

MEETING DATE: DECEMBER 9, 2002

SUBJECT: Streetcar Rapid Transit On St. Clair Avenue

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Commission:

1. Endorse the attached joint City-TTC report entitled, "Feasibility of Reserved Streetcar Right-of-Way on St. Clair Avenue", which recommends the undertaking of an environmental assessment regarding the establishment of an exclusive right-of-way for streetcars on St. Clair Avenue, between Yonge Street and Gunns Road, and regarding the extension of the 512 St Clair streetcar route, in an exclusive right-of-way, from Gunns Road to Jane Street, to be undertaken jointly by City of Toronto Transportation Services and Planning and TTC staff;
2. Forward this report to the Works and Planning and Transportation Committees of the City of Toronto in order to convey the Commission's support for the undertaking of the subject environmental assessment; and
3. Forward this report to Councillors Betty Disero, Joe Mihevc, Frances Nunziata, and Michael Walker, the St. Clair Avenue Business Improvement Association, and the City of Toronto Transportation Services, Planning, and Economic Development Departments.

FUNDING

Funds are available in the TTC's 2003 Budget for rapid transit studies, and these funds can be used for this study.

BACKGROUND

The TTC's five-year capital program includes the reconstruction of the majority of the streetcar tracks on St. Clair Avenue, between Yonge Street and Gunns Loop (just west of Keele Street), in 2004.

Councillors Disero and Mihevc have suggested that the new streetcar tracks could be constructed in a reserved right-of-way and that this concept could form the basis of a revitalization of St. Clair Avenue. TTC and City Transportation Services staff were requested to undertake a preliminary evaluation of the feasibility of establishing such an exclusive streetcar right-of-way on St. Clair Avenue. Also, Councillor Nunziata has expressed support for extending the 512 St Clair streetcar further west, from its current terminal at the Gunns Road loop to Runnymede Road.

The attached joint City-TTC report summarizes the work which has been done to date on these matters, and recommends actions which will allow these concepts to be developed more fully and comprehensively.

DISCUSSION

The 512 St Clair streetcar route operates on St. Clair Avenue, between Yonge Street and Gunns Road, just west of Keele Street. The route presently carries over 32,000 passengers per day or about 10 million passengers per year. Although the daily passenger volumes on this route are lower than those of some of the other streetcar routes in Toronto -- for example, the 504 King route carries about 51,000 passengers per day -- the 512 St Clair route is also a shorter route and, when compared to the other streetcar routes on the basis of passengers carried per route mile, the 512 St Clair route ranks second only to the 510 Spadina streetcar route. The 512 St Clair route ranks fourth among all streetcar routes in terms of passengers carried per vehicle hour, an important measure of productivity. During the busiest travel times on St. Clair Avenue, streetcars carry in the range of 45% to 57% of all the people travelling on that road, depending on location.

The City of Toronto's new official plan advocates that Toronto's streetcars should operate in exclusive rights-of-way to improve their efficiency and attractiveness, and the plan designates St. Clair Avenue as one of the transit corridors in which this type of transit priority initiative should be undertaken.

St. Clair Avenue is one of very few roads in Toronto which are wide enough to allow an exclusive streetcar right-of-way to be established without causing total disruption to automobile travel patterns and on-street parking, both of which are important to merchants along the street as well as for local community activities. Interestingly, the reason why St. Clair Avenue is wide enough for an exclusive right-of-way is because St. Clair Avenue was originally built with a reserved right-of-way for streetcars along much of its length. The resulting excellent streetcar service was a significant factor in encouraging residential and commercial development along the avenue. The reserved right-of-way was removed by the City in the 1930s as a Depression-era make-work project and, ever since then, streetcars have operated in ever-increasing mixed traffic.

Any proposal for a transit right-of-way will involve taking some existing road space away from automobiles and other road users, and reallocating it to transit. This means that transit service will become faster, and more reliable, attractive, efficient, and productive, and travel by cars in the same corridor will become slower, more congested, and less attractive. Making transit more attractive is a fundamental part of Toronto's long-term planning goal of establishing a more-sustainable transit-oriented transportation system in the future.

The attached report describes three streetcar right-of-way conceptual design options which have been jointly developed and reviewed by TTC and City Transportation

Services staff. While minor variations to these concepts may be possible, they are indicative of what could be done on St. Clair Avenue in order to create a reserved right-of-way for streetcars. These designs are conceptual only, but they were developed after extensive fieldwork on St. Clair Avenue, including measurement of road and sidewalk widths, and observations of the current uses of these spaces. The concepts are, therefore, considered to be physically feasible within this corridor.

The report describes the advantages and disadvantages of the three concepts with respect to transit operations, traffic operations, goods movement, pedestrians, and streetscaping.

The benefits to transit of the concepts would vary, depending on the specific concepts, but include:

- * faster travel speeds,
- * improved service reliability,
- * improved effectiveness of the established signal priority system,
- * improved passenger waiting environments,
- * increased transit ridership because of the improved service quality and travel speeds,
- * improved productivity and efficiency of operation, and
- * protection of the streetcar service from the detrimental effects of increasing traffic congestion in the future.

The effects of the concepts on automobile and truck traffic and other road users would also vary, depending on the specific concept, but include:

- * left turns and "U"-turns to/from St. Clair Avenue at all times, at signalized intersections,
- * 24-hour per day parking in permanent parking bays,
- * capacity for traffic flow reduced to less than half of what is now provided, resulting in significant delays and congestion in all directions at intersections, an expansion of peak-period traffic conditions, and increased traffic infiltration in neighbourhoods,
- * limited flexibility for on-street traffic diversion in the event of accidents, stopped vehicles, or road work,
- * worse commercial loading,

- * left turns to/from St. Clair Avenue prohibited at all locations except at signalized intersections,
- * easier pedestrian crossing of St. Clair Avenue because the medians in the centre of the street would provide refuge, and
- * 10-15 seconds longer waiting for pedestrians crossing St. Clair Avenue at signalized intersections.

The report also discusses the feasibility of extending the 512 St Clair streetcar route west, from its current terminal at Gunns Road, to Runnymede Road or to Jane Street. Any possible route extension would require a complete feasibility and engineering study, and this would be incorporated within the scope of an environmental assessment pertaining to a reserved streetcar right-of-way on St. Clair Avenue.

The cost estimates provided in the report, while very preliminary in nature, illustrate that the cost of converting the 512 St Clair streetcar route into a reserved right-of-way operation which would allow a streetcar rapid transit service to be provided on St. Clair Avenue, and the cost of extending this route westerly to Jane Street, which would allow for much-improved network connectivity between this high-frequency east-west route and the high-frequency 35 Jane bus route, are small compared to the costs of subway or other types of rapid transit extensions. None of the costs described in the report, with the exception of the environmental assessment itself, are currently included in the TTC's Budget.

There is agreement among Councillors Disero, Mihevc, and Nunziata and among staff of the TTC and City Transportation and Planning Departments, that this concept should be investigated and developed more thoroughly, and that the appropriate vehicle for such investigation would be an environmental assessment of the proposed streetcar right-of-way. This environmental assessment would be undertaken jointly by City Transportation and Planning and TTC staff, with the assistance of an outside consultant. The undertaking can be funded from the Rapid Transit Studies component of the TTC's 2003 Budget.

November 27, 2002

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Attachment: City-TTC report, "Feasibility of Reserved Streetcar Right-of-Way on St. Clair Avenue"