

INFORMATION SHEET

“STANDING UP FOR UNIONVILLE”

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TOPIC: TRAFFIC AND TRANSIT

LAST UPDATE: September 10, 2011

URA CONTACTS:

Peter Miasek (dmiasek@rogers.com) Committee Chair
Gord Mah, Adam Poon, Dave Wilson, Paul Morrison -committee members

BACKGROUND:

Traffic congestion consistently ranks as one of the top issues concerning URA members. The issue is not unique to Unionville - it is a Greater Toronto and Hamilton (GTHA)-wide problem that receives plenty of press. For example:

- Toronto City Summit Alliance, now known as Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance, (2007) showed that vehicle-kilometers of personal travel in the GTHA increased twice as fast as lane-km of road supply between 1986 - 2006
- The OECD (2009) cited the congestion problem as the leading productivity challenge that will affect GTHA international competitiveness
- A recent Toronto Board of Trade study (2010) shows that commute times in the GTHA are the highest among 19 cities surveyed - approximately 80 minutes per work day
- A Metrolinx study(2008) showed that the cost of congestion to commuters and the economy is \$6 Billion/yr, and will increase to \$15B by 2031 unless there is major transportation investment

There is a very large body of literature written on prevention/solutions to traffic congestion. First, however, it should be noted that for vibrant growing regions like the GTHA, some congestion is normal - it is unreasonable to suppose that traffic will be free flowing at all times of the day. However, the GTHA has gone beyond this healthy point and is now approaching a point of serious consequences which will get worse as our growth continues.

The current literature identifies three basic components to reduce traffic congestion

- Land use planning that emphasizes compact development and live-work-play developments, resulting in shorter commute distances and viable alternative travel modes for some people such as transit or active transportation
- Improved public transit with rapid, frequent, convenient, high quality service. High quality is needed to attract "choice passengers" - those who have a driving option. One advantage of transit is that capacity can usually be expanded significantly, as required, without expanding the land required.
- Strategic investments in road infrastructure. These include investments in intelligent transportation systems (eg adaptive traffic signals) and in gap-filling of the road grid. Experience shows that a fine grid of roads including collector roads is best for distributing traffic. These gap-filling projects, such as new crossings of 400-series highways or railways are beneficial.

Interestingly, road widenings for general purpose traffic beyond a basic two lanes each way plus left turn lanes do not appear to be an effective means of reducing congestion. Many studies have shown that the capacity rapidly fills up again as people make choices to drive more frequently or longer distances.

Numerous commentators have proposed that road tolls (ideally on all roads using a GPS-based tolling system with different rates based on location and time) is effective for reducing congestion. The idea is that unnecessary or inefficient trips would be reduced and the revenue could be used to fund transportation improvements.

CURRENT ISSUES:

This committee is newly established. Its mandate will be to be informed and to inform URA members on traffic and transit issues across all of URA's geography and environs. It will act in an advisory capacity to support URA committees working specific projects, such as Markham Centre or Upper Unionville. It will represent URA on any town or region-wide traffic or transit matters.

In 2008, in response to Markham citizen and council concerns, York Region suspended work on five Environmental Assessments in Markham - 16th Ave, Kennedy, McCowan, Leslie, and Bayview. The original plan had been to widen these roads. Instead, the Region stated they would launch a review of these roads and a search for other alternatives under a project called Sustainable Travel Choices. Peter Miasek was invited to join the working group. To date, this group has never met.

The York Region Transportation Master Plan (YRTMP) was finalized in late 2009. In the Unionville area, it identifies all day two way GO service and rapid transit corridors on Major Mackenzie, Highway 7, 407 Transitway, Steeles Ave, Warden Ave, and 9th Line. These are intended to carry Bus Rapid Transit or LRT on a dedicated right of way. Most of these BRT/LRT projects are also identified in the Metrolinx plan (The Big Move). However, only one (Highway 7 BRT) is funded at this time.

The YRTMP also identifies transit priority routes on 16th Ave, 14th Ave, McCowan, Kennedy and Woodbine. These are intended to carry bus traffic on a priority basis, and could include technologies such as traffic signal priority, queue jump lanes or HOV lanes. Presumably these options will be discussed by the Sustainable Travel Choices group if it ever gets started.

In May, 2010, Brian Lee of Markham's Engineering Department gave a well attended presentation to URA on land use and transportation, reiterating the solution summarized above.

In May, 2011, Peter Miasek, representing Transport Action Ontario (a Non Government Organization promoting sustainable transportation) and Mary Brawley, representing MAGIC (Markham Action Group for Improved Community – a coalition of 43 ratepayer groups including URA) approached Mayor Scarpitti with an idea to conduct a Forum on Traffic Congestion and Solutions for Markham. The objective was to educate the public on this challenging issue. Speakers would include experts from Metrolinx, York Region, Town of Markham and academia. The mayor was supportive.

In June, the Town released its draft Transportation Strategic Plan. Public consultation was planned for Oct/Nov 2011 via four public meetings. To avoid duplication, Peter and Mary will try to work with Town Staff to come up with an agenda that satisfies both our and their objectives.

HOW TO LEARN MORE:

Contact committee members.

URA OFFICIAL POSITION:

URA is getting progressively more concerned with the rapid pace of new development in our area and the slow pace of transportation improvements. A day of reckoning is coming. URA encourages Markham and York Region to initiate the Sustainable Travel Choices project asap, and to ensure that there is URA representation.

NEXT STEPS:

Participate in joint Town-MAGIC public consultations in Fall, 2011