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407 TRANSITWAY

Dispute over route

By Abbe Edelson

The Highway 407 transitway, a dedicated route for buses across **York Region**, is a proposal more than a decade off in the distance.

But intense discussions already are under way between the **Ontario** government and the municipalities of **Markham** and **Vaughan** over the exact location of the route.

This week, Markham officials expressed optimism that the province may be listening to their concerns.

“They were very supportive of our plans to move the transitway,” Markham Regional Councillor **Jim Jones** told *NRU*, citing a meeting held last week among representatives of Markham, **Metrolinx**, the provincial transit agency and **Viva**, the York region transit service. The current plan by the Ontario **Ministry of Transportation** locates the transitway about 300 metres north of Highway 407, a route that Markham says interferes with its plans for Markham Centre.

By contrast, Markham wants to build the transitway only 25 metres north of Highway 407. The town commissioned **Adamson and Associates** to develop a revised plan for the Markham Centre. “The new plan elevates the entire ground level by 40 feet and includes structured parking with a convention centre, office buildings, a performing arts centre and world class retail,” said Jones.

The 407 transitway is expected to be built east of Highway 400 to Kennedy Road, with seven stations, access connections and a maintenance and storage yard.

A chief concern, **Markham** mayor **Frank Scarpitti** told *NRU*, is that “the alignment of the transitway does not deal with the integration of the proposed Markham Centre plan.”

A secondary plan is currently under development for the centre, which could be ready by June. But, said Jones, “we don’t yet have a firm date for its completion because it still has to go through a public consultation process which could take longer.”

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DOWNTOWN MISSISSAUGA

Pushing pause

Mississauga has temporarily halted all development applications for a portion of the city’s downtown core. Last week council approved an interim control by-law, effect immediately, to freeze new development in the area. The pause is designed to give the city time to study land use permissions in the context of downtown growth plans.

Over the next year no new development applications will be approved for an area bounded by Centre View Drive, Rathburn Road East, Hurontario Street, Webb Drive, Duke of York Boulevard and Confederation Parkway.

The city’s **Downtown21** plan, approved by council last September, sets out a vision for a more urban downtown as an intense, mixed-use area that is pedestrian friendly and transit-oriented. One of the key principles of the plan is to provide a development framework and urban design excellence.

However, the city’s planning department became concerned about the number of suburban-style developments in the downtown core. The city hopes to curb large-scale retail projects and other car-oriented developments in the downtown.

“Recently, large format type of retail developments, such as Whole Foods, Crate and Barrel and LCBO have located in the Downtown Core, near the transit terminal,” **Mississauga** planning and building commissioner **Ed Sajecki** wrote in his report to council. “This type of use is permitted

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As soon as the revised plan for the Markham Centre station is ready, it will be submitted to the **Ministry of Transportation** even if the secondary plan is not done, he said. “We expect they will revise the environmental assessment.”

An environmental assessment for the project was approved by Ontario’s environment minister **John Wilkinson** on February 28, 2011. **Robb Minnes**, ministry of transportation project manager for the 407 transitway, told *NRU* that it was necessary to complete the environmental assessment by the end of February, because “we need to protect the lands where it will be built, so they will not be sold off.”

The provincial environmental assessment includes a provision to amend its plan for the 407 transitway, in consultation with local municipalities and transportation authorities. “Should significant changes to land use plans and planned transit alignments agreed to in the future by all parties, the Ministry of Transportation will modify the 407 transitway environmental project report,” states the report.

Minnes made clear that adjustments are still possible. “We will change the plans for the 407 transitway project in the future, based on new urban design plans if all parties agree including local municipalities, Metrolinx/**GO Transit**, Viva, **York Rapid Transit** as well as the TTC [**Toronto Transit Commission**] in places such as **Richmond Hill**, where the subway will intersect.”

By 2031, York Region is expected to grow by approximately 500,000 people but Jones anticipates an even greater influx. He expressed concern that “uses will not be able to accommodate the increased population.” Minnes maintains that “modern bus technology can accommodate the population that is projected for this area.”

The Ministry of Transportation’s plans for the 407 transitway suggest that the transitway could be converted to Light Rapid Transit (LRT) in future. But Minnes warned “there is no schedule for the conversion to LRT. We would convert it to LRT, if at all, when there is ridership demand.”

Despite optimism over a possible route change, Scarpitti questions the need to proceed now with an environmental assessment now. He would have preferred to delay the process until Markham completed revisions to its land use plans.

“We don’t see the rush,” he said. “We wanted the ministry of transportation to hold on to their approval for another six months to a year.”

Meanwhile, community groups in the **City of Vaughan** are still concerned that the 407 transitway project will disrupt their residential neighbourhood and interfere with their access to green space adjacent to the proposed Concord station.

Vaughan councillor, **Sandra Yeung Racco** told *NRU* that “several residents in the community are opposed to the

province’s plan to locate the proposed Concord transitway station east of Keele St and just south of Highway 7. “They have expressed concerns about the proximity of the proposed station to the adjacent green space that is part of the Bartley Smith Greenway. The massive parking that’s planned will interfere with the community’s access to the green space.”

She added that “the community has been working to gain safe access to the green space for a number of years. They are also concerned with how the proposed station will create noise, increased traffic and negatively impact the neighbourhood.”

Vaughan is currently working on a secondary plan for Concord and plans to submit it to the ministry of transportation and will request they amend their plans for the transitway, said Yeung Racco. A completion date for the Concord secondary plan has not yet been announced as it still needs to be approved in Vaughan’s budget next month.



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• Sandra Yeung Racco

The City of Vaughan passed a resolution on February 15th that supported the community’s opposition to the location of the Concord station and requested the province to defer its final decision on the environmental assessment report and evaluate the community’s alternative plan to protect the greenway. The resolution also asked the province to consult with city officials and local residents during the city’s review of the Concord secondary plan.

Dr. Paulo Correa, chair of the **Concord** west residents ad-hoc committee, old *NRU* that the community’s alternate plan “moves the Concord station north of Highway 7. It makes much more sense for it to be located there where there are plans for intense development.”

The committee is working to preserve the green space adjacent to the Bartley Smith Greenway now owned by the **Ontario Realty Corporation**. As part of the community’s alternate plan, Correa explained “we want this green space transferred to the **Toronto Region Conservation Authority**.”

Correa is sceptical the provincial ministry will alter its plans for the transitway and continues to lobby the province.

Provincial plans for the 407 transitway are included in Metrolinx’s regional strategy: *The Big Move: Transforming Transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area*. On paper, the transitway is scheduled to built between 2023 and 2033, but no provincial dollars have been allocated as yet. **NRU**