

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

MEETING DATE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2012

SUBJECT: OFF-PEAK PARKING PROHIBITIONS IN
ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

INFORMATION ITEM

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Commission receive this report for information.

FUNDING

This report has no effect on the TTC's operating or capital budgets.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of March 30, 2012, the Commission referred to staff, for report back, a presentation by Mr. Alan Yule, in which it was proposed that the parking regulations which are in effect during peak periods on King Street, also be applied on Friday and Saturday nights, from 9 pm until 2 am, in the Entertainment District, in order to improve the speed and reliability of the 504 KING streetcar. This report responds to that request.

DISCUSSION

The management and regulation of traffic operations on all streets in Toronto are the responsibility of Toronto Transportation Services and, therefore, this report has been prepared with the assistance and concurrence of that department.

In his presentation, Mr. Yule noted that the section of King Street which is within the Entertainment District -- roughly between Bathurst Street and University Avenue -- has a high density of entertainment venues, notably sixteen lounges and bars and thirteen restaurants. These venues generate a considerable volume of traffic after 9 pm on Friday and Saturday evenings, which are the busiest nights in the Entertainment District. The high volumes of traffic create congestion on King Street which, in turn, affects the speed and reliability of 504 KING streetcar service, with reports of actual waiting times being longer than is scheduled. The presentation suggested that, in order to address this problem and allow 504 KING streetcar service to operate more effectively, parking could be prohibited on King Street within the subject area during these busy times and that, in order to test the effectiveness of this, a one-month trial of such parking prohibitions should be implemented.

TTC staff are aware of the detrimental effects of on-street parking on both transit operations and broader traffic operations. That is why TTC staff regularly make various requests to Toronto Transportation Services for expansion of the time periods and locations of prohibitions on parking, standing, and stopping. TTC staff are also mindful of the sensitivity of local businesses and commercial activities to expanded parking prohibitions which may be perceived to be detrimental to their businesses. We try to strike a balance between such competing objectives. There is immediate and obvious justification for such prohibitions during peak periods when downtown streetcar services often carry more than half of all trips being made on downtown streets, when passenger volumes are very high and when the frequency of service is also very high. However, such prohibitions are more difficult to justify when passenger volumes are much lower and streetcar services operate less frequently.

To illustrate, on the section of King Street within the Entertainment District -- between Bathurst Street and University Avenue -- the 504 KING streetcar, during peak periods, operates with frequencies of between two and three minutes, and serves 5,700 passenger-trips that begin or end within this area. After 9 pm on Friday and Saturday evenings, the 504 KING streetcar route operates with a frequency of between seven and nine minutes, and serves about 500 passenger-trips that begin or end within this same section of King Street. These lower passenger volumes and, more notably, the less-frequent service make it more difficult to justify extensive parking prohibitions in this area. Requests for such regulations under these circumstances can be detrimental to the credibility of other more-justifiable and defensible requests for expanded traffic control measures.

Toronto Transportation Services equally must balance the needs and preferences of transit operations against those of other road users and local merchants, and believe that such traffic regulations have the greatest effect and highest level of compliance when the need and justification for such measures is obvious to all road users. This is not the case during the suggested time periods. They also note the logistical difficulty in applying and enforcing such non-standard prohibitions that would begin at 9 pm. Parking is allowed in designated areas of the Entertainment District starting at 6 pm on Friday evenings and 8 am on Saturdays. This would make it extremely unlikely that, in a high-demand area, car users would interrupt their visits and start to remove their cars from the street at 9 pm. On balance, Toronto Transportation Services do not believe that this is a justifiable or realistically-enforceable parking prohibition and, therefore, do not support it.

In summary, the proposal to implement parking prohibitions in the Entertainment District after 9 pm on Friday and Saturday evenings would contribute to faster and more-reliable transit operations, but would be difficult to justify, would be opposed by local businesses, and would likely suffer from a low level of compliance. For these reasons, this proposal should not be pursued further.

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