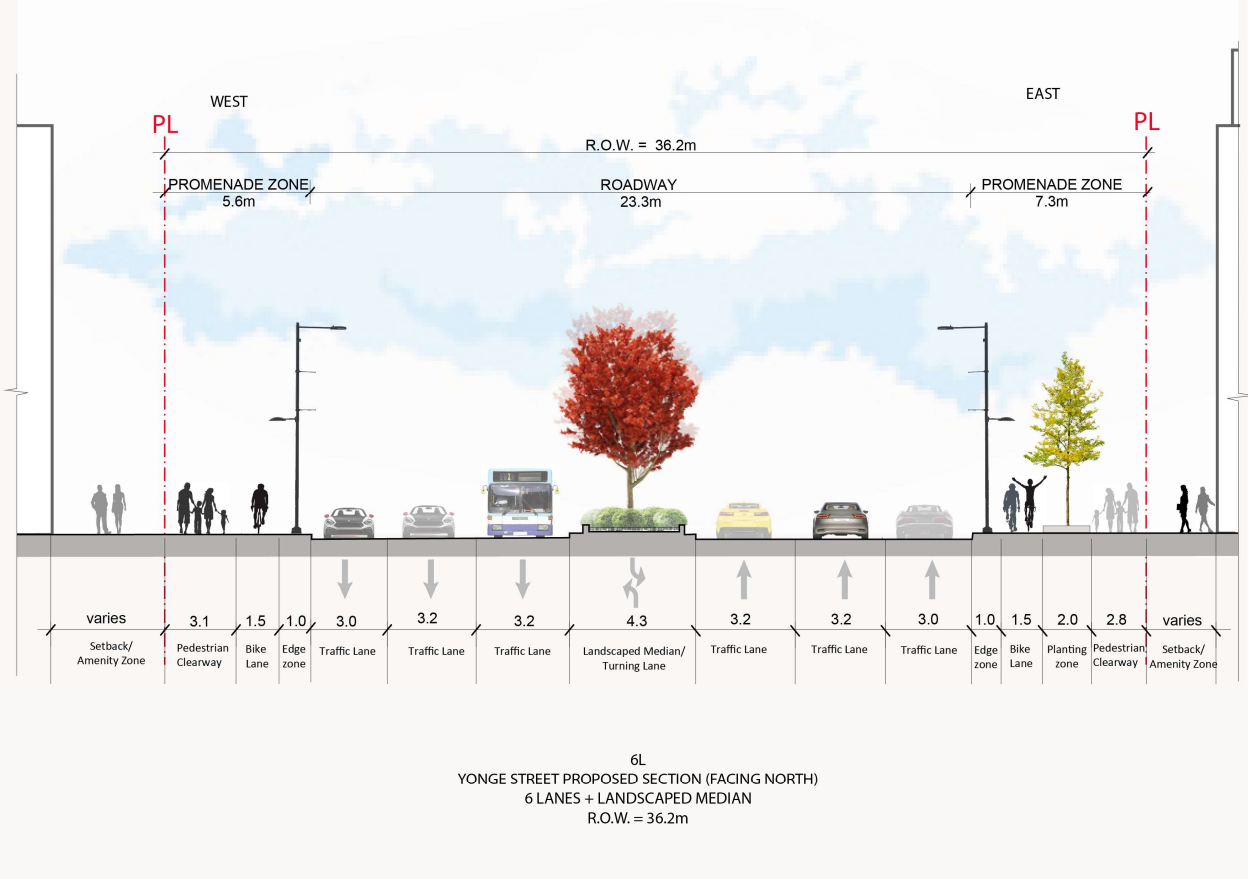
VI. Recommended Plan

The recommended plan transforms the streetscape and public realm along Yonge Street to incorporate all modes of transportation - pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and motorists. It includes wider pedestrian clearways, new signalized crossings, street trees and enhanced plantings (including landscaped medians), dedicated unidirectional cycle tracks, and opportunities for public art and street furniture. The existing through traffic lanes on Yonge Street, from Sheppard Avenue to Finch Avenue, will be reduced from 6 to 4 lanes. On-street parking will be provided where space permits.

The recommended cross-sections are shown below. Design Option 4A will be implemented south of Sheppard Avenue, and Design Option 4B will be implemented from Sheppard Avenue to Finch Avenue.

Option 4A (shown below in **Exhibit ES-2**) retains the existing six-lane cross-section south of Sheppard Avenue to the Highway 401 interchange, and introduces a centre planted median; this is expected to assist in managing traffic flows. In addition, one-way cycle tracks are planned to provide secure cycling infrastructure. Wider, more consistent pedestrian clearways on both sides of the street will improve the environment for walking.

