

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, April 18, 2023 **WARD(S):** 2

TITLE: HIGHWAY 7 IMPROVEMENTS BETWEEN WIGWOSS DRIVE
AND KIPLING AVENUE

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update to the Mayor and Members of Council of the ongoing planning work for the Queen Street-Highway 7 Bus Rapid Transit line, and to request York Region Council to direct staff to initiate the necessary steps to undertake a technical feasibility assessment of widening Highway 7 from Kipling Avenue to Wigwoss Drive, in partnership with Metrolinx.

Report Highlights

- The Queen Street-Highway 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project is a proposed rapid transit line in the cities of Brampton and Vaughan. The project's study area covers a 24-kilometre corridor along Queen Street and Highway 7, which would create a crucial east-to-west transit spine connecting the northwest and northcentral sections of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).
- A portion of the proposed project, the segment of Highway 7 between Kipling Avenue and Wigwoss Drive, is the last remaining four-lane section of Highway 7 in Vaughan, resulting in a bottleneck and limiting the efficient movement of goods and people in the City and more broadly, in York Region.
- The improvements to this segment of Highway 7, including a widening as well as improved walking and cycling facilities, align with long standing York Region and City of Vaughan transportation planning, including the 2022 York Region Transportation Master Plan, and the soon to be finalized Vaughan Transportation Plan.
- A rapid transit corridor on Highway 7 was identified as a key Council priority to support population and employment growth, improve connectivity, and increase the share of trips made using transit.
- It is critical that the planning for increasing the number of lanes on Highway 7 in the segment between Kipling Avenue and Wigwoss Drive occurs at this early stage of the BRT project. This will minimize future impact to businesses and residents, and result in reduced total costs to the taxpayer.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council formally request York Region to advance the necessary steps and partner with Metrolinx to initiate the technical feasibility assessment of a widening of Highway 7, from 4 to 6 general purpose lanes, in addition to 2 lanes for BRT, from Kipling Avenue to Wigwoss Drive; and
2. THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to York Region and Metrolinx for information.

Background

An effective transportation network is a critical component of complete and healthy communities and the City's transportation network plays a vital role in achieving forecasted growth in the Growth Plan and the York Region Official Plan. Today, Vaughan is evolving from a city that has a suburban, vehicle-oriented built form to a more urban municipality. The City of Vaughan acknowledges that the Queen Street - Highway 7 Bus Rapid Transit (QS7 BRT) will "unlock regional mobility" by providing a very important east-west connection between York Region and Peel Region.

Metrolinx is leading a project to develop the Queen Street-Highway 7 Bus Rapid Transit Preliminary Design Business Case (PDBC) in accordance with the Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP) (under O.Reg. 231/08), supported by the City of Vaughan, York Region, Peel Region, and the City of Brampton. The project has progressed to a stage where Metrolinx is refining the short-list of preferred design options for the corridor. A virtual Public Information Centre (PIC) was held in late February 2023. The specific details on the PDBC and the TPAP, such as the project background, study area, and evaluation methodology will be extensively covered by Metrolinx as part of their stakeholder engagement.

The area within the City surrounding the Queen Street - Highway 7 Bus Rapid Transit (QS7 BRT), is one of the most dynamic in Vaughan

The Woodbridge core, a key commercial and historic area in Vaughan, is located directly north of the corridor, and the southern portion of the Vaughan Enterprise Zone (VEZ) will be directly served by the QS7 BRT, which will act as one of the key transit spines for employees to travel to and from their workplace via transit.

Highway 7 is a 4-general purpose lane cross section with turning lanes at intersections. The surrounding land use is mostly low-density residential with parkland in the Humber River Valley. There are no dedicated cycling facilities. Highway 7 between Kipling Avenue and Islington Avenue includes crossings of the Humber River and the CP Rail MacTier subdivision, which leads to the Vaughan Intermodal facility. The segment of Highway 7 between Kipling Avenue and Wigwoss Drive is the last remaining four-lane section of Highway 7 in Vaughan, resulting in a major bottleneck and limiting the efficient movement of goods and people in the City and more broadly, in York Region. It is critical that the planning for increasing the number of lanes on Highway 7 occurs at this early stage. This will minimize future impact to businesses and residents, and result in reduced total costs to the taxpayer.

Improvements to this segment of Highway 7, for both road widening and rapid transit, align with long standing York Region and City of Vaughan transportation planning, including the 2022 York Region Transportation Master Plan and the soon to be finalized Vaughan Transportation Plan. Attachment 1 illustrates the Metrolinx study area for the QS7 BRT project within the City of Vaughan.

