

Left turn restrictions at Yonge and Wellington postponed until Fall

By Brock Weir

A pilot project to ban left turns on Yonge Street at Wellington Street during peak traffic times has been put on the backburner until at least October pending a Regional decision.

Ahead of last week's General Committee meeting, local lawmakers were set to do a final sweep over the fine details of a plan, banning left hand turns from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and again from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. beginning August 15 and running through October 15.

Now, following an eleventh-hour realisation from the Region of York that they might have jumped the gun, the earliest this pilot project will get off the ground is October 1, running through November 30.

‘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 to get Regional approval would be at their Council meeting in September.

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.’

Mayor Geoff Dawe told Councillors last week that he was concerned about the infiltration on surrounding streets, including Mark and Batson, and questioned how the Region was going to monitor that when the pilot comes into play.

That is a challenge that will be tackled by the Region with the help of the Town, said Mr. Hui, by monitoring through Bluetooth stations at 15 key locations around Yonge and Wellington.

A report on the results of the pilot will be presented in the middle of 2017, he added.

While the decision implementing the pilot project ‘how, when and if’ is ultimately in the hands of the Region, Council members will either reiterate their support for the plan, or lack thereof, this week.

Potential infiltration was one of the main bones of contention when Councillors subsequently discussed Mr. Hui's comments on the delay, along with making sure the public is fully aware of what might come to pass.

One of the key components of the pilot, said Mayor Dawe, is ‘pending local feedback’ and that has been lacking so far, he contended.

‘I don't see how we can proceed with this without any feedback from the public,’ he said. ‘I think we need to put in here that we're going to put in at least one public information session. There will be infiltration on Mark and Batson.’

Councillor Michael Thompson said he saw no reason to delay a public information campaign on the pilot project. However, Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, said he was a ‘little leery’ of a public media campaign on a pilot project where the outcome is outside of Aurora's control.

?As of 12 noon today, we were under the impression that the Region had given us the green light to proceed with this project,? said Mr. Simanovskis. ?When we were informed that they needed to go to their Council, now it is in their hands that this project may or may not proceed. If I was still under the direction that they were in agreement, by all means we could proceed with this plan because now we have the green light to move forward, but that changed today and that is why we are concerned.?

Nevertheless, Councillor Thompson disagreed, stating public information sessions have taken place on a number of issues where the final outcome is uncertain, such as Library Square.

?I don't seem to follow what the issue is,? said Councillor Thompson on building awareness this could be in the offing. ?To me it makes common sense, but maybe I am missing something.?

Councillor Wendy Gaertner offered a similar view, adding that it is ?disrespectful of the public? to simply say this is what is happening.

?My son informing me that he wants to take the car and is going to do it is really different from asking my permission!? she said.