South Yonge Street Corridor
Streetscape Master Plan Study
Draft Final
Executive Summary

January 2012

Prepared by:

In Partnership with:
Introduction

The Future...

Yonge Street is at the forefront of York Region’s city building initiatives. Designated as a Regional Corridor, Yonge is envisioned to be a pedestrian and cyclist-friendly street, lined with a lively mix of housing, shops, offices and meeting places. The proposed Yonge Subway Extension, linking Richmond Hill Centre to Finch Station, will serve to connect this vital corridor with other rapid transit initiatives including the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on Yonge Street, north of Bantry Avenue to Major Mackenzie Drive, serving York Region’s diverse communities, and providing linkages to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and beyond.

The need for a detailed streetscape plan for the Yonge Street corridor north of Steeles Avenue was identified by York Region and supported by the local municipalities including the City of Vaughan, the Town of Markham and the Town of Richmond Hill. The local municipalities each passed Council resolutions requesting that York Region commit funding to undertake a comprehensive and detailed streetscape study including an implementation and funding strategy for the South Yonge Street corridor and to expedite initiation of the study to ensure its completion and implementation in coordination with the construction of subway related works in consultation with each of the other local municipalities. These resolutions are founded on several key factors:

- York Region has identified the Yonge Street corridor as a high priority for investment in high-order transit (BRT and Yonge Street Subway);
- The cost effectiveness of public transit depends on high levels of transit ridership, and ridership levels depend on an urban environment which is attractive, pedestrian-friendly and complementary to transit service in terms of density, built form, roadway design and streetscaping;
- The detailed design of Yonge Street BRT facilities began early in 2009;
- The reconstruction of a significant part of the Yonge Street right-of-way will provide an opportunity to incorporate streetscape improvements during construction of the transit facilities;
- York Region has the authority to coordinate and implement a comprehensive streetscape improvement program for the Yonge Street corridor;
- Each of the area municipalities have undertaken intensification and urban design studies for the Yonge Street corridor, which have been integrated into the streetscape master plan;
- Streetscape improvements will facilitate redevelopment and support the proposed transit initiatives.
This study coordinates and integrates the previous studies undertaken for areas adjacent to and along Yonge Street into a cohesive and unified streetscape design strategy for Yonge Street itself. Key objectives of the Master Plan include:

- A bold, sustainable and achievable plan for Yonge Street.
- A vision and approach that support and advances implementation of various planning and urban design visions consistent with approved on-going local municipal studies, taking into consideration the design standards adopted by Regional Council for the Viva system.
- A strong gateway at Yonge Street and Steeles Avenue.
- A hierarchy of spaces along Yonge Street – gateways, transit plaza / nodes, public spaces, street level arcades, facades, landmark buildings, amenities to create a comfortable, sustainable and distinctive urban environment, setting the stage for transit-oriented development (TOD) surrounding each station.
- An implementation and phasing strategy including costs for Regional and Municipal Capital budgets.
The South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan will result in a “Main Street” for York Region that is Bold and Vibrant; Green and Sustainable; Practical and Achievable.

**Vision for Yonge Street**

**BOLD**
The Master Plan will establish a new standard in streetscape design that others will regard as “an urban design masterpiece”.

**SUSTAINABLE**
Yonge Street Corridor will showcase sustainable design innovation and green infrastructure making it a “people place” that supports community identity, human health, human comfort and social interaction.

**ACHIEVABLE**
The Master Plan establishes an urban design implementation strategy focused on achieving the long term design intent for the streetscape and the adjacent development sites, encouraging participation from local municipalities and other stakeholders.
Design Philosophy

**Access and Wayfinding**
“The access and wayfinding philosophy for the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan emphasizes the need to balance the role of Yonge Street as a regional street with increased neighbourhood level access through provision of generous pedestrian spaces and great service to all users – those who live, work, play and visit the Yonge Street corridor.”

**Built Form, Place-Making + Public Art**
“The “Place-Making” philosophy for the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan will focus on establishing a strong and cohesive streetscape that supports a “hybrid” urban experience that authentically “samples” the series of existing and anticipated character areas along Yonge Street. These include the primary intensification centres at the Yonge-Steeles Centre and the Richmond Hill-Langstaff Centre, the historic Thornhill local centre intensification area and the Yonge Street primary intensification corridor segments that link the primary and local centres.”

