

# York Region Response to URA 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA Concerns

Thank you for your email and continued interest in the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA studies. The project team has reviewed the concerns outlined in your letter and offers the following responses.

## 1. Stakeholder Engagement

Appendix D of the ESR documents the key agency and stakeholder consultation undertaken by the consultant team. Consultation with Councillors followed the York Region communication protocols. Instead of a formal resident /stakeholder group, as part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA studies, the project team carried out an enhanced consultation program involving individual meetings with stakeholders, including agencies, property owners, and resident group representatives in order to have more one-on-one discussions. In addition to public events, over 40 meetings were held with interested residents and businesses and over 60 meetings were held with review, permitting and approval agencies. Individual meetings with property owners/residents and other stakeholders are summarized in Appendix D of the ESR. These individual meetings were in addition to the public consultation events required as part of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process.

Anyone interested in the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA studies was encouraged to participate and welcome to meet with the project team at various opportunities throughout the studies. Study notices were sent by regular mail to all those on the mailing list (over 5,600 contacts including residents, agency representatives, Indigenous groups and stakeholders) and by email to all those on the electronic distribution list (including those who have previously expressed interest in the study and requested to receive future study notifications via email). Study notices were also published in local newspapers in accordance with the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process. Throughout the EA studies, notifications mailed to residents included the Notice of Study Commencement, Notices of Open Houses, Notice of Study Completion (Study A), Notice of Study Completion (Study B) and invitations to property owner drop-in sessions for those whose properties were directly impacted by the proposed design. In addition to the above, study notifications and other material were posted on the study website ([www.york.ca/16thavenue](http://www.york.ca/16thavenue)) which included contact information for anyone who wished to reach the project team. Social media including Facebook posts and Tweets were used to promote the studies and to encourage anyone who follows the Region's social media channels and was not included in the other notice distributions to provide their input.

In summary, the public and stakeholder engagement completed as part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA studies was comprehensive and far exceeded the minimum requirements of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process.

It should be noted that the York Region decision to accelerate the construction of some segments of 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue was independent from the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA studies. As documented in Section 9.3 of the ESR, the EA studies anticipated construction timing to follow the Region's 2019 10-year Roads and Transit Capital Construction Program, which is reviewed and approved by Regional Council annually and is subject to change.

## 2. Overall Strategic Case

York Region's Transportation Master Plan (TMP) provides the basis for the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue improvements. Endorsed by York Region Council in 2016, the TMP is based on approved provincial policies and plans, including the Provincial Policy Statement (click [here](#)) and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (click [here](#)). The link to the TMP can be found [here](#). York Region is anticipated to grow from

1.16 million people to 1.79 million people in 2041 and from 578 thousand jobs to 900 thousand in 2041. Based on these considerations, the TMP included recommendations for a comprehensive Frequent Transit Network (FTN) and Cycling Network. The FTN will allow for bus service every 15 minutes. These recommendations include widening many York Region arterial roads to accommodate new lanes for transit (buses) and high occupancy vehicles (also known as HOV or carpool lanes) and dedicated cycling facilities.

Rutherford Road/Carrville Road/16<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a 40-kilometre-long corridor that is continuous from Peel Region to Durham Region. The TMP identifies this corridor as a critical transportation link in the FTN and cycling network and recommends widening to six lanes to accommodate transit and carpooling in addition to dedicated cycling facilities for much of its length. Design and construction preparation are ongoing on the Rutherford Road sections in the City of Vaughan.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue EA study team assessed various alternative solutions based on identified needs and opportunities for the study corridor. The following alternatives were considered for the 16th Avenue study corridor between Woodbine Avenue and Markham Road/Highway 48.

- Do Nothing
- Active Transportation (AT) Improvements Only
- Widen 16th Avenue to 4 General Purpose Lanes (GPL) + 2 Transit/HOV lanes, AT Improvements
- Widen 16th Avenue to 6 General Purpose Lanes (GPL), AT Improvements
- Maintain 4 lanes on 16th Avenue, convert existing curb lanes from GPL to Transit/HOV, AT Improvements

Based on a detailed traffic analysis and assessment of impacts to the community, the EA study team confirmed the TMP recommendations. Widening to accommodate transit and HOV, most efficiently addresses future growth in York Region. Providing additional lanes for transit and HOV provides the best balance between accommodating future growth and minimizing impacts to the community. Congestion and demand on the road will be greater with the other alternatives. As such, the EA study team moved forward with assessing the widening of 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue to accommodate Transit and HOV, and cycling and pedestrian facilities, as presented at Open House 1 in November 2016.

