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## TOWN CENTRE / CEDARLAND RAPIDWAY ALIGNMENT TOWN OF MARKHAM

**The Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, January 9, 2008, from the Vice-President, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation:**

### 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the modified alignment for the rapid transit system along Cedarland Drive and Warden Avenue as a local refinement to the alignment presented in the Highway 7 Corridor Transit Environmental Assessment.
2. Council authorize staff to submit the modified alignment to the Ministry of the Environment for approval.

### 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to modify the approved Highway 7 Corridor Public Transit Improvements Environmental Assessment alignment of the rapid transit system along Cedarland Drive and Warden Avenue through the IBM lands.

### 3. BACKGROUND

The Highway 7 alignment is approved. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Highway 7 rapid transit corridor was completed in August 2005 and submitted to the Minister for approval. The EA was approved by the Minister in November 2006.

The preferred alignment for the rapid transit system, as described in the approved EA, shows an alignment for the rapidways leaving Highway 7 at the Town Centre Boulevard intersection and travelling southward on Town Centre Boulevard, passing through the IBM lands, crossing the Rouge River valley on a new bridge and aligning with the Civic Mall across Warden Avenue in the Markham Centre downtown master plan (*see Council Attachment 1*).

This alignment was considered, on balance, to be the alignment that offered “the greatest long term benefit in support of both existing commercial and planned residential development in this local area”.

### **The EA contemplated further consultation with IBM**

Extensive discussions were held with local area stakeholders during the EA process and in particular with IBM. Ultimately, the EA was submitted with an alignment through the IBM alignment campus with IBM's concurrence that they would be able to further consider the transit ROW once funding was secured. IBM indicated that they would be "in a better position to confirm their long term land needs and determine if they could accommodate the rapid transit right of way".

The EA proposed to consult with IBM "prior to commencing preliminary and detailed designs to determine whether a right of way and station can be integrated within their property". If a resolution with IBM could not be reached, a modified alignment would be required. This consultation has now taken place.

### **Council authorized preliminary engineering to commence on Highway 7**

At its meeting on June 21, 2007, Council authorized the York Region Rapid Transit Corporation (YRRTC) to commence the preliminary engineering (PE) work on the Highway 7 corridor from Richmond Hill Centre Terminal to Kennedy Road. At the same time, design work was also commenced on a section of the Highway 7 rapid transit corridor through the heart of the Markham downtown plan, along the proposed Civic Mall from Warden Avenue to Birchmount Road.

This project was identified for early funding in order to be operational in at least this section, to coincide with the occupancy of the residential buildings planned and currently under construction adjacent to the corridor. Occupancy of the first buildings along the north side of the Civic Mall is expected to commence in late summer/early fall of 2008, with occupancies continuing in subsequent phases of the building programme into early 2009.

### **Some funding for Highway 7 has been recommended by Metrolinx (GTTA)**

In the Fall of 2007, the Region was requested to submit its priority transit projects to the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority (now Metrolinx) for consideration under the proposed "Quick-Wins" projects programme. As part of the submission, the Highway 7 rapid transit corridor from Pine Valley Drive to Kennedy Road was identified for consideration.

In its report of November 23, 2007, Metrolinx recommended that the Highway 7 project, amongst other transit projects in York Region, be qualified as a category 1 project under the MoveOntario 2020 programme. Further analysis and screening is required as part of the programme, and by Spring 2008, Metrolinx will be in a position to confirm if full capitalization will be recommended. In light of the anticipated securing of funding and commencement of the PE effort, staff initiated discussions with IBM representatives to review and confirm the recommended alignment.

### **Meetings were held with IBM representatives**

Over the past several months meetings were held with IBM representatives to discuss the proposed alignment and seek IBM's endorsement. Regional staff was joined on most occasions by senior Town of Markham staff. IBM retained independent traffic consultants to help them understand the issues and impacts on their property and to make recommendations.

Senior IBM officials advised that they were unable to support the alignment of the rapidway through the IBM campus. The main reasons cited were the preservation of and the security of its property.

IBM requested that the Region identify an alternative alignment and expressed their support for the rapid transit system. In addition IBM acknowledged the benefits to their staff from the rapid transit service and pledged their cooperation in identifying and securing an alternative alignment.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

### **Staff re-examined alternative alignments**

In anticipation of further consultation with IBM, staff undertook a review of the alternative alignments identified in the EA. The EA considered four alternatives in addition to the preferred alignment along Town Centre Boulevard. Three of the alignments considered Warden Avenue as the north-south route connecting Highway 7 to the Enterprise Civic Mall. The fourth alternative examined taking the rapidways further across Highway 7 to a proposed Birchmount Road intersection, taking the rapidways south along Birchmount Road to connect to the Civic Mall. This alternative was quickly discarded because of the indeterminate timing to acquire the land to extend Birchmount Road northward from the south side of the Rouge Valley to Highway 7, and the potentially high cost of bridging the valley. The Warden Avenue alignments (Highway 7 – Enterprise Drive) were further reviewed to assess their functional feasibility and potential property impacts. Although a Warden Avenue alignment was identified as a fall-back to the preferred route in the EA, each of the three alternatives had serious functional and/or property impacts.

