



York Region

Infrastructure Master Plan Update
Public Consultation Centre 2, Meeting 2

Meeting Notes

Town of Markham
Civic Centre, Council Chambers
101 Town Centre Boulevard, Markham
6:30 pm-9:00 pm

November 15, 2007

I. Opening

Dave Hardy (Facilitator, Hardy Stevenson and Associates Limited) opened the session. He welcomed the 52 attendees and introduced the project team members.

Dave asked if there were any political representatives in attendance. Joseph Virgilio, Ward 3 Councillor from the Town of Markham, introduced himself. Also in attendance was Regional Councillor Jack Heath from Town of Markham.

Dave also asked if there were any First Nations representatives, and there were none. Dave then introduced Regional staff and the project team leaders in attendance.

II. Presentation

Paul May, Director of Infrastructure Planning at the Region of York, gave a presentation on behalf of the Region of York on the infrastructure Master Plans and York Region's sustainability principles. A copy of this presentation is available online at: www.york.ca/TMP.

III. Dialogue Session

Dave asked the attendees if they felt the Master Plans were headed in the right direction.

A Markham resident stated that he believes the water and wastewater systems are working well, but there is currently too much gridlock in Markham. He asked why there is gridlock at all, and questioned whether the process to study transportation in Markham had begun too late.

Paul May replied that it is important to recognize the population size of York Region, and to understand that York is growing at a very rapid pace. Any community the size of York Region will have some degree of traffic congestion. It is a sign of a strong economy. The challenge is to keep up with the pace of development. Paul added that the Region is running out of roads to widen. Other travel options must be considered, such as walking, cycling, transit and carpooling. If every York Region resident used one of these methods just once a week, there would be a 20% reduction in traffic congestion.

A resident noted that he took a Viva bus to attend the meeting. He commented that compact communities help reduce the need for travel. He suggested that major arterial roads such as Elgin Mills and Leslie be lined with commercial uses instead of houses, with the notion that people could walk or cycle to commercial areas.

Regarding the water and wastewater system, the resident urged everyone to be aware of the distinction between treated water and rainwater. The resident said he uses 4 rain barrels at home, and that his friends have even more rain barrels. He said that he receives 1300 litres of water through this method, and doesn't use York Region's water for outdoor uses. He said that he would like to see building codes mandate the use of rain barrels, because it's a free source of water. He said that treated water should not be used for outdoor uses.

The educational aspect of Water For Tomorrow, York Region's water efficiency initiative, is good. Throughout the Region the resident noted that average water consumption is 224 litres per person per day, and at his house it is 36 litres per day. He said that education is important, but the best way to ensure serious conservation would be through a four or five-fold increase in the price of water.

Dave Hardy asked the residents how he would suggest people can encourage their neighbours to conserve water.

The resident said that he would support increasing the price of water 4-5 times. People will then use their ingenuity to use less water. The resident said that the price of water is too low in Richmond Hill, and this is leading to wasteful

behaviours. He added that education is important, but we shouldn't rely on it. We have to raise price of water.

A resident asked about the proposed widening of 16th Avenue. Paul May stated that there are still some roads in York Region that need to be widened. Any roads in the Region widened to 6 lanes will include High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes. He added that HOV lanes, which provide better bus travel times, will encourage more people to take public transit.

The resident added that traffic congestion on 16th Avenue is only a problem for 30 minutes in the morning and afternoon peak periods. She suggested the Region get creative with promoting carpooling instead of widening 16th Avenue. Paul noted a Smart Commute initiative has been established to help promote carpooling in the Region. There is also a website that connects commuters who wish to carpool.

Another resident stated that widening any road to 6 lanes does not follow the principles of sustainable transportation. He routinely cycles along the HOV lanes on Don Mills. He asked if there has been a study on the use of HOV lanes at that location. He estimates that 50% of cars using those lanes are single occupant vehicles. He is also concerned about the lack of bike lanes in Markham.

Stephen Collins (York Region) noted that low-density housing has traditionally been developed in York Region. In the past, Markham residents wanted segregated land uses. Markham was not built for transit. Provincial legislation such as: Places to Grow, the Greenbelt Act, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan call for increased density in various parts of York Region, including Markham. This increased density will make transit more feasible. York is trying to promote multiple modes of travel now, but the way York's communities are planned has to change. In terms of widening from 4 to 6 lanes, the Region is looking for solutions, and aiming to promote transit and HOV use. The Region is looking 50 years into the future, and taking action to accommodate the needs of the future, and to manage traffic congestion.