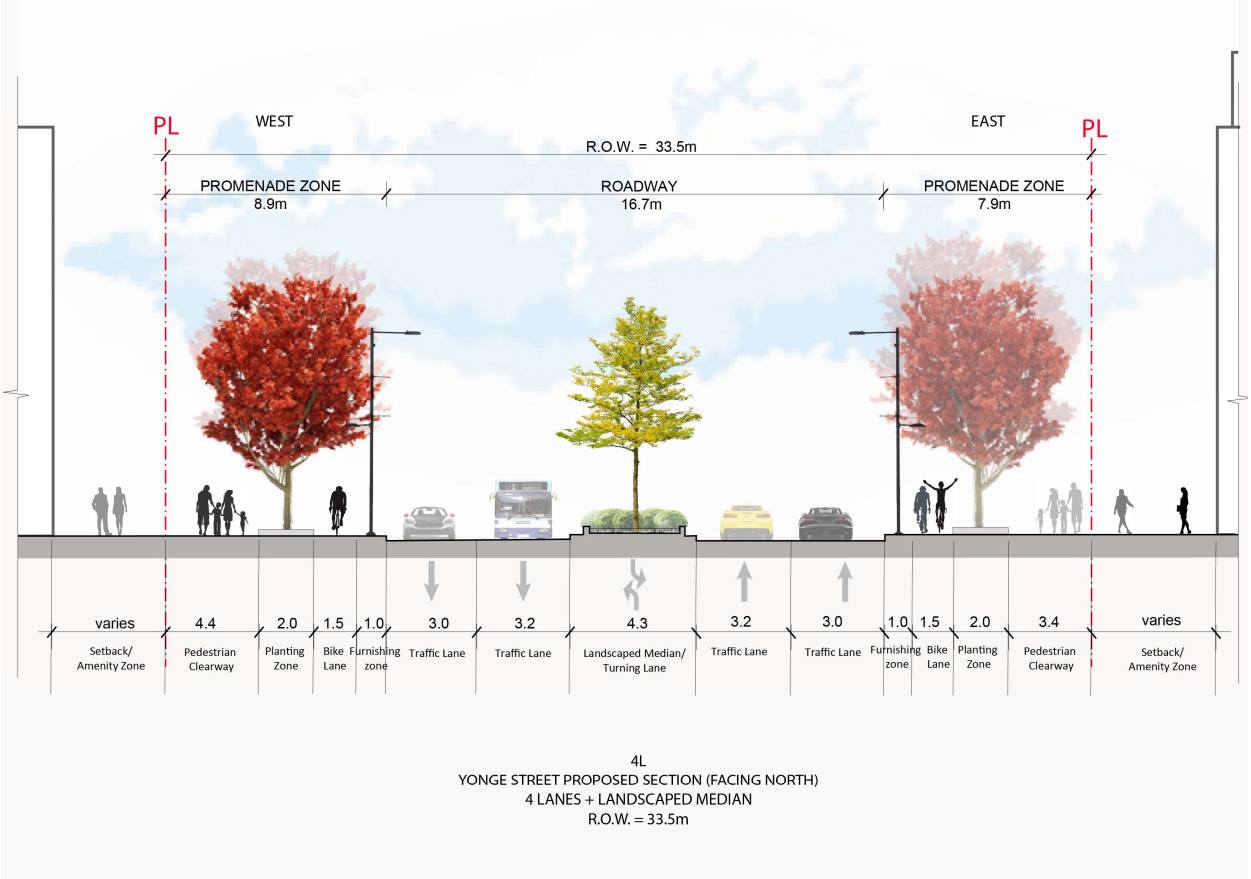
Exhibit ES-2: Option 4A – to be implemented south of Sheppard Avenue



6L
YONGE STREET PROPOSED SECTION (FACING NORTH)
6 LANES + LANDSCAPED MEDIAN
R.O.W. = 36.2m

North of Sheppard Avenue, under Option 4B (shown below in **Exhibit ES-3**) the cross-section will narrow to four through lanes, with the cycle tracks, wider pedestrian clearways and centre median continuing to Finch Avenue. Laybys for parking (or possibly loading) will be provided in select locations. The cycle tracks and wider clearways continue north of Finch to Hendon Avenue; additional lanes are proposed here for turning movements and TTC buses.

Exhibit ES-3: Option 4B – to be implemented from Sheppard Avenue to Finch Avenue



Cycling Infrastructure

The plan includes raised, unidirectional cycle tracks, with a barrier curb and buffer zone between the curb lane and cycling facility, offering enhanced protection to cyclists. The buffer between the cycle track and pedestrian clearway will be paved and surfaced with a detectable, tactile material and will accommodate street lighting and/or trees.

As demand for cycling increases, so too will the need for bike parking, and it is recommended that the City proactively install new racks and “post and ring” stands outside destinations and, in particular, subway stations and bus stops, as well as Bike Share stations along Yonge Street.

Quieter east-west residential streets adjacent to Yonge Street should be designed to create comfortable cycling routes. The design may include signs, pavement markings, and traffic calming elements. The following are identified as quiet street routes: Churchill Avenue / Church Avenue; North York Boulevard / Elmwood Avenue; Harlandale Avenue, and Avondale Avenue / Florence Avenue.

Intersection Improvements

At signalized intersections, the plan includes features for the safe movement of all road users, particularly related to the interaction between turning motorists and pedestrians and cyclists. Where sufficient right-of-way is available, the preferred design is to implement “protected intersection” corners that include a forward queueing area for cyclists and pedestrians and setback crossings from the adjacent roadway to improve sightlines between turning motorists and vulnerable road users.

