

## 7080 Yonge St (Chestnut) - Transportation Considerations Report - Analysis

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The *Transportation Considerations Report for 7080 Yonge* is markedly similar to those for **100 Steeles West** and **180 Steeles West**. This is hardly surprising, as it is in the same area and was conducted by the same consultant. It too relies heavily on questionable premises and assumptions favourable to the developer. However, due to the relatively smaller footprint and scale of this development proposal, it is not as extreme as the others.

The Report opens with excerpts from key provincial policy documents to legitimize its proposals. It quotes at length from the **2020 Provincial Policy Statement, the Places to Grow Growth Plan, and Ontario's Five Year Climate Change Action Plan** which all encourage increased density to reduce auto-based travel and encourage active transportation. This provides cover to slash mandated parking requirements by over 60% and lowball projected vehicle traffic because, presumably, most residents will instead be walking, biking and mostly taking transit for all their daily mobility needs.

However, what they fail to reveal is that what all these policy documents encourage is not just any kind of unchecked residential density, but, very specifically, **mixed-use** density. Mixed use is an absolutely essential component of sustainable density, a theme that is emphasized repeatedly in each of those policy documents.

The key Provincial Policy statement begins:

### *Section 1.1.1*

*Healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by accommodating an appropriate affordable and market-based range and mix of residential types (including single-detached, additional residential units, multi-unit housing, affordable housing and housing for older persons), employment (including industrial and commercial), institutional (including places of worship, cemeteries and long-term care homes), recreation, park and open space, and other uses to meet long term needs;*

Sadly, this proposed project, similar to all the others, does not begin to approach these standards. Other than 1795 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial GFA, over 96% of its floor space is devoted exclusively to residential condos. In plain language that means that all these hundreds of future residents will need to commute to a job or to school each day, travelling some distance to a location that is not within walking or even biking range for most. How will they get there? The Report sidesteps this fundamental question.

What's more, it means that heaviest travel is all going in one direction during peak periods, as almost no one is coming to this site to work. That is a nightmare scenario for any transit planner. The problem is further compounded by the many other development proposals in this immediate area, which also weigh overwhelmingly on the residential component. There are no office towers, schools, institutions, community centres, open spaces, public services, or entertainment attractions. None of the attributes of the complete communities demanded by the provincial policy statements that are the supposed basis of these developments.

This is not a recipe for an accessible, sustainable, self-contained walkable community that is the cornerstone of all those provincial policy documents encouraging densification. Rather it is simply more residential sprawl, just vertical instead of horizontal.

### **Proposed Yonge North Subway Extension (YNSE)**

Although it claims otherwise, this proposal's density exemption justification ultimately relies on support for the unbuilt YNSE. It needs to be recognized that the subway extension to Steeles was already fully justified and approved based on the existing proposed density levels in the Secondary Plan. In fact, even under current densities (pre-Covid) thousands of riders were coming in by bus from Steeles and further north to Finch Station during AM Peak. Rather than providing further unneeded justification for the extension, substantial increases to the currently approved densities would aggravate loading and crowding issues especially if it is overwhelmingly residential.

### **The Yonge and Steeles Area Regional Transportation Study**

The **Yonge and Steeles Area Regional Transportation Study** approved by York Regional Council in 2015, consolidated recommendations of ongoing studies, and developed an overall plan to ensure growth is accommodated in a predictable manner that does not overwhelm the transportation system prior to the subway extension. One of the key conclusions out of this study is that the road network is already failing today during the peak periods and there are few opportunities to increase arterial road capacity. This impacts cars, but also the buses which are the mainstay of current transit service in the area.

### **Transit Travel Review 5.3**

Despite its heavy reliance on the future YSNE, the Report acknowledges that it will be a few years at the earliest before the subway is extended. In reality, based on historic experience and the current fiscal pressures, it could be decades until completion. In the intervening years, much of the transportation will need to be carried by existing local bus services.

The Report provides tables showing current level of service for the bus stops that are in the immediate area and proudly proclaims that some of them are at a Level of Service (LOS) rated "A". What they fail to point out is that this rating was only based on peak PM hour. At that time, all the travel would be headed inbound to their site as people are returning home. In that situation, the relevant stops are westbound on Steeles and north and south on Yonge. All of these stops fall in the "D" category. Similarly, if LOS information was available for AM peak, it is likely that eastbound Steeles would also fall into a similarly low category or worse.

As pointed out in the Regional Transportation Study, buses travelling along Steeles to and from Finch Station are frequently at capacity and caught in congestion during peak periods. We agree with the Report that "Should the Yonge Subway Extension be constructed, a subway station at Yonge / Steeles would significantly improve both transit and traffic performance in the immediately surrounding area."

