

Region will have say on Yonge Street turn restrictions

By Brock Weir

Regional representatives will appear before Council before Aurora requests a new pilot project prohibiting left-hand turns at Yonge and Wellington this year.

The move came as Council voted in favour of a motion asking the Region of York to implement a pilot project banning left hand turns at the intersection during peak morning and afternoon traffic periods.

The motion was brought to Council by Councillor Tom Mrakas, who said it was developed to address long-standing concerns about traffic flow at the intersection, building on a similar pilot project undertaken at the intersection in 1998 which showed favourable results.

?I found over my time living here that the majority of people who are making left hand turns during the peak periods are usually not residents of Aurora,? he said. ?For me, when I travel through town, I tend to avoid Yonge and Wellington, take the side streets, cut and weave, and I am sure most of us do that. The intent of this is to bring the residents of Aurora back to the area. If we get the flow of traffic moving properly, people will not be afraid to come to that intersection.?

Supporting going forward with the pilot project, Councillor Harold Kim questioned how the success of such a program would be measured ? whether it is by easier traffic flow, or where the traffic ultimately ends up.

?If [neighbouring streets] are inundated with traffic, it just transfers the problem,? he said.

Those are issues that will have to be worked out between Aurora and the Region, according to municipal staff.

?We could work with the Region to identify where the traffic might go alternately,? said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure. ?I think what might be useful is traffic counts at the intersection, as well as St. John's, because that is a primary route both the Region and the Town supports and advertises. I think it is prudent to have conversations with the Region to determine what the expectations are, what the real goal is of this change, and provide them with that kind of guidance so they can measure it appropriately.?

The impact on neighbouring streets was a concern also shared by Councillor Jeff Thom. ?Delighted? that the Region would be presenting options before implementing the pilot project, he said the effects such a ban would have on Temperance Street, Victoria Street, and Mosley Street, among other roads, should be kept in mind.

?I imagine that commuters already use those roads to circumvent Yonge and Wellington,? he said. ?I imagine if there were left hand turn restrictions there would be more people using [the other] streets to circumvent that intersection as well.?

A pilot project in this area is not exactly the road less travelled, as far as Aurora is concerned. When questioned by Councillor Michael Thompson as to why permanent measures weren't taken in the late 1990s when the last pilot project was deemed to have favourable results, Mr. Simanovskis said there were ?political? issues at play.

?My understanding of the removal of the left-hand turn restriction was a political decision at the time,? he said. ?From what I understand, there was some feedback from the community that suggested the old methodology was preferred, so the Region was requested to remove that left turn restriction.?

Seventeen years on, however, the time might be here for a re-think, said Councillors.

?It could be wonderful for the intersection,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?I do think the education component will be very important as we try to convince people to take St. John's Sideroad and Industrial as the bypass it was intended to circumvent all that

traffic on Yonge Street. I hope?the public can come forward with their ideas and concerns and then, after that, we can also do a good job of educating the public of what we would like them to do to help us out with that traffic problem.?

This issue also needs to be tackled from a wide-ranging perspective, added Mayor Dawe.

?We need to do this as a holistic approach,? he said. ?I am looking forward to what the Region says because part of the problem when Yonge and Wellington became a challenge is people started to make that left hand turn at Centre, then the no left turn went to Centre and they moved it down to Catherine and down to Maple.?