



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Opportunities for Improved Bus Service on Finch Avenue West: Follow-Up Report #3

Date:	June 22, 2015
To:	TTC Board
From:	Chief Executive Officer

Summary

This is a follow up report to *Opportunities for Improved Bus Service on Finch Avenue – Follow-Up Report #2* and provides an update on recent and forthcoming service initiatives pertaining to this corridor.

Service improvements have been made to every period of operation on this route over the last year to increase service reliability and reduce overcrowding. Articulated buses have been operating on the 36 FINCH WEST route since September 2014. Articulated buses have increased the overall capacity of this route and have improved the ability to manage surge loads.

The TTC is currently studying the expansion of its express bus route network to identify possible new and improved express bus routes. This study will review the feasibility of introducing express bus service on Finch Avenue West.

Consistent with past conclusions, the current report concludes that it would not be wise to improve the road geometry on Finch Avenue West, for bus operations, west of Keele Street, given the confirmed construction of the Finch West Light Rail Line. East of Keele Street, where LRT construction is not planned in the near-term, improvements such as implementing queue-jump lanes could be made. Discussions are underway currently with Toronto Transportation Services to establish a business-case analysis procedure to determine where queue-jump lanes should be constructed.

Finch Avenue West has transit signal priority. TTC staff are working with Transportation Services to evaluate the city-wide signal priority program to ensure that it is adapting to changing traffic conditions and maximizing travel benefits for customers.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

1. concur with the action taken by staff, noting that discussions are underway with Toronto Transportation Services to improve the road geometry on Finch Avenue West; and
2. that the review of the express bus route network currently being undertaken by staff will include the feasibility of introducing express bus service on the 36 Finch West route .

Financial Summary

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

Accessibility/Equity Matters

There are no accessibility or equity implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Decision History

At its meeting on May 11, 2011, TTC staff submitted a report in response to an inquiry by Commissioner Crisanti for improved bus service on Finch Avenue West.

http://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2011/May_11_2011/Reports/Opportunities_for_Im.pdf

That report provided a comprehensive review of alternatives which could be considered on Finch Avenue West, including both infrastructure and operational improvements. Follow-up reports on March 30, 2012 and June 29, 2012 further developed these alternatives and presented the TTC Board with more information on possible means of improving service on Finch Avenue West.

https://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2012/March_30/Minutes_Other/Opportunities_for_Im.pdf

http://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2012/June_29/Reports/Opportunities_for_Im.pdf

A September 27, 2012 report reviewed the potential for queue-jump lanes on Finch Avenue, west of Keele Street, in advance of the Finch West LRT construction.

http://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2012/September_27/Reports/Potential_for_Queue-.pdf

Issue Background

Finch Avenue West is a highly travelled and congested corridor that also has high transit ridership volumes. Approximately 44,000 customer-trips are made every day on the 36 FINCH WEST route. In recent years, when there was uncertainty over the future of the proposed light rail line on Finch Avenue West, some city councillors inquired about possible alternative means of improving the existing transit service on Finch Avenue West. More recently, roadway restrictions related to construction activities from the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension, at Finch Avenue and Keele Street, in combination with general traffic congestion, have resulted in a reduction in the reliability of this route. This causes buses to bunch-up and create gaps in the service. In response to these problems, schedule adjustments have been made and resources added to the route. However, it is impossible to completely offset construction effects and traffic congestion.

Metrolinx has now confirmed its plan to build an 11-kilometre light rail transit line that will run along the surface of Finch Avenue West from the new Finch West subway station at Keele Street to Humber College. On April 27, 2015, the Province of Ontario and Metrolinx confirmed funding support for this project. With construction scheduled to begin in 2017, previously-presented possible means of improving the physical infrastructure on Finch Avenue West are no longer practical.

Comments

Articulated buses on the 36 FINCH WEST route

Since early 2014, the TTC has been introducing articulated buses onto its busiest bus routes. Articulated buses have higher capacity, which helps increase productivity and efficiency, with minimal effects on passenger waiting times, when used on high-frequency routes. The 36 FINCH WEST bus route has been operating with articulated buses since September 2014. This change in operation has improved the ability to manage surge loads of customers and has increased passenger capacity in most off-peak periods.

Service Improvements on the 36 FINCH WEST route

The TTC has an established process of continually monitoring ridership levels and operating conditions on all routes in its system, and adjusting service levels, capacities, and schedules as necessary, to match changing ridership levels. Service levels on all routes are based on Board-approved crowding standards, which are applied in a consistent and equitable way across the system. Service improvements made on the 36 FINCH WEST route under this process, since 2012, have increased service in every period of operation, on all days of the week. A number of service reliability improvements have also been made. In April 2014, short-turn branches were removed from the route to make it simpler and more manageable, and schedules were redesigned to more-accurately reflect actual driving conditions. Table 1 lists the service improvements which have been made over the last year.

