TORONTO

STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED

Roncesvalles Avenue Streetscape Improvements Class Environmental Assessment Study

Date:	April 20, 2009
To:	Public Works and Infrastructure Committee
From:	General Manager, Transportation Services
Wards:	Ward 14 Parkdale – High Park
Reference Number:	p:\2009\ClusterB\tra\tim\pw09003tim

SUMMARY

A Class Environmental Assessment Study was undertaken to address opportunities for improvements to the public realm in conjunction with water and combined sewer upgrades and a reconstruction of streetcar tracks on Roncesvalles Avenue between Queen Street West and Dundas Street West. The potential improvements were developed under the guidance of the Roncesvalles Village Streetscape Strategy, prepared by the Roncesvalles Village Business Improvement Area (BIA). The evaluation of a reasonable range of alternative solutions, which included consultation with the public and review agencies, resulted in the following Recommended Design:

- The removal of one travel lane in each direction, to provide one 4.3 metre traffic lane and a 2.0 metre parking lay-by on both sides of Roncesvalles Avenue;
- The provision of transit platforms as an extension of the sidewalk to allow level boarding to new TTC transit vehicles; and
- The widening of the boulevard in certain areas to increase public space and reduce crossing distances.

A Notice of Study Completion must now be issued and the Project File placed in the public record for a 30-day review period in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Transportation Services Division recommends that:

1. authority be granted to the General Manager of Transportation Services to issue a Notice of Study Completion and to file the Project File for the Roncesvalles Avenue Streetscape Improvements Class Environmental Assessment Study in the public record for 30 days in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment; and

2. the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Financial Impact

The estimated cost of the road modifications required to narrow Roncesvalles Avenue is $1.95 million. This work is to be undertaken in 2010 in conjunction with the Toronto Transit Commission's reconstruction of the streetcar tracks on Roncesvalles Avenue.

Some cost sharing will occur with the Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto Water, and potentially the Roncesvalles Village BIA. The General Manager, Transportation Services will report on the total project costs, required cash flows, and any other financial implications as part of the 2010 Capital Budget Submission.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Roncesvalles Village Streetscape Strategy was completed in 2003 for the Roncesvalles Village Business Improvement Area (BIA), identifying a planning approach to improve the way the street looks (revitalization), give the street a sense of identity and build on its function as a local amenity and regional destination. The plans included narrowing the Roncesvalles Avenue to provide gateway features, landscaping and providing wider sidewalks by narrowing the pavement at selected locations and incorporating corner treatments.

The TTC has identified that the streetcar tracks need to be reconstructed on Roncesvalles Avenue between Queen Street West and Dundas Street West and plan to do the work in 2010. To coordinate with the reconstruction of the streetcar tracks, Toronto Water plans to advance their work program to replace the watermain and combined sewer services in 2009. Given the timing and extent of work for the replacement of the streetcar tracks and the underground infrastructure, Transportation Services undertook an Environmental Assessment for Roncesvalles Avenue to examine BIA plans and obtain any required approvals so that all works could be coordinated.

COMMENTS

Study Process

The Roncesvalles Avenue Streetscape Improvements Class Environmental Assessment Study has been completed according to the requirements for a Schedule 'B' project under the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (the Class EA). As a requirement of Schedule 'B' projects, if City Council endorses the recommendations of this Study, the Project File will be filed in the public record for a minimum 30-day review period. During this period, members of the public, and any other interested individual, interest group, or government agency, may request that a Part II Order be issued by the Minister of the Environment. If granted, a Part II Order elevates the status of the project from a Class EA Study to an Individual Environmental Assessment. If this occurs, the project cannot proceed until the proponent completes an Individual Environmental Assessment Study and receives approval from the Minister. If a Part II Order is not granted or if no requests or objections are received during the filing period, the project is approved under the Environmental Assessment Act and may proceed.

The Class EA Study was carried out with the assistance of a Technical Advisory Committee comprised of staff from Transportation Services, Technical Services, Toronto Water, Economic Development, Urban Forestry and the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC).

Public Consultation

Public involvement is an integral and ongoing part of the study process for the Roncesvalles Avenue Streetscape Improvement Class EA Study. The public consultation requirements of the Class EA were met and surpassed. A Notice of Study Commencement was issued in April 2008 which appeared in two issues of the Parkdale Liberty and NOW Magazine. Notices were also directly mailed to relevant review agencies and resident stakeholder groups, and were distributed to residents and businesses within the vicinity of Roncesvalles Avenue through Canada Post and through the Ward Councillor's office.

The distribution of the Notice of Study Commencement announced the initiation of the Class EA Study and invited interested stakeholders to participate. Two Public Information Centres (PIC) were held at key decision points during the study.

The first PIC was held on July 9, 2008 to review the opportunity and the evaluation of alternative solutions. Notices were placed in two issues of the Parkdale Liberty and NOW Magazine in June 2008. Notices were also mailed to relevant external agencies, interest groups, and members of the public who had requested to be placed on the study mailing list, and were distributed to the neighbourhood via Canada Post. Approximately 80 members of the public attended this meeting.