As you can see from the above summary, the proposed recommendations will provide multi-modal improvements. The additional vehicular lanes will accommodate transit and carpooling to support 16th Avenue as part of the FTN, and continuous cycling and pedestrian facilities will improve connections. Together, these improvements will provide alternatives to single occupancy vehicles.

### **3. Other Alternatives**

#### **a. Intersection Improvements Only**

The traffic analysis completed as part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Ave EA studies included assessment of intersections as well as road segment (link) conditions. Exhibit 5-6 of the ESR, also included below, illustrates that intersections and links will be over capacity by 2041 if capacity improvements are not implemented.

In addition, the Region's TMP also considered intersection improvements only. However, the TMP assessment determined that this option only provides minor improvements for corridor traffic flow, and it does not address overall traffic congestion nor improve transit/HOV and active transportation modes.

#### **b. Improve Transit Priority**

Transit priority at intersections alone does not provide the level of service to support 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue as part of the Frequent Transit Network. Widening for Transit/HOV as recommended by the EA aims to provide improvements to transit service along the entire 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor, and not just at intersections, so that buses will be able to travel on continuous lanes.

#### **c. Reversible Centre Bus Lane**

Reversible centre bus lanes are not a practical solution for 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue as YRT transit service along 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue runs in the curb lanes, not the centre lanes like Viva does on Highway 7. In order to maintain curbside transit stops with a centre bus lane, buses would consistently need to weave through several traffic lanes to go back and forth between the centre travel lane and the curbside stops, which would pose safety concerns. Furthermore, based on the distance between stops, weaving time and frequency would likely negate any time savings from using the centre bus lanes in the midblock segments. Moving the transit stops to the centre of the road like on Highway 7 would require more space than the proposed widening – even if only one reversible centre bus lane were to be implemented, bus stops on both sides of the centre bus lane would be required to accommodate transit service in both directions, and curbside stops would need to stay in place to accommodate transit service in the opposite direction and during off-peak hours as you suggested. This scenario would also be confusing for transit users, who would not necessarily know if they should wait for the bus at the curbside stops or at the centre bus lane stops at any given time. Reversible lanes are also not recommended for the following reasons:

- Reversible lanes are generally not as safe as a dedicated lane due to increased risk of drivers using the lane incorrectly, such as driving the wrong way in the lane
- Reversible lanes require the elimination of dedicated left-turn lanes, leading to increased delays for vehicles going straight through the intersections and a greater possibility of rear end collisions at intersections
- Reversible lanes require the installation of overhead, illuminated signage at regular intervals to indicate lane directionality. The additional signage increases operational costs and is not as visually appealing
- Reversible lanes will eliminate opportunities for streetscaping treatment in the median. Streetscaping helps create attractive and safe streets, which are the cornerstone to liveable communities with a distinct sense of place in York Region

#### **d. Alternative East/West Corridor**

The Region's TMP identified improvements for various roads, not just 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue capacity improvements are required in addition to improvements to other east-west corridors such as Major Mackenzie Drive and Elgin Mills Road.

**e. Reduced Lane Widths**

16<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a major arterial road within York Region that moves people as well as goods and services throughout its neighbouring municipalities. The study team reduced the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue right-of-way as much as possible from the 43 metres identified in the Region's Official Plan for a six (6) lane road. In consultation with design staff, transportation planning branch, forestry branch, road and traffic operations branch and corridor control and safety branch, the Region proposed to reduce the design speed from 80 km/h to 60 km/h and the right-of-way from the 43 metres designated in the Official Plan in order to minimize the roadway footprint. The resulting proposed design criteria and roadway cross-section reduces the environmental and social impacts as much as possible. The Design Criteria for key elements is outlined below.

<b>Road Elements</b>	<b>Standard Design Criteria</b>	<b>Proposed Design Criteria</b>
Right-of-Way for 6 lanes	43m (per YR Official Plan)	Maintain existing as much as possible, with property acquisition only as required
General-Purpose Lanes Width	3.5m	3.3m
Transit/HOV Lane Width	3.75m	3.5m
Boulevard Width	2.0-5.0 m	At least 2.0 m to accommodate utilities (both sides of the street)
Median Width	4.0 m (two-way left-turn lane)  2.0-5.0 m (raised median)	1.5-5.0 m
Sidewalk	1.5-2.0m	1.5m
Multi-use Path (MUP)	2.4-3.0m	2.4-3.0m
Posted Speed Limit	60 km/h	60 km/h
Design Speed for 60 km/h Posted Speed Limit	80 km/h	60 km/h

Although other projects with more significant constraints such as cemeteries may implement design exemptions for short road sections, these should only be used unless other alternatives are available and only for short, localized segments. Further lane width reductions are not proposed for 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

We trust this addresses all of your concerns, but please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like to discuss further.

January 21<sup>st</sup> 2020