



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Third-Party Assessment of Effects of Streetcar ROW on St. Clair Corridor

Date:	May 27, 2015
To:	TTC Board
From:	Chief Executive Officer

Summary

Over the last three years, interest has been expressed by Councillors, Board members, and members of the public in better understanding what effects the establishment of the streetcar right-of-way has had, in broad socio-economic terms, on the St. Clair Avenue corridor. A study was proposed, whose purpose would be to assess the longer-term effects attributable to the streetcar right-of-way, as measured through a number of variables.

In 2012/2013, staff from the TTC and three City departments -- Economic Development and Culture, City Planning, and City Manager's Office -- started preparatory work for the study. However, the launch of the study was delayed because of significant disruption to traffic and travel patterns on St. Clair Avenue West which occurred, for more than two years, as a result of the Metrolinx Grade-Separation Improvement Project, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street, in support of the Union-Pearson Express Rail Service. Although the proposed study was intended to be wide-ranging in nature, traffic operations on St. Clair Avenue would be an important part of the study and could not be measured reliably with such a major construction project underway.

This construction project was completed in December, 2014 -- along with other related civil works on St. Clair Avenue -- so traffic conditions should be back to normal by now, and the situation more conducive to study. Therefore, the study can now proceed. This report seeks Board endorsement of the purpose and objective of the study, and to proceed with the workplan.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Endorse the purpose and objective of the study, as described in this report, to assess the effects of the streetcar right-of-way on the St. Clair Avenue corridor;

2. Authorize staff to commence work on the study, noting that staff will report back on progress and on the selection of a consultant and associated cost to undertake the study; and
3. Forward this report to the City of Toronto City Clerk for re-direction, as appropriate.

Financial Summary

Sufficient funding for this study was included in the 2015 TTC Operating Budget, which was approved by City Council on March 11, 2015.

The Chief Financial & Administration Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

Accessibility/Equity Matters

The undertaking of this study, unto itself, will have no implications pertaining to accessibility or equity. Many aspects of the design of the St. Clair right-of-way project were intended to improve the accessibility of the streetcar service and the street itself, and the proposed study will, among other things, assess whether these accessibility objectives were achieved.

Decision History

At its meeting of March 30, 2012, in response to a communication from Councillor Joe Mihevc, the Board requested staff to report back on the feasibility of conducting an independent third-party, comprehensive review of the post-construction effects of the St. Clair transit improvement (right-of-way) project.

http://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2012/March_30/Minutes_Other/Feb_29_Minutes.jsp

Staff submitted a follow-up report to the Board at its meeting of September 27, 2012.

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

The Board requested that staff report back with more complete information pertaining to a workplan and costs of doing the study.

http://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2012/September_27/Minutes/index.jsp

The requested report-back was delayed a number of times because staff believed that the study could not be done effectively until the Metrolinx Grade-Separation Improvement Project was completed in December, 2014. Given the impact on traffic and travel patterns as a result of this project, the proposed study had been put in abeyance pending its' completion.

Issue Background

In 2003, owing to age and deterioration, it became necessary to completely rebuild the streetcar infrastructure -- tracks, trackbed, and passenger platforms -- on the 512 St. Clair streetcar route, which operated in a mixed-traffic environment.

An environmental assessment (EA) study recommended that the streetcar route be reconstructed as a physically separated transit right-of-way, interacting with other vehicular traffic at only signalized intersections. This required changes to the overall streetscape on St. Clair Avenue, between Yonge Street and Gunns Road (just west of Keele Street), including how the municipal right-of-way would be allocated among different users of the road; there would be less road space for non-transit traffic operations and, at signalized intersections, less sidewalk space for pedestrians. Left turns would have to be made at only signalized intersections. The project also called for several improvements to the overall streetscape and public realm. Today, St. Clair Avenue looks and functions much differently than it did before.