**Fundamentals of Street Design**
“The street design for the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan will become a place that people will “travel to” rather than “travel through” as the implementation of the subway becomes a reality. It will combine the functional requirements of street design in an urban setting with the qualitative elements that ensure the street is accessible, becomes a destination both day and night and creates vibrant social spaces that define community focus.”
Green Streets + Sustainable Design

“The sustainable design philosophy for the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan encompasses the natural and physical environment, the social environment and the economic environment. Green infrastructure offers a number of benefits including mitigation of urban heat island effects, reduction of energy demands, reduction of stormwater flows, protection from flooding, sequestration of carbon, filtration of air and water pollutants as well as a range of aesthetic improvements, social, community and economic benefits.”

Implementation + Maintenance

“The implementation strategy for the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan will focus on achieving the long term vision through a series of progressive steps. This will require a collaborative approach across the jurisdictions as well as enforcement of development standards to achieve the goals of the plan and create a consistent design expression for the streetscape. The approach to implementation is based on actual program and project schedules and financial forecasts for the subway construction that is integrated and supported by policy at all levels, establishes a clear time frame for development and is widely supported by the community.”
The concept plan is a Linked District Approach that is centered on one strong street that recognizes local character and features. The districts, or character areas, are linked with threshold zones that provide the appropriate transition between each area. Streetscape elements are generally consistent throughout the study corridor; however, variations in some elements may occur where special conditions are present, such as street tree planting, median location and parking.
The street design for the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan will become a place that people will “travel to” rather than “travel through” as the implementation of the subway becomes a reality. It combines the functional requirements of street design in an urban setting with the qualitative elements that ensure the street is accessible, becomes a destination both day and night and creates vibrant social spaces that define community focus. The function and nature of Yonge Street will change substantially once the proposed subway is completed. York Region’s “Transit FIRST” philosophy that the automobile is secondary is emphasized here.
Master Plan Elements

Unifying Elements

Unifying streetscape elements will be located throughout the right-of-way zone along the length of Yonge Street, in both the street design of the roadway and the boulevard. The roadway is primarily the vehicular zone, while the boulevard is generally the pedestrian zone. These elements will provide continuity along the entire length of the streetscape, while providing certain variations within the special character areas.

**Roadway**
- Travel lanes
- Bicycle lanes
- Median / Centre Left Turn Lane

**Boulevard**
- Continuity Strip Paving
- Lighting
- Street Furniture
- Wayfinding / Signage

Character Areas Philosophy

Three strategies are required to create distinct identity for the character areas and thresholds along Yonge Street – one that builds on existing character in some districts, one that creates appropriate new character in other districts and one that leverages the opportunities inherent in the infrastructure thresholds.

**Strategy 1 - Protect and Enhance Existing Character**
Further developing the existing character areas such as the Clark Station district, Old Thornhill and New Thornhill districts to enhance their distinct characters will advance the overall streetscape identity and provide variation and along the corridor.

**Strategy 2 - Create New Character**
Developing urban character treatments for places along Yonge Street that are currently slated for major re-development including the Steeles to CN Rail Bridge district, the Longbridge / Langstaff district and the Richmond Hill Centre will also be important to the overall continuity and success of the streetscape plan. Utilizing a range of consistent strategies and techniques for these challenging areas will help to unify Yonge Street throughout the study area.

**Strategy 3 - Leverage Infrastructure**
In addition, the ability to “leverage the opportunities” related to the major infrastructure threshold components represents the other important strategy. The CN Bridge offers the possibility of creating a much needed public space along Yonge Street. The Don River Bridge provides excellent viewing into the natural areas of the valley as well as opportunities for pedestrian access to the valley. The Highway 407/Hydro corridor presents the chance to create a large scale, bold landscape expression.
Distinct Character Areas

Yonge Steeles Gateway District

- Distinctive Urban Character
- 4 Corner Treatment
- Vibrant Streetscape and People Friendly Spaces
Distinct Character Areas