### **A modified Town Centre Blvd. alignment along Cedarland was identified**

Through the re-examination process staff identified a modification of the preferred Town Centre alignment not specifically addressed in the original EA, but combining a number of advantages of the five alternatives.

The modified alignment retains the preferred routing from Highway 7 south along Town Centre Boulevard to Cedarland Drive. However, instead of continuing southward through the IBM property, the alignment turns eastward, in segregated rapidways, along the south half of the existing Cedarland ROW, then turns southward and travels along the west side

of Warden Avenue, crossing the Rouge River and turning eastward through a “jug handle” arrangement to align with the Civic Mall, where it continues as per the approved EA to the Unionville GO station and out to Kennedy Road. The proposed modified alignment is shown on *Council Attachment 2*.

A rapid transit station is located near the intersection of Cedarland and Warden Avenue to serve IBM, the southern phases of the Liberty project and the proposed land uses and development densities along the east side of Warden Avenue.

### **The modified alignment has been reviewed by the Town of Markham**

The Cedarland alignment modification has been reviewed by Markham staff. Staff received Markham’s comments on the proposed alignment and has made adjustments to the plan and layout to reflect the Town’s comments. Staff also presented the proposed Cedarland alignment to Markham’s Development Services Committee for comment. There was general consensus that the Cedarland alignment was a workable alternative.

### **Staff has consulted with area stakeholders**

The proposed alignment modification has also been presented to area stakeholders, including Liberty Development whose property abuts Cedarland Drive and to Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). Preliminary feedback from Liberty Development indicates support for the proposed modification.

Staff has been working with TRCA staff to assess the impact of crossing the Rouge River by extending the existing bridge structure to accommodate the rapidways. TRCA staff has indicated that they believe this alternative is feasible and represents a better alternative to a separate crossing. Staff continue to work with the TRCA to establish the appropriate design criteria for the bridge extension crossing. Staff will be contacting two adjacent landowners on smaller land holdings on the west side of Town Centre Boulevard to secure their support.

### **The modified alignment was presented to IBM**

The alignment modification has been tabled with IBM and presented internally to senior staff. Rapid transit staff has received written confirmation that IBM is prepared to work with the Region to secure the Cedarland Drive alignment.

IBM identified two technical issues remaining to be resolved, namely: to preserve the existing “right-in” movement into their property from the southbound lanes of Warden Avenue at their private driveway access location, and to provide a fully functioning “left turn” movement into their property from westbound Cedarland Drive at Town Centre Boulevard. Staff is currently preparing revised drawings to address the two issues for further review with IBM.

### **The modified alignment will need to be submitted to MOE**

The modified alignment for the rapid transit system along Cedarland Drive and Warden Avenue is a local refinement to the alignment that was presented in the Highway 7

Corridor Transit EA. The modified alignment will be submitted to MOE, along with a rationale for the modification and the results of our consultation with affected stakeholders.

Local modifications and refinements to a project during the post EA design phase can be somewhat common and an expeditious MOE review and approval process is expected, particularly in light of general agreement from directly affected stakeholders.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The proposed alignment along Cedarland Drive is expected to have a comparable or reduced capital construction cost impact compared to the preferred alignment through IBM. The acceptance of the modified alignment will have no effect on the cost for the PE effort as authorized by Council for the Highway 7 (H3) segment from Kennedy to Richmond Hill terminal. Staff will report back on any land arrangements required to implement the alternative alignment.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

The proposed Cedarland Drive alignment preserves the advantages of the original EA alignment by continuing to serve the existing employment and future planned development uses and densities along the Town Centre corridor. The proposed alignment continues to support the urban transformation, streetscape and building placements planned and currently being developed along the public rights-of-way.

The modified alignment has the added advantage of moving the intermediate station to the Cedarland Drive and Warden Avenue intersection, where it will serve the development uses and densities planned in the Liberty south precinct, as well as the developments being planned along the east side of Warden Avenue. Also, the modified alignment has the added advantage of reducing the potential environmental impact on the Rouge Valley by eliminating a separate crossing and consolidating the crossing with the existing Warden Avenue bridge.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Council previously authorized the commencement of the PE effort on the Highway 7 rapidway corridor from Kennedy Road to Richmond Hill Centre Terminal. The approved EA for this corridor established a preferred alignment for the rapidways through the IBM lands to connect Highway 7 to the Civic Mall within the Markham Centre downtown plan. IBM has confirmed that it does not support the alignment through its private property for security reasons.

Staff has identified a modification of this alignment along Cedarland Drive and Warden Avenue that preserves the advantages of the preferred route. Staff has consulted area stakeholders, including area landowners, IBM, TRCA and the Town of Markham, and has received positive support for the modified alignment, subject to some technical fine-tuning.

This report seeks endorsement of the modified alignment that has been developed in consultation with affected stakeholders, and also seeks authorization to submit the modified alignment to MOE for approval. Timely resolution of this issue is essential in order to complete the PE work and be in a position to capitalize and construct the rapidways in the earliest timeframe.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(The two attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)*