

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

REPORT NO.

MEETING DATE: December 19, 2013

SUBJECT: BICYCLE CROSSING ON ST. CLAIR AVENUE WEST AT
POPLAR PLAINS ROAD

INFORMATION ITEM

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board receive this report for information, noting that modifying the edges of the raised streetcar right-of-way on St. Clair Avenue at Poplar Plains Road, in order to allow cyclists to ride across the streetcar right-of-way, is not acceptable from a safety perspective because it would violate the fundamental design premise that all vehicles, including bicycles, be prohibited and physically deterred from crossing the right-of-way anywhere other than at signalized locations.

FUNDING

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

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on October 23, 2013, the TTC Board requested staff to report back on the feasibility of providing a curb cut for bicycles travelling north on Poplar Plains Road and crossing the St. Clair Avenue streetcar right-of-way to continue their journey north. This report responds to that request.

DISCUSSION

The St. Clair streetcar right-of-way was established to provide an operating environment for transit operations which is free of interaction with, or obstruction by, other vehicles and road users. Its design incorporates a physical deterrent, everywhere except at signalized intersections, in order to discourage or prevent vehicular crossings. This deterrent is mostly the raised-up nature of the right-of-way itself or, where the tracks come down to road level, on the approaches to designated intersections, it is the raised curb on either side of the streetcar right-of-way.

The fundamental principle in the design of the streetcar right-of-way is that all vehicular crossings are restricted to signalized intersections. No vehicles are permitted to cross St. Clair Avenue West at unsignalized locations, except for emergency vehicles (fire trucks, police cars, ambulances). Under the Highway Traffic Act, bicycles are vehicles and, as such, they are subject to the same restrictions that apply to motorists who drive adjacent to, or wish to cross the streetcar right-of-way. Therefore, it would be inconsistent with the operating and design principles, and unacceptable from a safety perspective, to allow an exception for bicycles to cross the right-of-way at Poplar Plains Road.

The St. Clair right-of-way was designed with many traffic signals that allow for safe crossings: the intersections include designated lanes that permit both left turns and U-turns. It would be highly inadvisable to install an additional traffic signal for bicycles at the intersection of Poplar Plains Road and St. Clair Avenue West because the streetcar tracks are on the raised right-of-way, above the level of the traffic lanes, so pedestrians and cyclists would be vulnerable to tripping; traffic signals there would be too close to adjacent signals; and the proliferation of traffic signals on streetcar routes is a major contributor to slow and unreliable service.

Cyclists who approach St. Clair Avenue West via Poplar Plains Road, and who wish to cross the right-of-way, are required to do the same as other vehicles: make a right turn onto St. Clair Avenue West, travel east to Avenue Road, make the U-turn at that signalized intersection to travel west on St. Clair Avenue West, and continue their journey. Of course, in reality, cyclists, like pedestrians, often cross the streetcar right-of-way away from signalized intersections when safe opportunities arise. However, the design of the right-of-way, with its raised-curb edges, at least forces cyclists to dismount and safely walk their bike across, as a pedestrian, not as a higher-speed cyclist.

Limiting vehicular (including bicycle) crossings to signalized intersections is less convenient for motorists and cyclists, but the St. Clair streetcar right-of-way was designed to achieve the best balance between providing a reliable and efficient transit service and safely accommodating the needs of all other users of the road.

December 3, 2013
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