CN Rail Bridge Threshold

- Elevated Platform Park
- Pedestrian Viewing

Plan View

Finishes and Colour Palette

Sitting Areas

Materials

Specialty Lighting
Distinct Character Areas

Clark Station District
- Urban Transit Plaza

Plan View

Subway Entrance Plaza
Street Trees
Specialty Lighting

Perspective
Distinct Character Areas

Old Thornhill Village District

- Heritage Community Character
- Streetscape as Integrator
- Old and New

Plan View

Interpretive Signage

Specialty Planting

Paving Palette

Perspective
Distinct Character Areas

Don River Bridge Threshold

- Enhance Natural Valley Features
- Public Art as Infrastructure
- Pedestrian Connection and Viewing

Plan View

Specialty Lighting
Public Art Elements
Planting

Materials Palette
Viewing Areas
Distinct Character Areas

New Thornhill District

- Transition from Don River
- Double Row of Street Trees
- Mid-block Links

Plan View

Specialty Lighting

Paving Palette

Street Tree Planting
Distinct Character Areas

Highway 407 Threshold

- 407 Hydro Art Park
- Pedestrian and Open Space Connections
Distinct Character Areas

Richmond Hill Centre District
- Richmond Hill Centre/ Langstaff UGC
- Transit Integration

Plan View

Paving Palette
Specialty Planting
Tree Planting

Perspective
Streetscape Conditions

Yonge Steeles Gateway District

Key Plan - Sections

Section A-A

The pavement width will respond to the operational requirements during the Pre-Subway and Subway phases.

Section B-B

The pavement width will respond to the operational requirements during the Pre-Subway and Subway phases.
Old Thornhill Village District

The pavement width will respond to the operational requirements during the Pre-Subway and Subway phases.
New Thornhill District

Section E-E

The pavement width will respond to the operational requirements during the Pre-Subway and Subway phases.

Key Plan - Sections

Streetscape Conditions

The pavement width will respond to the operational requirements during the Pre-Subway and Subway phases.
Streetscape Conditions

Richmond Hill Centre District

The pavement width will respond to the operational requirements during the Pre-Subway and Subway phases.
The Phasing Plan was prepared in response to the reality that no final decision on the timing and funding of the subway is imminent. In the absence of a decision and accompanying funding for the subway, Yonge Street must continue to function as a major commuter route accommodating increasing traffic flow and functions for the foreseeable future.

The prime assumption upon which the Pre-Subway Plan is built is that it will continue to use existing roadway infrastructure including pavement width and curb lines. The Plan identifies areas of boulevard where implementation of the Streetscape Master Plan could potentially take place without compromising the roadway and traffic functions or that would require re-construction when the subway is built.

The Pre-Subway Plan represents the “early wins” in building the Streetscape Master Plan.

**Condition A:** Open-cut areas that cannot be developed until subway construction is complete (Ultimate Plan).

**Condition B:** Areas where the Master Plan can be slightly modified using existing curbs (Pre-Subway Plan).

**Condition C:** Areas where roadway widths are narrower than the proposed design and can be expanded with no loss of transportation function (Pre-Subway Plan).

**Condition D:** Areas where the current roadway is wider by 1.5 to 2.5 metres than the proposed allocation and it would be preferable to wait until the road is narrowed to achieve a more spacious pedestrian zone (Ultimate Plan).
Capital Costs

The proposed standards for Yonge Street are based on the Streetscape Master Plan for South Yonge Street predicated on the construction of the Yonge Street subway from Finch to Richmond Hill Centre. As the “Main Street” for York Region, the Streetscape Master Plan for South Yonge Street envisions a modern, vibrant, multi-functional urban streetscape flanked by a variety of land uses including medium to high density residential, at-grade retail and commercial uses, as well as the protection and enlargement of existing heritage areas. The proposed streetscape standards and associated capital costs for Yonge Street reflect this character.

Cost Estimate
The order of magnitude cost estimate for the full build-out of the Streetscape Subway Plan (Ultimate) is approximately $45,000,000 (+ HST) excluding underground power distribution and other utilities, and public art. This amounts to an average cost of $8.0 million per kilometre.

The order of magnitude cost estimate for the Streetscape Pre-Subway Plan is approximately $38,000,000 (+ HST), excluding underground power distribution and other utilities and public art. This amounts to an average cost of $6.78 million per kilometre.

Existing Capital Costs

Three existing standards and associated costs within York Region have been reviewed. These include streetscapes without medians, streetscapes with medians, and enhanced streetscapes, such as those included in the vivaNext projects.

