

Yonge and Welling turn restrictions delayed pending fall reports

By Brock Weir

Aurorans will have to wait until the second half of October – at the earliest – to learn the future of a pilot project which would see left-hand turns restricted at Yonge and Wellington Street during peak times in an effort to improve traffic flow.

If the pilot gets the thumbs-up from both the Town and the Region of York, the earliest it is likely to be implemented is November, according to Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure.

Residents had a chance to weigh in on the program at a public information session last week, but just 25 residents came out to have their say and most of the individuals leaving feedback were from the Downtown Core, who have often spoken out about potential traffic infiltration a turning ban could mean for their streets.

“If people came out from the northeast or out of the core it would have been different, but we didn't get any feedback from that perspective,” said Mr. Simanovskis.

Feedback received at the session last week will be compiled for a report to Council in the second half of October, along with a report outlining the Region's position. Their standpoint was set to be clarified this month but has been delayed until October due to Mayor Geoff Dawe being unable to attend this month's Regional session.

Other members of Regional Council have questions to pose to Mayor Dawe on the proposal, according to Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny, so it was delayed for the Mayor's return.

The delay may have been welcome news to area residents who turned out for a last week's meeting prior to Tuesday's Council session.

Angela Daoust stuck around for the Council meeting to voice her concerns to local lawmakers. She said she was disappointed the turn restriction proposal was still being considered.

“Once again, Council has ignored the concerns of the residents, which were brought forward previously,” she contended. “I came forward previously on behalf of the residents in my neighbourhood to express my concerns and the project is going ahead anyway. According to the information session, over 200 cars will be diverted off Yonge going northbound at peak hours, at the same time that children are walking to Wellington Public School and Aurora High School through the side streets such as Tyler, Temperance, and George and there are a lot of kids – like, hundreds – that use this route. How long before one of these children are put in danger or hit by a car or killed before people here are going to realise that this is a bad idea?”

“There are other solutions to this – all way flashing lights, take some land from the banks, I don't care but don't divert traffic from Yonge Street onto quiet residential neighbourhoods. It is not fair to the residents who live here. Who is going to protect the children's safety? What about all the noise and pollution and lowered property standards as a result of all these extra cars being diverted to our neighbourhood? There is a 68 townhouse complex proposed to be built on Tyler Street, there is a five storey retirement residence being proposed for Yonge and Tyler. How many more cars is that going to put onto the roads in our quiet residential streets?”

Council last tackled the issue of the left-hand turn restrictions last June.

The pilot was originally set to be carried out from August 15 through October 15 at peak times between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m., and again from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. At that point, however, it was put on the back burner until October and November once it was realised by Town and Regional Staff that the matter had to get the green light from York as well. Now, that October start time is once again in jeopardy.

“We were working with Aurora staff on [the August] time period,” said Richard Hui, Manager of Transportation Planning for the Region of York, on the pilot, which was requested of the Region by the Town of Aurora last year. “As we approached it, we actually talked more with our legal services on what implementation and protocols were required and [we were advised] we would need Regional Council approval to carry out the bylaw changes.”

The earliest opportunity he saw on the horizon to get Regional approval, at the time, was this month's Regional Council.

A left turn ban at the busy beleaguered intersection is nothing new. A similar project was carried out in 1998 but was abandoned after traffic infiltration into surrounding neighbourhoods by drivers looking to bypass the intersection became a problem.

Nevertheless, it is something Mr. Hui said the Region found beneficial to overall traffic flow.

“There will be less delays for the majority of the traffic volumes,” he said. “Having said that, there will be impacts elsewhere. There will be the diversion of traffic to certain communities, or there may be more turning movements at intersections such as St. John's Sideroad in order to make up where the turns would occur. Right now we don't know exactly where the impacts will be, but at a

particular intersection of Yonge and Wellington we think if you restrict the number of turns there will be some benefits.?