The use of clear zone pavement markings (hatched pavement markings, together with “Do Not Block Intersection” signage) in intersections will also minimize the risk of operations being affected by queues reaching back from the downstream intersection.

Left Turn Restrictions

Currently, where the landscaped median exists on Yonge Street, left turns are restricted from the east-west streets. With the extension of the landscaped median along Yonge Street, left turns to and from Yonge Street are proposed to be restricted at seven (7) additional unsignalized intersections. By reducing the number of locations at which left turns are permitted, traffic flow is expected to be more efficient in the through lanes on Yonge. Safety is also improved for pedestrians and cyclists at these side street crossings by eliminating the hazard of motorists permissively turning across traffic.

Parking

There are over 14,000 publicly available parking spaces available within the Study Focus Area, operated by the Toronto Parking Authority, the TTC and private operators. The off-street parking garages and surface lots are not fully utilized, and it is estimated that at peak times on weekdays, there are typically at least 1,000 unused spaces (referring to typical pre-Covid pandemic conditions.) There are currently 255 parking spaces on Yonge Street; these are available only during off-peak hours (as there is no parking permitted during peak morning and afternoon travel periods on weekdays). These will be removed with the implementation of Transform Yonge. There is the opportunity to implement 39 full-time on-street parking spaces in laybys on Yonge Street from Sheppard Avenue to Finch Avenue. Also, side streets in the study area could potentially accommodate an additional full-time 95 spaces within a 6-minute walk of Yonge Street. The addition of these spaces plus the 39 spaces on Yonge Street mentioned above (i.e. total of 134 spaces) would equate to a net decrease of 121 spaces. There is also the potential to add part-time parking spaces on Beecroft Road and Doris Avenue.

Providing dedicated space for residential and commercial on-street loading is another issue that has been considered in relation to curbside uses. The North York Centre Secondary Plan indicates that loading for new developments should be provided on-

site. Thus, as development continues in the corridor, the need for on-street loading facilities will decrease. No additional civil works are expected to be required to accommodate loading needs.

Public Realm

The plan includes improvements to the public realm at Mel Lastman Square (shown below in **Exhibit ES-4**). Community events that showcase music, art, dancing, theatre, food, and sports are held at the Square year-round. This public function often requires the street to be closed off in its vicinity which suggests a natural need for integration with the streetscape and the public realm across the right-of-way.

Exhibit ES-4: Mel Lastman Square

Pedestrian Clearway Zones

Spanning between the inner edge of the cycle track buffer to the property line or building face, the pedestrian clearway zones will include an Edge Zone, a Furnishing and Planting Zone, a Pedestrian Clearway Zone, and a Frontage and Marketing Zone. Each of these zones will be designed to provide clear, unobstructed surfaces that meet current AODA standards, be designed for comfort and year-round use, incorporate passive stormwater measures where possible, with materials and design that are durable and easy to maintain, and with an overall timeless esthetic and uncluttered organization. Tree plantings will be included along the pedestrian clearway zone to increase pedestrian comfort and reduce heat island effects.

Public Art

Development of a Public Art Strategy will establish a vision, guiding principles and framework recommendations for its public art program. This strategy will serve as an

important and proactive guide in prioritizing sites that offer the most potential and impact for public art opportunities. Opportunity exists for the inclusion of public art in strategic locations within the corridor, particularly at Olive Square Park, Mel Lastman Square and in front of the Joseph Shepard Building. The Public Art Strategy will explore additional opportunities for location of public art, including integrating into major infrastructure, parks and open spaces, plazas, privately-owned public space (POPS), right-of-way and development sites.

Sustainability

The proposed corridor design embodies sustainability through enhanced pedestrian facilities, creation of dedicated cycling facilities, and improved connectivity to promote non-motorized modes of transportation. By providing facilities for active transportation choices, the use and reliance on motorized vehicles are expected to decrease, thereby enhancing air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Other sustainability elements will include the ability to store the first five millimetres[1] of storm events in expanded planting areas as well as the evapotranspiration function of the increased number of trees. The increase in tree canopy coverage, the increase in permeable and landscaped surfaces and the selection of paving materials with high Solar Reflectance Index (SRI) values will further reduce the urban heat island effect. The Toronto Green Street Technical Guidelines will guide future phases of design.

Cost Estimate

The estimated cost of the project, including streetscape and public realm improvements, is $60.44 million (2020 dollars). This includes utility relocations, major reconstruction of Yonge Street, intersection improvements, landscaping, public art, engineering and contingency.

VII. Next Steps

This ESR summarizes the extensive work undertaken to ensure that the future vision of Yonge Street between Highway 401 and Bishop/Hendon Avenue meets the needs of the present and future users of the space. Following the 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. Subject to approval of this Municipal Class Environmental

[1] Per *Wet Weather Flow Management Guidelines*, City of Toronto (2006)

Assessment Study, the subsequent detailed design assignment, approvals and the allocation of funding, and the implementation of Doris Avenue connection to Tradewind Avenue and the extension of Beecroft Road, construction for Yonge Street is anticipated to begin in 2026 or later. Various commitments to future work are documented in this ESR.