But in the years until that is a reality, a significant increase to the current bus ridership would present serious problems. This has not been accounted for in the analysis.

It is mystifying that despite repeated mentions of the subway extension throughout the Report, nowhere is there any attempt to provide the basic numbers on the ridership that would be generated by the proposed development to support the YSNE. Auto trip numbers have been severely downplayed by slashing parking allowances. That raises the obvious question as to how then most of the hundreds of non-driving residents will be commuting each day. Nowhere does the Transportation Report provide these numbers or even offer a clear plan.

**The overall lack of any transit ridership analysis is a serious flaw for a project that is essentially based on having access to top tier transit service as its primary justification for density triple that allowed in the Secondary Plan.**

### **Vehicular Parking Considerations 10.2**

The Report initially calculates the parking requirement based on existing zoning bylaws. The grand total for all the residents, visitors, delivery, service, and shoppers comes to 1,226. But the developer has determined that these numbers are not applicable to this development. Instead the consultant claims that the VMC bylaws should be used which reduces the total almost in half to 641 spaces. However, this is still not minimal enough so the consultant simply slashes that number down to only 456 spaces in a 4 level underground garage. (stratified)

In other words, the final proposal is to slash even the VMC low minimums for parking spaces. The basis for this drastic reduction is to encourage (in fact, force) more transit use and active transportation. This would make some sense in a well serviced higher order transit hub such as the VMC.

The problem is, Yonge Steeles is simply not VMC. It certainly is not anywhere near the VMC in terms of higher order transit today. Unlike the VMC there is no existing subway and no VIVA BRT service within the area. Current local transit service is grossly inadequate for the numbers of new residents being proposed.

It also is not the VMC in terms of mixed use, “complete community” as defined in the provincial policy statements. VMC contains carefully planned self-contained, mixed-use developments that naturally reduces the need for a car. It was designed from the start to make it easy to walk or bike to jobs, shopping, schools, library, YMCA, community centre, large parks with hiking trails, etc. There is no similar master plan for Yonge Steeles, and the proposed condo developments only exacerbates the situation.

### **Bicycle Parking Considerations 10.3**

After slashing car parking, the Report must provide transportation alternatives. Biking is one option for active transportation. It therefore adopts the increased bicycle parking requirements used at VMC. It appears remarkable that, despite reducing the car parking far below VMC levels, they do not then suggest adding considerably to the VMC levels of increased bike parking to compensate.

However, there is a good reason for this glaring omission. The VMC is a master planned community with an extensive system of dedicated bike lanes and trails throughout connected green spaces to promote and support biking. Over 17 kilometres of dedicated bike lanes already exist in the VMC. Contrast that with the Yonge Steeles area with exactly zero bike lanes, and where, by their own estimation the entire biking network is Level of Service of F, the lowest possible failing grade.

To further discourage biking, for those who might even consider it on the unwelcoming nearby roads, bike parking spaces are mostly one or two levels underground, and mostly double stacked. This is hardly a recipe to invite bicycle usage.

## **Conclusions**

The Transportation Report is geared to support a “complete community” with mixed use that could encourage and support walkability, biking and transit use. It slashes parking space allocations to unprecedented levels to ensure minimal traffic generation in or out of the development.

It is a proposal suited for downtowns such as VMC or Toronto or Manhattan, where cars are not always necessary for access to daily needs. In those places most people can easily access their employment, educational, shopping, recreational, cultural, social, and entertainment needs. Yonge Steeles is not a downtown and is not being planned as such. There are no office towers, major commercial centres, theatres, sports arenas, community centres, government agencies, social services, arts, libraries, central parks, grand public spaces, lakes, etc. It is an area that is overwhelmingly residential, and the proposed condominium developments will only make that balance more extreme.

Yes, eliminating car parking could force many residents and visitors out of cars, but the question remains, where will they go and how will they get there? The Transportation Report does not address this basic issue in a satisfactory manner.

Walking is not the answer. Almost none of the most critical destination types that people need are within walkable distances. Biking will also fall far short of providing meaningful mobility options in the context, as the treatment of bike parking and the complete lack of any bike infrastructure clearly demonstrates.

There is no real analysis provided of existing transit capacity and what measures would need to be taken to provide sufficient service in the intervening years until the possible build of a Yonge subway extension. This is particularly problematic as the entire development relies predominantly on extremely high levels of transit use.

The overall lack of any projected transit ridership analysis is a serious flaw for a project that is entirely based on having access to top tier transit service as its primary justification. It also leaves the entire project without any credible transportation options to meet the basic daily mobility needs of the hundreds of proposed residents and visitors.

