

MEETING DATE: April 11, 2001

SUBJECT: Dedicated Streetcar Lanes On The 504 King Route

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Commission:

1. Receive this report for information, noting that:
 - TTC staff are working with Toronto Transportation Services and City Planning to identify the best way of creating effective, dedicated streetcar lanes on King Street, while fully respecting the needs of the adjacent businesses;
 - two of the options under consideration at this time are: i) banning all traffic, except streetcars, taxis, and commercial vehicles, from King Street during the busiest traffic hours; and ii) a full-time, permanent solution, with physical modifications to the street, whereby through traffic would be banned at all times, but vehicles would still be able to access each block; and
1. Forward this report to Toronto Transportation Services and City Planning.

FUNDING

This report has no impact on the Commission's operating or capital budgets.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on February 16, 2001, the Commission considered the TTC's 2001 Operating Budget and approved Commissioner Miller's motion which included, *...that staff be requested to report to the Commission regarding... significant transit priority measures for the surface system, in particular streetcars.*

This report provides a preliminary and partial response only, to that request, and summarizes the status of staff's efforts to provide greater priority for streetcars on King Street. The results of this work are expected to be generally applicable to other streetcar routes.

DISCUSSION

TTC staff are developing a comprehensive plan to improve transit operations throughout Toronto, identifying ways to make transit faster, more reliable and, ultimately, more competitive with the private automobile. Staff are working with Toronto Transportation Services and City Planning, and will bring forward a detailed joint report with recommendations for city-wide transit-related improvements later this year.

Meanwhile, staff are proceeding with detailed evaluations of several route-specific transit priority initiatives in advance of that report. At present, much effort has been focused on measures to improve streetcar operations and, in particular, the 504 King streetcar route, where some of the greatest operational problems are found.

The 504 King streetcar route carries over 50,000 customer-trips per day -- the highest ridership of any surface route in the TTC system. The route has a frequency of every two minutes in the morning peak hour, which is the most frequent streetcar service in the city. Customer demand along this route is growing rapidly; over 4000 new residential units will soon be occupied in the area between Bathurst Street and Sudbury Street alone.

This route operates on a four-lane road through the central area, in some of the most congested traffic conditions in Toronto, conditions which are characteristic of most streetcar operations in Toronto.

As indicated in the staff report entitled, *504 King Streetcar Route: Results of Police Enforcement Blitz, and Next Steps*, also being submitted to the Commission at its meeting of April 11, 2001, staff are proposing a number of initiatives which are required to improve service quality on King Street. These include:

- a consistent police presence on King Street to stop the blatant and continuing disregard for traffic regulations on this roadway;
- a permanent solution to taxis illegally parking in the curb lane in peak periods, waiting for customers;
- re-scheduling all TTC non-urgent track repair and maintenance work into off-peak periods;
- speeding-up passenger boarding times, possibly by expanding the proof-of-payment (POP) fare collection system to the 504 King streetcar route;
- using higher-capacity, articulated streetcars on specific trips on that route;
- expanding the hours of peak-period parking and turn restrictions and, ultimately,
- establishing dedicated streetcar lanes on King Street.

Dedicated Streetcar Lanes on King Street

Staff of the TTC, Toronto Transportation Services, and City Planning, are working together to identify the most effective way of creating dedicated streetcar lanes on King Street. To be successful, any solution, when in operation, must be based on these three principles:

- i. The streetcar operation must be separated from traffic;
- ii. All regular commercial activities on King Street, except for on-street parking, should proceed unimpeded; and
- iii. The solution must, to the greatest extent possible, be self-enforcing; that is, it should not require a police officer on every corner to ensure motorist compliance.

To date, staff have been focusing on the section of King Street between Dufferin and Parliament Streets. As illustrated in the following table, at peak times, there are often over twice as many people travelling on this section of King Street in streetcars than in private autos. This is clear justification for creating a right-of-way for streetcars, separated from the impacts of traffic congestion, even if this requires reducing, or eliminating, the road space available to general traffic.

Transit Market Share on King Street in the Morning Peak Hour		
On King at:	People on Streetcars	People in Other Vehicles
Strachan Avenue	2210	1520
Spadina Avenue	2660	1040
University Avenue	2310	1170
Yonge Street	1950	1050

Staff tried to create a dedicated streetcar right-of-way on King Street in the past, but the concept failed. In the early 1990's, general traffic was prohibited from driving on the streetcar tracks on King Street, through the downtown, during peak periods. This was to be effected through the use of overhead signs and pavement markings, some of which are still in place today.

However, this "passive" system of deterrents didn't work; motorists did, and continue to, ignore it. While this was disappointing, staff learned a valuable lesson from that experience: there is no "low-impact" way of establishing dedicated streetcar lanes on King Street. For dedicated lanes to be effective, there must be a dramatic change in the way in which King Street operates.

In this regard, two potential options are currently being evaluated:

- i. Banning all traffic, except streetcars, taxis, and commercial vehicles, from King Street during peak traffic conditions, for example, between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.; and
- ii. Implementing a permanent, full-time physical modification to King Street, such as that shown conceptually in Exhibits 1 through 3. In this concept, through traffic would be banned from King Street at all times, but vehicles would continue to have access to one side of every block. This design would allow vehicles to stop in the curb lane for deliveries, pick-ups, drop-offs, taxi standing, etc. While vehicles would be restricted from travelling in the dedicated streetcar lanes, they would be allowed to come onto the tracks to pass a vehicle stopped in the curb lane. Private-use vehicles would not be permitted to travel beyond the one block they are on, because the only movement permitted at the next intersection would be a mandatory right turn.

On the opposite side of the street from the "stopping lane", the sidewalk would be widened out to meet the streetcar lane, thus eliminating the curb lane for traffic. This widened sidewalk would significantly increase the space available for sidewalk amenities on that side of the street. As shown in Exhibit 1, by alternating this treatment between the north and south sides of the street, the expanded sidewalk would act as a physical barrier to motorists wishing to travel, illegally, along King Street beyond that particular block.

Such a solution would provide for all commercial activities such as deliveries, taxi stands, hotel pick-ups and drop-offs, and access to and from off-street parking lots. All driveways would be restricted to right-in, right-out operation; left turns would be prohibited.

This second option would force motorists, destined for a particular business on King Street, to pre-plan his or her routing. However, people quickly learn to adjust to arrangements such as these, just like people do in cities with extensive one-way street systems.

This proposal would eliminate all on-street parking. However, as can be seen by comparing Exhibits 2 and 3, the widened sidewalk area would significantly enhance the streetscape along King Street, which would be a benefit to many of the neighbouring businesses.

SUMMARY

It is impractical to continue to operate the 504 King streetcar route, with service frequencies as great as every two minutes, in congested mixed traffic conditions. There are a number of initiatives being undertaken by staff to address the variety of problems contributing to the slow and, typically, unreliable service on this route. The most dramatic of these would be the creation of effective, dedicated lanes for the streetcars. TTC staff are working with Toronto Transportation Services and City Planning to identify a design for dedicated streetcar lanes which would fully respect the commercial activities in this corridor. To be effective, any solution will require trade-offs between substantial improvements in the quality of transit service on King Street and auto traffic and on-street parking.

March 29, 2001

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Attachments: Exhibits 1-3

FILENAME: dedicated streetcar lanes on 504 King .cr