A resident from Thornhill said that York Region should be complimented on the work done thus far on the study. One issue that is missing, however, is stormwater management. Supposedly, she said, this is a municipal responsibility. Thornhill is the rain barrel of York Region, and this is a problem. In August 2005 Thornhill experienced severe storms, and it is a miracle that there was no loss of life. If upstream development is continually permitted, this will be a significant problem. Markham does not have the funds for a stormwater facility.

The resident noted that many US cities have stormwater facilities based on surcharges, and she suggested that US examples should be examined in Markham. She said that residents in the southern part of York Region do not

have strong stormwater control, and infrastructure is not designed to accommodate climate change. She said that we have been lucky so far, but not too far in the future we might not be. The Region should consider stormwater impacts and the associated health impacts.

In response to these comments, George Zukovs (XCG Consultants) said there are many actions that the Region is undertaking to eliminate the stormwater at the source. The Region is completing a 5-year study on collection systems. Secondly, over many years the Region has put in pipes to relieve parts of the system and give alternate flow routes from the YDSS down to Lake Ontario. Third, there have been numerous storage elements installed into the collection systems. These storage elements are designed to take flow in, store it, and retain it. This is being done in Aurora and Newmarket.

Regarding stormwater, George said, our response needs to start with a recognition that everyone has a role to play in managing it. Homeowners, for example, can use rain barrels, and education about rainwater harvesting should be done. The Region is working with Conservation Authorities to develop educational initiatives. Conservation Authorities, additionally, are requiring that buildings be designed with various green infrastructure elements. Rainwater harvesting schemes and other initiatives are a part of this. Pervious pavements are also being examined.

Rather than putting all of our money into developing a 'big pond', George said, the trend now is to look at existing development. Grants, incentives and education are to be used, and people should be encouraged to develop their own solutions.

A resident who lives close to 16th Avenue commented that there are many people who do not know about the proposed plans to widen 16th. He asked how residents in the area are being contacted.

Another resident suggested that traffic gridlock exists today because of the way Councils in York Region have approved land development. The planning process has been crazy. The solution to gridlock is not expanding roads. Land use and transportation should be planned together.

Another resident asked about enhancing the existing transit system, and asked if the Region has a traffic computer. Paul May indicated the Region does have a traffic computer. The resident commented that until recently, traffic signals on segments of Kennedy Road and Warden Avenue were not synchronized. He added that signals in York should be timed to allow drivers to move more easily with fewer delays. He suggested that left turn signals be included at all intersections. He also noted that HOV lane violators should be punished, there should be dedicated bike lanes, and roads should only be widened as a last alternative.

Dave Richardson (MMM Group) noted that York Region now has a draft Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan, which recommends bike lanes on a large number of Regional roads. On the issue of traffic signals, there is often a challenge of coordinating with the communications service provider, such as Bell Canada, immediately after road reconstruction and widenings are complete. This can mean delays in implementing coordinated timing patterns at signals along a newly widened road such as Warden Avenue.

There is also a challenge when designing signal coordination plans for roads experiencing heavy two-way traffic, as is the case on Warden. In these situations, there is no single “peak” direction during the rush hours, which means that coordination patterns must be balanced for both directions. Designing signal coordination for a one-way street such as Richmond or Adelaide in Toronto is relatively simple. When left turn signals are utilized for all left turn movements at an intersection, this means time must be taken from the heavier through movements, which results in longer delays.

A resident made another comment about 16th Avenue. He only learned of the proposed widening three weeks ago. All of the local residents he has spoken to are opposed to the expansion. He would like to see a drawing of what is being proposed. Based on his experience working for the Toronto Transit Commission, he believes HOV and reserved bus lanes (RBL) do not work unless they are policed.

A young student noted that he is an environmentalist, and chooses to walk to school. He crosses Kennedy Road to get to school, and has safety concerns once the road is widened to 6 lanes. Stephen Collins agreed that safety is a concern. There is no answer to this problem yet, but the Region is working on it.

