



"YOUR VOICE MAKES OUR VOICE STRONGER"

<http://unionvilleresidents.ca>

York Region
Transportation Services
Colin, Wong P. Eng Project Manager
via email: roads.ea@york.ca

January 8, 2020

Dear Colin:

**Comments on Environmental Study Report (ESR) for 16th Avenue Woodbine Avenue
to York/Durham Line**

The URA (Unionville Residents Association) is one of Markham's largest and most active resident associations. Many of our members are very concerned about the proposal to widen 16th Avenue as outlined in the recently published ESR. We have formed a committee to deal with the matter. I have been tasked to lead it.

Our concerns fall into 3 bundles: the stakeholder engagement process, the overall strategic case for widening, and other possible alternatives that should be more fully considered.

1. Stakeholder Engagement

[Appendix D](#) of the ESR report published Dec 19th lists "Agency and Stakeholders". However, this lists corporations, government agencies and property owners only. There is no mention of ward councillors or resident groups. Furthermore, there was no other formal stakeholder process involving residents as there is for the Kennedy Road and McCowan Road EA studies. Appendix D also documents a review of the proposals on September 16th 2019 held with the City of Markham - again staff only, no councillors and hence nobody reached out to any affected ward councillors or their residents at that time.

Appendix C lists correspondence with 120 individuals who contacted your team. While the level of detail in the responses is impressive, this is a small number compared to the thousands of impacted residents.

We have been told that the study team used social media for outreach. How did that work? Did one have to be a Region follower on Twitter for example to receive the outreach?

There is another engagement concern, although not part of the EA study, that needs to be documented. The timing of the York Region decision on Dec 19th to accelerate the necessary funds into the 10 year capital plan for 16th between Woodbine and Kennedy came as a big surprise to many. It was not until the

meeting of you and your team with several residents on Dec 17th that this date become known to us. We had previously been told at a City of Markham DSC meeting on Oct 15th that such a decision would not be taken until after a planned transportation workshop now taking place on Jan 22nd. The matter at DSC was for Markham to respond to a Region request for comments on moving capital from a 404 flyover project to the 16th Ave project instead, in order to accelerate 16th Ave. Why did the Region go ahead without an answer from Markham?

2. Overall Strategic Case

As a result of the planned widenings, the residents of Unionville are going to be closely surrounded by 6 lane arterial roads on all sides. Many of those who are aware of the plan view this as undesirable. They cite increased pollution and safety concerns, as well as the feeling of being boxed in. Many other communities in North America are no longer using widening as a congestion solution, focusing on better and more frequent transit for example, not space for ever more cars. [The Government of Ontario](#) expects Toronto's population to rise from 2.96 million in 2018 to 4.27 million in 2046, an increase of 44.5 per cent, with growth in Durham, Halton, Peel and York projected to be significantly faster than the Ontario average, with the addition of over 2.1 million people to the suburban GTA. Commenting on this the [Globe & Mail Jan 3rd](#) said "Try to imagine millions of new commuters, all trying to drive to work on the GTA's already gridlocked highways. It can't be done".

There is also the matter of [induced demand](#), where traveller behaviour changes after new road capacity is installed, so that the new capacity is very rapidly filled up again. Result being, you are no further ahead. The seminal paper on induced demand was written by Professor Matthew Turner of the University of Toronto ("The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion: Evidence from US Cities, by Duranton and Turner, published in American Economic Review 101, October, 2011). Was induced demand considered in the strategic case?

Given this context, if indeed we cannot accommodate everybody driving to work by car anyway, where is the overall strategic case for road widening? Could \$150 million be better spent on perhaps significantly improved transit, better connected transit, more frequent transit, transit on request, first/last mile transit, perhaps even free transit?

There are also megatrends in society at large that need consideration. For example, in an [RBC forecast](#) published January 6, it says "*the proportion of working-age Canadians is expected to fall to 1.7 for every youth and senior by 2030, down from 2.3 in 2010*". Were changing demographics taken into account in the strategic case? Also, there are changes in transportation technology, such as automated vehicles and shared mobility, that need to be considered. Future travel demand is much more uncertain than cited in the ESR.

3. Other Alternatives

The alternatives looked at in the ESR were very limited and only evaluated superficially. It really appears that the preferred alternative was preselected and the report written to simply paper this conclusion. There are at least 5 other alternatives that should be evaluated before the ESR is approved as complete.

3.1 Intersection Improvements Only. During the settlement process with York Downs last year, it was discovered that significant congestion benefits could be achieved by just improving intersections, at

Warden and Kennedy with 16th Ave. Given that the intersections are the bottlenecks, how much of the desired changes could be achieved with intersection improvements only? Techniques such as the displaced left turn as described in this article from the [US DOT](#) could be used and would also improve safety.

3.2 Improve transit priority. Were options such as widening near intersections only for transit queue jump lanes and giving transit signal priority to YRT buses, as with VIVA today, considered for the 16th Ave corridor?

3.3 Reversible Centre Bus Lane. Using a bus-only reversible centre lane could provide for speedy transit in the peak traffic direction. Buses would use general purpose lanes in the non-peak direction. This would reduce the amount of widening needed from 6 to 5 lanes. Left turns and other traffic management issues would be handled as on Highway 7 today. What are the pros and cons of this option?

3.4 Reduced Lane Widths and Reduced Speed Limits

The assumed lane widths in the ESR are 3.3 m for a general purpose lane and 3.5 m for an HOV/Transit lane. In some of the other EAs we have been involved with, it has been stated that lane widths would be reduced to 3.0 m (general purpose) and 3.2 (HOV/Transit) in certain pinchpoint areas (e.g. cemeteries), and that this is still a safe situation. We feel narrower lanes should be studied for the entire corridor, as they offer many benefits:

- Reduces road speeds, eg 50 km/hr
- Provides more room for active transportation options, eg cycle track+ sidewalk rather than MUP. We feel that an MUP is not the preferred ultimate solution on a busy, intense corridor, especially in an era of e-bikes and e-scooters.
- Easier crossing for pedestrians
- Less disruptive to neighbourhood (noise, vibration, particulates)
- Less environmental issues (salt, storm water management) due to less hard surface
- Lower construction and maintenance costs

3.5 Alternative East/West Corridor. Major Mackenzie Drive is already designated as a rapid transit route, already has space for a centre lane for most of the same east west direction as the planned 16th Ave changes, and much of the existing residential environment is well set back from the road. Significant current and future developments are planned for Markham Rd north of 16th, and with no widening of 16th planned from McCowan to Markham Rd, this traffic will surely head north and west along Major Mack in the morning and reverse in the evening. There is also a very large FUA ([Future Urban Area](#)) planned along Major Mack, between Woodbine and Warden, with 12,000 dwelling units and 19,000 jobs. Would it not make more sense from many perspectives to construct this corridor first, instead of widening 16th Ave? Users of 16th Ave wishing to avoid any future congestion would then have the choice of Highway 7 or Major Mack as other options.

In conclusion, Colin, you can see that the URA has many concerns. We would like to request a meeting with you and your team ASAP to discuss further. This should be well in advance of February 3, in order to inform any Part II Order request that we may make, due on that date.

Yours truly,

Michael Gannon

Michael Gannon
Chair, URA Committee on Road Widenings

Cc: Veronica Restrepo - HDR
Doug McKay – York Region
Brian Titherington – York Region
Brian Lee – City of Markham
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