Capital Costs – Existing Streetscape Policy (per km)
The costs are based on 2011 Urban Cross Section from Transportation Services, Roads – Capital Delivery. The total cost for streetscape including street trees, sidewalks, and a median totals approximately $4.5 million/km. This figure excludes the cost of utilities.

Capital Costs – Enhanced Streetscapes (per km)
Enhanced streetscape costs within the Region (i.e. vivaNext projects) amount to approximately $6.1 - 7.2 million/km. These enhanced streetscape costs include substantial upgrades from the other existing standards in terms of quality of materials and design.

Together, these factors provide an overall level of accuracy of approximately ±20%. Based on this, the anticipated costs for the Streetscape Master Plan includes a 20% contingency.
The maintenance and operational costs for the streetscape are based on the itemization of considerations and components as outlined below that are required to ensure the proper care required for the longevity and attractiveness of the initial investment.

Recommended Maintenance + Operating Costs

The maintenance and operational costs for South Yonge Street are detailed in the South Yonge Street Phase 5 Report. The costs presented are based on the VivaNext H3 Project through which cost assumptions are presented for enhanced streetscapes within York Region. Local municipal input into the projected maintenance costs are also accounted for in the figures.

It is estimated that maintenance costs per annum will be in the range of $300,000-$350,000 / km depending on the character area and streetscape elements.

Key Assumptions

Hardscape
- Concrete Sidewalk (3m wide each side).
- Pavers on concrete base.
- Streetprint - Cleaning and repair costs assume washing / colouring once a year, more sweeping, repainting every 15 years.
- Median without planting (excluding public art).
- Crosswalks (all 4 arms) - Repainting every 15 years.

Softscape
- Tree - Pruning, watering, mulching / fertilizing, infiltration / irrigation system maintenance / flushing.
- Planters - Watering / plant maintenance in addition to tree care.
- Ground cover Planting - Trash removal and minor plant maintenance needs.

Site Furnishings and Lighting
- Bike Racks – Graffiti removal.
- Trash Cans - Graffiti removal.
- Benches - Graffiti removal.
- Road and Pedestrian Lighting maintenance.
- LED fixtures – Graffiti abatement, ongoing operation / repair.
Funding Options

Potential Funding Sources include...

- Development Charge Funds
- Section 37 Benefits
- Business Improvement Area (BIA) Funding
- York Region Municipal Streetscape Partnership Program
- VivaNext

Other Funding Partners

- While not directly applicable to the “usual” funding sources for streetscape there may be other “non-conventional” sources and / or partnerships with stakeholders that should be investigated, including:
  - Highway 407 ETR
  - CN Rail
  - Hydro One
  - Private Donors / Sponsors for public art
  - Environmental Partnerships (e.g. TRCA, etc.)
Key Recommendations

Leadership and Support for Implementing the Streetscape Master Plan

- York Region to lead the implementation of the Streetscape Master Plan in collaboration with local municipalities and the private sector to achieve commitment towards creating a world class street.
- Support for local policies that integrate the South Yonge Street Corridor Streetscape Master Plan and speak to the importance of this primary urban corridor.
- Continued communications with major stakeholders such as York Region Rapid Transit Company, Powerstream, MTO / 407 ETR, CN Rail, and City of Toronto.

Major Focus on Funding the Streetscape Master Plan

- Leverage existing funding opportunities for streetscape design through the development process.
- Explore alternative funding sources for implementation to complement existing sources.
- Establish Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) for Vaughan, Markham, and Richmond Hill business owners.
- Explore harmonization of operations/maintenance practices in partnership with local municipalities.

Establish Implementation Teams that support and facilitate the Streetscape Master Plan

- Establish a Streetscape Implementation Team that will focus on the planning, monitoring, evaluating, and achieving efficiencies between local and Region operations/maintenance. The team will also be tasked to facilitate the development process along this corridor.
- Establish a Public Utilities Coordination Committee dedicated to South Yonge Street in planning and coordinating utilities within right-of-way in support of the streetscape master plan. A major objective of this committee may be to develop implementation options in integrating utilities seamlessly into an urban context.
- Establish Public Art Steering Committee that is dedicated to outlining opportunities for siting public art on public / private property, and the review of public art proposals based on a Shared Public Art Policy for South Yonge Street.