Table 1. Service improvements on 36 FINCH WEST in 2014-2015		
Period	Type of change	Description
January, 2014	Service reliability improvement	Schedule enhancements made in the daytime on Saturday, Sunday, and holidays to improve operating reliability
	Service increase	Service increased in the daytime on Saturday, Sunday, and holidays to reduce crowding
April, 2014	Service reliability improvement	Schedule enhancements made for all periods from Monday to Friday to improve operating reliability. Scheduled short-turns were removed to improve customer convenience and improve route manageability. Service increased to Humber College
January, 2015	Vehicle type change	Route converted to articulated 18-metre buses operation: improved overall capacity on route
April, 2015	Service reliability improvement	Schedule adjustments made to the early morning service on weekends to improve operating reliability
	Service increase	Additional trips added in the morning peak period to reduce crowding
May, 2015	Service increase	Service increased in the late evening as part of service improvements for 2015 and the forthcoming Ten-Minute-or-Better Service Network
Fall, 2015	Service increase	Service will be increased in the midday, from Monday to Friday, and in the afternoon and evening on Saturday, and in the early evening on Sunday and holidays as part of service improvements for 2015 pertaining to improved off- peak crowding standards

On March 11, 2015, Toronto City Council passed the 2015 City Budget, which confirmed funding to reduce crowding across the TTC system. Under the improved crowding standards, various off-peak periods of operation will receive more service. These will be implemented starting in Fall 2015. These service improvements will result in less crowding and more-frequent service during these times of the week:

Monday to Friday	9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Saturday	12:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.
Sunday and holidays	7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Express Bus Service on Finch Avenue

The TTC is currently studying the expansion of its express bus route network. As reported in the March 26, 2015 report, *Express Bus Route Network Study Plan*, TTC staff will present a first draft of a new Express Bus Route Network, by October 2015, to introduce new and improved express bus routes. Included in the scope of this study is the feasibility of introducing express bus service on Finch Avenue, from Finch Station to Humber College North Campus.

Possible Queue-Jump Lanes on Finch Avenue

In the March 30, 2012 report *Opportunities for Improved Bus Service on Finch Avenue – Follow-up Report*, TTC staff reviewed possible locations for queue-jump lanes on Finch Avenue West. That report said that the benefits from implementing queue-jump lanes on Finch Avenue, west of Keele Street, would probably be short-lived given the impending plans to construct light rail on Finch Avenue West.

This issue was further reviewed in the September 27, 2012 report, *Potential for Queue-Jump Lanes on Finch, West of Keele, in Advance of LRT Construction*. That report concluded that early implementation of queue-jump lanes, west of Keele, in advance of possible LRT construction, would not be practical due to the time constraints associated with property acquisition, detailed design, and possible relocation of underground utilities, as well as complications related to the ultimate staging of the LRT construction.

Metrolinx has subsequently confirmed funding for the Finch West LRT and will begin construction in 2017. This will provide rapid transit to Toronto neighbourhoods which will benefit greatly, including two of the city's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. It will provide high-capacity, accessible, and reliable service between the new Finch West Station, at Finch Avenue West and Keele Street, and Humber College. The LRT will provide a high-speed service connecting to several key routes in the network, such as Line 1 Yonge-University.

The June 29, 2012 report *Opportunities for Improved Bus Service on Finch Avenue – Follow-up Report #2*, focused on possible locations for queue-jump lanes, east of Keele Street, where LRT implementation is not imminent. The report concluded that there are twelve locations along Finch Avenue West which could benefit from queue-jump lanes. TTC staff are currently working with Toronto Transportation Services to establish a business-case framework to govern where queue-jump lanes should be constructed.

Transit Signal Priority on Finch Avenue

Transit Signal Priority (TSP) is present at most intersections on the 36 FINCH WEST bus route. TSP is effective in reducing delays and improving travel times for customers: buses get through intersections more quickly, and there is more regular and consistent operation through intersections, thereby improving service reliability (more-even spacing and less bunching). TTC staff are working with Transportation Services to evaluate the

TSP program and to ensure that maximum benefits are being derived from the signal priority infrastructure on all routes, including Finch Avenue West.

This report will be forwarded to all affected Councillors.

Conclusion

Service changes over the last two years have improved service reliability and reduced crowding on the 36 FINCH WEST route. Articulated buses have been operating on this route since September 2014, including full conversion of the whole route in January 2015. This has resulted in improved ability to manage surge loads of customers and increased passenger capacity in most off-peak periods.

Finch Avenue West is being studied for new and improved express bus service, and a draft report will be presented to the Board by October 2015.

TTC staff are continuing to work with City staff on establishing a business-case framework to evaluate the implementation of queue-jump lanes and transit signal priority.

There are many planned service improvements for the 36 FINCH WEST route starting in Fall 2015, including reduced off-peak crowding and the implementation of the Ten-Minute-or-Better Service Network.

Metrolinx will begin construction of the Finch West light rail line in 2017, and this will greatly improve the delivery of quality transit service on Finch Avenue West. The Finch West LRT will provide high capacity, accessible, and reliable service on Finch Avenue West, between the new Finch West Subway Station and Humber College.

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