Generally, residents expressed their strong desire to maintain parking on Roncesvalles Avenue and not to implement turn restrictions to side streets. There were also many comments in favour of bike lanes and/or improvements to the cycling environment.

The evaluation of alternative design concepts for the configuration of Roncesvalles Avenue was presented at the second PIC, which was held on March 23, 2009. Notices appeared in two issues of the Parkdale Liberty and NOW Magazine in March 2009. Notices were also mailed to relevant external agencies, interest groups, and members of the public who had requested to be placed on the study mailing list and distributed to the neighbourhood via Canada Post. Approximately 90 members of the public attended this meeting.

The most frequently raised issue among the attendees of this meeting was concern regarding how the transit platforms that include an integrated bicycle lane will look, function and be maintained.

Environmental Assessment Findings

(1) Identification of the Problem or Opportunity

The Study Area, shown in Appendix 1, Figure 1-1, was bounded by Bloor Street West to the north, Queen Street West to the south, Parkside Drive to the west and Lansdowne Avenue to the east. Roncesvalles Avenue is a north-south minor arterial road, with a 4-lane cross-section from Queen St West to Dundas St West. Parking is permitted in the curb lanes at all times except 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. from Monday to Friday in the southbound curb lane. This street is approximately 2 km in length and has four signalized intersections and six separate pedestrian cross-overs. The analysis of existing and future conditions on Roncesvalles Avenue identified the opportunity to consider modifications to the design of the road, as described in the following points:

- Existing traffic demand on Roncesvalles Avenue between Dundas Street West and Queen Street West is well below the capacity of a 4-lane street, with a generally very good level of service as shown in Appendix 1, Figure 1-2, suggesting that a reduction in the number of lanes is feasible;
- The Roncesvalles Village BIA's Streetscape Strategy identified a planning approach to improve the public space and revitalize the street yet keep its identity and remain functional through the narrowing of Roncesvalles Avenue;
- The TTC has identified the streetcar tracks need to be reconstructed on Roncesvalles Avenue;
- Toronto Water has identified the existing watermain and combined sewers need to be replaced and are advancing their work program to coordinate with streetcar track reconstruction; and
- A coordination of the above work on Roncesvalles Avenue provides an opportunity to provide a new curb alignment to support the BIA's Streetscape Strategy and improve conditions for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

(2) Identification and Evaluation of Alternative Solutions

To address the opportunity described above, five alternative solutions, including "Do Nothing," were generated and evaluated. A brief description of these alternatives and the results of the evaluation are provided below.

Do Nothing: The "Do Nothing" alternative was included as a benchmark for the assessment of the other planning alternatives. As the name suggests, the "Do Nothing" alternative involves leaving the street in its current configuration after the Toronto Water rehabilitation and TTC construction.

Alternative 1: This alternative solution involves widening the east side sidewalk/boulevard, creating a parking lay-by on the east side and providing two southbound traffic lanes and one northbound traffic lane.

Alternative 2: This alternative solution adds exclusive bike lanes in both directions and a parking lay-by on the east side, as well as two southbound traffic lanes and one northbound traffic lane. Sidewalk widths are decreased on both sides.

Alternative 3: This alternative solution provides a parking lay-by on both sides and one wide traffic lane in each direction. Sidewalk widths can potentially be increased depending on where bump-outs are located.

Alternative 4: This alternative solution provides exclusive bike lanes and parking lay-bys on both sides of the street with one northbound and one southbound traffic lane. The sidewalk area is decreased on both sides of the street.

Alternatives 1 through 4 are shown in Appendix 2, Figures 2-1 to 2-4.

Each alternative was analyzed and evaluated in detail utilizing five criteria groups:

- Urban Design: This criteria reflects support of BIA Streetscape Strategy, opportunity for greening and wider boulevard area;
- Transportation: This criteria considered impacts to pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and traffic operations;
- Socio-Economic Environment: This criteria considered impacts to private property, heritage features, noise, and on-street parking;
- Costs: These criteria considered construction costs and impacts to utilities and major services, but it does not include the costs for the TTC tracks or landscaping.

Based on the results of the analysis and evaluation, Alternative 3 was identified as the preferred solution. This solution supports the BIA Streetscape Strategy, provides shorter crossing distances for pedestrians, acceptable conditions for cyclists, and on-street parking is allowed on both sides of the street all the times. The full evaluation table is provided in Appendix 2, Figure 2-5.

(3) Develop and Evaluate Alternative Design Concepts for the Preferred Solution

Three design concepts were developed for the preferred alternative cross section. An example of each of the concepts is attached, each shown at the intersection of Roncesvalles Avenue with High Park Boulevard. A description of each concept is provided below:

Concept 1: Bump-outs
This concept, shown in Appendix 3, Figure 3-1 extends the curb line and uses corner treatments in certain areas, but does not provide for level boarding at transit stops. Parking is permitted on both sides of the street in lay-bys, and transit, cyclists and vehicles share one general travel lane.

