



“YOUR VOICE MAKES OUR VOICE STRONGER”

<http://unionvilleresidents.ca>

Re: Environmental Study Report (ESR) for 16th Avenue Study B Woodbine Ave to York/Durham Line

The URA is one of Markham’s largest and most active resident associations. Many of our members are very concerned about the proposal to widen 16th Avenue as outlined in the recently published ESR. I chair a committee tasked to deal with the matter.

Our concerns fall into 3 areas: the stakeholder engagement process, the overall strategic case for widening, and other alternatives that should be more fully considered.

1. Stakeholder Engagement

[Appendix D](#) of the ESR report published Dec 19th lists "Agency and Stakeholders". However, this lists corporations, government agencies and municipal staffs only. There is no mention of ward councillors or resident groups. There was no formal stakeholder group involving residents, as there is for the Kennedy Road and McCowan Road EA studies. Appendix D also documents a review of the proposals on September 16th 2019 held with the City of Markham, again staff only, nobody reached out to any affected ward councillors or their residents at that time. Appendix C lists correspondence with 120 individuals who contacted your team. While the level of detail in the responses is impressive, this is a small number compared to the thousands of impacted residents.

We have been told that the study team used social media for outreach. How did that work? Did one have to be a Region follower on Twitter for example to receive the outreach? Should this process have been published in advance to the affected ward councillors and residents?

Another engagement concern is that the timing of the York Region decision on Dec 19th to accelerate the necessary funds into the 10 year capital plan, came as a big surprise to many. It was not until a meeting between yourself and your team, with several residents on Dec 17th, that this date became known to us. We had previously been told, at a City of Markham DSC meeting on Oct 15th that such a decision would not be taken until after a planned transportation workshop now taking place on Jan 22nd. The matter at DSC was for Markham to respond to a Region request for comments on moving capital from a 404 flyover project to the 16th Ave project instead, in order to accelerate the 16th Ave project. Why did the Region go ahead without an answer from Markham?

2. Overall Strategic Case

As a result of the planned widenings, the residents of Unionville are going to be closely surrounded by 6 lane arterial roads on all sides. Many of those who are aware of the plan view this as undesirable. They

cite increased pollution and safety concerns, as well as the feeling of being boxed in. Many other communities in North America are no longer using widening as a congestion solution, focusing on better and more frequent transit for example, not space for ever more cars. [The Government of Ontario](#) expects Toronto's population to rise from 2.96 million in 2018 to 4.27 million in 2046, an increase of 44.5 per cent, with growth in Durham, Halton, Peel and York projected to be significantly faster than the Ontario average, with the addition of over 2.1 million people to the suburban GTA. Commenting on this the [Globe & Mail Jan 3rd](#) said "Try to imagine millions of new commuters, all trying to drive to work on the GTA's already gridlocked highways. It can't be done".

There is also the matter of [induced demand](#), where traveller behaviour changes after new road capacity is installed, so that the new capacity is very rapidly filled up again. Result being, you are no further ahead. Please see Professor Matthew Turner of the University of Toronto's seminal work ([The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion](#)). How was induced demand taken into account in the strategic case?

Given this context, if indeed we cannot accommodate everybody driving to work by car anyway, where is the overall strategic case for road widening? Could \$150 million be better spent on perhaps significantly improved transit, better connected transit, more frequent transit, transit on request, first/last mile transit, perhaps even free transit?

There are megatrends in society at large that affect the strategic case. An [RBC forecast](#) published January 6th 2020, says "*the proportion of working-age Canadians is expected to fall to 1.7 for every youth and senior by 2030, down from 2.3 in 2010*". There are clearly coming changes in transportation technology, such as automated vehicles and shared mobility that need to be considered. Future travel demand is much more uncertain than cited in the ESR. How were changing demographics and transportation technology taken into account in the strategic case?

3. Other Alternatives

The alternatives looked at in the ESR appear limited and not fully evaluated. The preferred alternative appears preselected and the report written to confirm this conclusion. We suggest there are at least 5 other alternatives that should be fully evaluated, both singly and together, before the ESR can be said to be complete.

3.1 Intersection Improvements Only. During the settlement process with York Downs last year, it was discovered that significant congestion benefits could be achieved by just improving intersections, at both Warden and Kennedy, with 16th Ave. Given that the intersections along the length of 16th Ave are the bottlenecks, how much of the desired changes could be achieved with intersection improvements only along the full length of the subject road? Techniques such as the displaced left turn as described in this article from the [US DOT](#) could be used and would also improve safety. Should double left turn lanes be considered? Can bus stop locations be changed to allow general traffic to proceed faster? In summary, what percentage of the overall benefits could be achieved with intersection improvements only, and how much would that cost versus the planned \$150 million?

3.2 Improve transit priority. Were options such as widening near intersections only for transit queue jump lanes, and giving transit signal priority to YRT buses, as with VIVA today, considered for the 16th Ave corridor?

3.3 Reversible Centre Bus Lane. Using a bus-only reversible centre lane could provide for speedy transit in the peak traffic direction. Buses would use general purpose lanes in the non-peak direction. This would reduce the road widening needed from 6 to 5 lanes. Left turns and other traffic management issues would be handled as on Highway 7 today. What are the pros and cons of this option?

3.4 Alternative East/West Corridor. Major Mackenzie Drive is already designated as a rapid transit route, already has space for a centre lane for most of the same east west direction as the planned 16th Ave changes, and much of the existing residential environment is well set back from the road. Significant current and future developments are planned for Markham Rd north of 16th, and with no widening of 16th planned from McCowan to Markham Rd, this traffic will surely head north and west along Major Mack in the morning and reverse in the evening. There is also a very large FUA ([Future Urban Area](#)) planned along Major Mack, between Woodbine and Warden, with 12,000 dwelling units and 19,000 jobs. Would it not make more sense from many perspectives to construct this corridor first, instead of widening 16th Ave? Users of 16th Ave wishing to avoid any future congestion would then have the choice of Highway 7 or Major Mack as other options.

3.5 Reduced Lane Widths

The assumed lane widths in the ESR are 3.3 metres for a general purpose lane and 3.5 metres for an HOV/Transit lane. In some other EAs, for example Kennedy Road, lane widths are proposed to be reduced to 3.0 m and 3.2 m respectively in pinch point areas (e.g. cemeteries), and that this is still deemed to be safe. Have narrower lane widths been studied for 16th Avenue? Do they not provide benefits such as more room for active transportation options, easier crossings for pedestrians, less disruption to neighbourhood in terms of noise and vibration, less environmental issues (salt, storm water management), less cost to construct and maintain?

In conclusion, Colin, the URA has many concerns and appreciates your kind offer to meet and discuss. We would like to request a meeting with you and your team as soon as possible, hopefully well in advance of the February 3 Part II Order request deadline.

URA Committee on Road Widenings

January 10th 2020