A resident asked what plans have been made for Highway 7. Paul noted that a rapid transit line has been approved for Highway 7, and is in the design stage now. There will be reserved bus lanes in the centre lanes of Highway 7, with stations located in the median at signalized intersections. If demand permits, the line could later be converted to light rail.

A resident asked if the rapid transit line would alleviate congestion on other east-west routes. Paul stated that the system needs a combination of many initiatives to reduce car usage.

A resident commented that where people live and work in York Region is an important factor in traffic congestion and travel behaviour. Paul May explained that since 1986 the Region has participated in a GTA wide travel demand survey every five years. In a telephone survey, the Region asks randomly selected residents for information on travel trips made the previous day. The information collected is used to calibrate the travel demand-forecasting model.

Markham Councillor Joe Virgilio stated that bicycles are difficult for most people to use for commuting if dedicated lanes are not provided. He asked why it is necessary to widen roads, adding that HOV lanes will not solve our problems. He asked what would happen to traffic congestion and transit in Markham if no more roads were widened. He wants to consider do nothing alternatives. Paul May stated the “do nothing” alternative has been considered in planning to 2031. Congestion is projected to increase significantly if no action is taken. Buses will be caught in that traffic too. Councillor Virgilio asked where the traffic is going to go. Because the City of Toronto will not widen roads, the residents of Markham will suffer as traffic is bottlenecked crossing the boundary of Toronto and Markham. Paul noted that not every trip starting in York Region ends in Toronto. Studies show that more York Region residents are commuting within York for their trips to and from work. The Region is promoting carpooling as congestion is continually worsening. Councillor Virgilio asked if the Region could present information on the “do nothing” alternative to the public, adding that public education is important. He wondered why there aren’t more residents attending this public meeting. Paul explained that at the start of the Master Plan process every household in York Region was notified by mail. It is an enormous challenge to notify residents and generate interest in the process. The public consultation centres have also been advertised in local papers.

A Markham resident asked what has been accomplished since the 1986 and 1996 transportation studies. The expansion of Warden between Apple Creek and Denison keeps being extended. He asked when it will finally be done. He admits that he will not take transit because it is more economical for him to drive alone. He suggested that fare integration between York Region Transit and other systems will encourage more people to take transit. Paul explained that of the 42 recommendations coming from the 2002 York Region Transportation Master Plan, 72% have been achieved. On the fare issue, Paul agrees that integration is important. The Greater Toronto Transit Authority (GTTA) is developing a smart card to integrate fares. It will still be a double fare when passengers cross regional boundaries, but it will be a more convenient system. Fare integration is ultimately beyond York Region’s control.

A resident commented on the issue of air pollution, and asked why roads would be widened, when it will just increase driving and pollution.

Another resident noted that staggering work hours may help further alleviate traffic congestion. As a high school teacher, she suggested shifting school hours.

A resident said that Metro Toronto is undertaking an initiative to help homeowners disconnect rain pipes from their systems, and it is an excellent program, which promotes separation from roof drains. The resident said that

York Region should have something similar. Such an initiative would reduce water use and flooding.

Stephen Fung responded on behalf of York Region. He said there are some Inflow and Infiltration reduction programs that York Region is developing to limit the amount of water getting into the sanitary system. A few years ago York Region completed a study to look at the sources of Inflow & Infiltration in Richmond Hill, Aurora and Newmarket, and the Region has been working with the towns to eliminate some of the existing connections from roofs to sanitary sewers. There are some programs ongoing. Compared to Toronto, he added, York Region is a much newer area. The number of connections in York Region is much less. Additionally, the practice of connecting roofs to sanitary sewers is now not allowed in new buildings in YR.

A resident of East Toronto said there have been no new roads in his neighbourhood in 50 years. The transit service is great, but there is still traffic gridlock.

A resident of Markham suggested living closer to work in order to reduce travel time and traffic congestion.

Another resident living near 16th Avenue commented that the majority of comments provided at the public meeting have been opposing road widening projects in Markham. He drives to the nearest GO Transit station and takes the train to downtown Toronto. He believes that adding more lanes gives residents the message that it is ok to drive, and that is not the message that should be delivered.

Dave Hardy thanked the residents for participating in the PCC and closed the dialogue session. The residents were notified that minutes will be retrievable on the Region's website and the Consultants will take into consideration all the comments noted today.

END OF SESSION