Concept 2: Bump-outs & Transit Platforms
This concept, shown in Appendix 3, Figure 3-2, is similar to Concept 1, however, it introduces transit platforms to provide level boarding to new low-floor streetcars. Transit, cyclists and vehicles share one general travel lane at mid-block locations. At transit platforms, cyclists will be directed to ride over the platform and then continue on the street. Cyclists will yield for streetcar loading and unloading. The streetcar tracks will be realigned slightly from the centre of the lane to come closer to the platforms. Parking is permitted on both sides of the street in lay-bys.

Concept 3: Cycling Lanes & Transit Platforms
This concept, shown in Appendix 3, Figure 3-3, introduces exclusive bike lanes in each direction. It incorporates the transit platforms as in Concept 2 to provide level boarding. Parking is only provided in lay-bys on the east side of the street.

The same criteria used to evaluate alternative solutions were also used to evaluate the alternative designs. The Evaluation Table in Appendix 3, Figure 3-4 summarizes the results of this evaluation for each criteria group. Based on this evaluation, Concept 2 was selected as the preferred design. Concept 2 provides similar opportunities for improving streetscaping and pedestrian facilities, maintaining adequate on-street parking, provides level loading for TTC vehicles, and provides wide travel lanes to facilitate cycling.

Recommended Design

The Recommended Design is Concept 2, illustrated in Appendix 4, which includes the following elements:

- Provides bump-outs with transit platforms to allow for level boarding to new TTC vehicles;
- One travel lane in each direction approximately 4.3 metres in width;
- Parking lay-bys on each side of the street approximately 2.0 metres in width; and
- Boulevard and sidewalk width increased in some areas to increase public space and reduce crossing distances.

The estimated cost to modify Roncesvalles Avenue is $1.95 million. This does not include any costs for the streetcar track rehabilitation or landscaping.

Public/Agency Concerns

Throughout the public consultation process, a wide variety of valuable comments were received from the general public, adjacent property owners and review agencies which assisted in the development and evaluation of the alternatives. The primary concerns identified through the consultation process and our responses are summarized below.

Parking

Throughout the study, the availability of parking has been a concern, and some area residents and business owners feel there is not enough parking in the current configuration. To address these concerns Transportation Services completed a parking survey on a block-by-block basis during different time intervals to assess the demand for parking on Roncesvalles. The results of this survey are shown in Appendix 1, Figure 1-3. The peak demand for parking was 192 vehicles compared to an existing parking supply of 236 parking spaces. In developing the preferred design, 225 parking spaces have been provided, which will accommodate the peak demand.

Bike Lanes

The Pedestrian & Cycling Committees requested that an alternative be considered that included the provision of exclusive cycling lanes on Roncesvalles Avenue by not permitting parking on the west side of the street. Although this is possible, as shown in Concept 3, it has severe impacts to available on-street parking, which has been a major community concern. The initial designs for this concept included 4.1 metre-wide lanes in each direction to facilitate cycling, while also providing an adequate parking supply. Staff are currently examining opportunities to increase the lane width to 4.3 metres to further improve conditions for cyclists.

TTC Platforms

The TTC requested that an alternative be considered to provide level boarding from the sidewalk to new, low-floor streetcars which will be used on Roncesvalles Avenue in the near future. In order to facilitate this, a functional design was developed, based on international examples, to provide level boarding while minimizing impacts on cyclists. Some members of the public expressed concerns about safety and requested photos of examples of where it is used in other areas. Appendix 5 includes an example of transit platforms used in Portland, Oregon, that incorporate a cycling lane.

Transportation Services and TTC staff are proposing to use a similar concept on Roncesvalles, but with the passenger waiting area located on the outside of the cycling area. Cyclists approaching a streetcar in the process of boarding/alighting passengers will be required to stop and yield the right of way, just as required under existing conditions. Further research will be done during detailed design to refine the design for these platforms.

Property Impacts

There are no requirements to acquire private property for this project.

Next Steps

Pending approval of this report by City Council, the Project File will be compiled and filed in the public record for a minimum 30-day period. Once EA approval is received, design and construction of the Recommended Design may proceed and, is currently planned to occur in 2010, in conjunction with works already planned by TTC and Toronto Water.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1: Figure 1-1 – Study Area Map
Figure 1-2 – Roncesvalles Avenue Level of Service
Figure 1-3 – On-Street Parking Impacts & Peak Demands
Appendix 2: Figures 2-1 to 2-4 – Alternative Solutions
Figure 2-5 – Evaluation of Alternative Solutions
Appendix 3: Figure 3-1 – Concept 1
Figure 3-2 – Concept 2
Figure 3-3 – Concept 3
Figure 3-4 – Evaluation Table of Concepts
Appendix 4: Recommended Design for Roncesvalles Avenue
Appendix 5: Example of Transit Platform used in Portland, Oregon