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To the TTC Commission, 24 January 2014.  
From Philip Webb.  
Re Transit Priority at Traffic Signals.

At some time during the past few months, the City Transportation Dept. reset the control equipment for the traffic signals on street car routes so that it no longer gives an extended green phase to street cars outside weekday peak hours. Previously, TTC street cars loading riders were given an extra 30 seconds before the light changed to amber ; now that is no longer the case & TTC vehicles are treated like all others.

This is easily observed by a regular rider on those routes & has been confirmed by conversations with TTC operators; I do not know whether it applies to TTC bus routes, eg Dufferin, but it is a fair guess that it does.

Besides the obvious effect of slowing the progress of TTC vehicles, a worse result is that the problem of left-turning traffic has returned.

When transit priority is in force, the extra 30 seconds are usually enough to allow the waiting vehicle to make its turn & release a street car before the green phase ends, but now that is no longer the case & it commonly happens that an auto with a lone driver making a left turn holds up a street car with many riders for a whole signal cycle.

It is not clear how many, if any, members of the Commission are aware of this serious change in practice with its damaging effect on TTC service.

There has been no report from TTC staff about the issue & City Transportation staff appear to have made the change quietly without any kind of public announcement. There have been a couple of reports to City Council proposing changes to transit priority policies, but they mainly asked to study the matter or conduct tests ; Council has not approved the change actually made nor would it be likely to do so without proper reports from staff, incl. consultation with TTC staff & commissioners.

Transit priority on street car routes was first installed in the early 1990s & was later extended to some of the busier bus routes.

The cost of fixed equipment for one downtown route was about \$ 1 M, which was paid for by City Transportation, while the TTC paid for the corresponding equipment in the vehicles.

In both cases, of course, it was the City taxpayer who really paid it all.

Currently, that investment is being largely wasted.

No-one benefits when transit priority is removed.

It may look as if other road users gain time, but that is a fallacy.

City Transportation seem to be counting vehicles rather than people:

if we count person-minutes saved, we must take into account the fact that the average auto carries c 1.2 people, whereas a bus carries c 25 & a street car c 40 during the off-peak hours now lacking priority.

The number of riders now inconvenienced is far higher than those benefitted.

Moreover, transit priority assists auto drivers in another way:

the more people we can get to use transit, the fewer autos are on the road & the more space is available for those who really do need to drive.

The supposed "war on the car" touted by a few politicians is a myth: everyone benefits when transit ridership goes up, incl. auto users.

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There is no need for anyone to attack auto use in order to promote transit & sensible auto users should be lobbying to get all those other drivers off the road to free up space for themselves.

It is true that many vehicles on the city's streets are doing deliveries or other commercial work, but while such traffic is vital to our economy, very few of them are at work during off-peak hours or at weekends.

In this affair, they are irrelevant.

You need to ask TTC staff why they have not reported about this matter & you need to instruct staff to ask City Transportation staff to explain their reasons for removing off-peak & weekend transit priority. In the absence of any convincing explanation -- I doubt they have one -- you need to demand that transit priority be restored at all hours to make full use again of the equipment City residents have paid for & to promote the smooth flow of all forms of traffic on City streets.

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