There are differing views regarding how the St. Clair streetcar project has affected transportation in the area, the quality of transit service offered, traffic congestion, the viability of local businesses, land values, development patterns, and the general character of the community within the St. Clair Avenue West corridor. Some people view the end result favourably, while other people question whether the completed project is an improvement over what previously existed. An objective and comprehensive analysis of the positive and negative effects of the completed St. Clair streetcar project would provide a useful and factual basis for informed discussion of the project, as well as perspectives for assessing the value and desirability of implementing similar projects elsewhere in Toronto. It would also provide a real-life case study of the actual benefits-to-cost ratio of undertakings of this nature.

Comments

Purpose and Objective of the Study

The study would entail a comprehensive assessment of the effects of the St. Clair streetcar project as a finished product. It would focus on the long-term and lasting effects of the project, after it was completed and is in place today. The broad categories of material which would be covered in the study include, but are not limited to:

- transportation: determine the effects of the streetcar project on all users of the corridor -- transit riders, mixed-vehicular traffic, pedestrians, cyclists -- including whether there has been a change in the “mode split” (ie – percentage of travel which is being made on transit, as opposed to cars) on St. Clair Avenue;
- environmental: determine whether the implementation of the streetcar project has resulted in a change of travel behaviour and, if so, what effect has this change had on the environmental consequences associated with travel;
- local economy: identify and quantify changes to any aspects of the local economy

which are attributable to the establishment and presence of the revised streetcar infrastructure;

- quality of life/community cohesiveness: assess whether the streetcar project has affected the quality of life and / or the sense of community for residents in the St. Clair Avenue corridor; assess people's perception of the St. Clair corridor today, and whether they believe that the project has been, overall, positive or negative;
- accessibility: determine whether the streetcar project has affected the level of accessibility -- for people with mobility or sensory disabilities -- to public transit, street and sidewalk infrastructure, and all other aspects of the public realm;
- parking: quantify the supply of parking in the St. Clair Avenue corridor, and compare it to the supply which existed before the project, in terms of on-street parking, off-street parking, and total or net supply of parking; also, identify any trends in usage rates of the current parking supply;
- emergency services: assess whether the streetcar project has affected the quality and effectiveness of emergency service provision in the St. Clair corridor;
- streetscape/urban design/ambience: assess, both quantitatively and qualitatively, whether the streetcar project has affected the quality, appearance, and overall attractiveness of the public realm within the St. Clair Avenue corridor;
- safety: determine what effects the redesigned and re-constructed roadway has had on the safety of all road users, including cars, streetcars, cyclists, and pedestrians (noting that the TTC is currently undertaking an investigation of pedestrian interaction with the right-of-way itself);
- shaping/influencing land use: determine whether the streetcar project has caused a change in land use by type and by density in the St. Clair Avenue corridor, whether it has affected land values, and whether it has affected the pace or quantity of development; and
- "destination" status of the corridor: determine whether the streetcar project has affected St. Clair Avenue's status as a "destination" within the City of Toronto.

Execution, Oversight, and Management of the Project

In order to achieve the highest possible level of credibility, objectivity, and impartiality, all aspects of the work will be managed and overseen by an inter-agency Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from:

- TTC Strategy and Planning
- Toronto City Planning
- Toronto Economic Development, Culture, and Tourism
- Toronto Transportation Services
- City Manager's Office
- other subject matter expert(s) as may be determined through discussions of the Steering Committee

It is proposed that the study be undertaken by an objective third-party consultancy with proven expertise in econometric studies of this nature. The project would be put to the market using a formal competitive tendering process. Draft Terms of Reference for the study have been prepared by the Steering Committee and, if the Board directs that the study be initiated, these Terms of Reference will be refined and finalized.

To further ensure objectivity and rigour in the preparation of the study, the Steering Committee has proposed that there be a peer review of the study before it is finalized. This could help identify any real or perceived omissions, and provide expert advice pertaining to the findings, conclusions, or any other aspect of the study. A Peer Review Panel could include subject matter experts from disciplines including:

- urban transportation
- municipal affairs/governance; and
- urban economics/development

Contact

Chris Upfold, Deputy Chief Executive Officer / Chief Customer Officer, 416-393-6119,
chris.upfold@ttc.ca