Vaughan is a key and involved stakeholder in the QS7 BRT planning process

As a review agency and directly affected municipality with vested interest in shaping its future mobility and managing its growth, the City is a key stakeholder for the QS7 BRT

project. Metrolinx has identified two avenues for formal engagements on the TPAP and PDBC. The Project Working Group (PWG) is collaborating on planning, preliminary design, business case, and supporting works, and will seek to resolve any issues at the initial stages as the project advances. The PWG is composed of a smaller group of staff from Metrolinx and municipal partners including the City of Vaughan that are intimately connected with the project. Additional avenues for engagement also exist between the City and Metrolinx at the staff level as part of regular contacts, and also through the Metrolinx's Municipal Sponsor's office as part of Metrolinx program updates. These engagements also provide opportunities to seek direction, build consensus, and triage any potential issues for resolution.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Item 12, Report No. 14, of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted, as amended, by the Council of the City of Vaughan on April 20, 2021](#)

Analysis and Options

It is critical to ensure that the ongoing QS7 BRT studies consider the assessment of options for widening Highway 7 in this area

The future Highway 7 corridor must balance the needs of moving goods and all road users through road improvements, future transit facilities, and walking and cycling facilities. Following this principle, staff communicated the following considerations to Metrolinx, in collaboration with York Region, at the study workshop held on March 2, 2023:

- Preference for a cross section of six general purpose lanes and two BRT lanes (the "6+2 Option") for the QS7 BRT sections of Highway 7 through Vaughan, with appropriate active transportation facilities. This preference was previously noted in staff letter dated February 3, 2023 (Attachment 2).
- Recommendation that the QS7 BRT corridor provides separate, in-boulevard pedestrian facilities and separate, in-boulevard, unidirectional cycling facilities on both sides of Highway 7 through Vaughan.
- Recommendation that the QS7 BRT corridor protects space to accommodate existing and future sustainable first-last mile services such as bicycle parking, bike/e-bike share, micromobility and on-demand microtransit.
- Recommendation that the QS7 BRT project plan to design for future climate change resilience, including designing crossings to accommodate changes in flooding, ice jam flooding and precipitation intensities.

- Accommodation for future integration of the QS7 BRT with the proposed Caledon-Vaughan GO rail service.

To date, the QS7 BRT study has not considered an alternative with six general purpose lanes and two BRT lanes

Staff have initiated discussions with both York Region and Metrolinx to include the “6+2 Option” in the QS7 BRT planning work. Metrolinx has indicated that they are willing to engage their consultant to undertake a feasibility study for this work, which will consider the needs of both the proposed BRT as well as the need to widen Highway 7. The technical feasibility study will review the impacts, high-level costs, and logistics of widening options. It will also outline next steps for additional and more refined investigation if necessary. Given that Highway 7 is a Regional road, jurisdiction for approval of this work is with York Region.

Staff will continue to be involved in the QS7 BRT study

As part of the TPAP process, Metrolinx and their consultants will be circulating a number of documents related to environmental studies, technical investigations, business cases, and preliminary design for review and feedback by City staff. This will require the involvement of staff across the City’s departments with requisite subject matter expertise. The QS7 BRT project timelines are governed by Metrolinx. The project was initiated in mid-2022 and is anticipated to be completed by mid-2024, with significant consultation with the City occurring between the fall of 2022 and the winter of 2024.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact with this report. The additional scope to assess widening of Highway 7 from Kipling Avenue to Wigwoss Drive/Helen Street in the City of Vaughan, will be funded by York Region together with Metrolinx.

Operational Impact

As part of the TPAP process, Metrolinx and their consultants will be circulating a number of documents related to environmental studies, technical investigations, business cases, and preliminary design for review and feedback by City staff. This will require the involvement of staff across the City’s departments with requisite subject matter expertise.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The City works in a coordinated effort with the Region and Metrolinx to advance an effective transportation network as a critical component of complete and healthy communities. The City's transportation network plays a vital role in achieving forecasted growth in the provincial Growth Plan and the York Region Official Plan.

Conclusion

Staff recommend that Council request York Region to proceed with the technical feasibility assessment of widening Highway 7 from 4 to 6 lanes general purpose lanes, plus 2 BRT lanes, for the segment between Kipling Avenue to Wigwoss Drive in partnership with Metrolinx.

This preferred design option will assist in prioritizing frequent and reliable transit service, enhancing management of traffic for all road users and provide necessary infrastructure in facilitating Vaughan's growth plans as directed by the Province of Ontario. It is critical that the planning and coordination for increasing the number of lanes on Highway 7 occurs at this early stage of the QS7 BRT project, as this will minimize future impact to businesses and residents, and result in reduced total costs to the taxpayer.

For more information, please contact:

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Attachments

1. Metrolinx - Highway 7 BRT Study Area
2. March 2023 Letter to Metrolinx - Queen Street Highway 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

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