

Yonge and Wellington left turn ban eyed for Fall

By Brock Weir

If you're in the habit of trying to turn left at Yonge and Wellington during the morning and afternoon rush, you might have to come up with a few alternative routes this fall.

The Region of York came to Town Hall this week to present plans for a pilot project banning left hand turns at the busy intersection between peak periods. Originally proposed, at press time, to run from August to September, Regional representatives told Councillors Tuesday night that the project would not be ready for launch until the fall.

Council was originally poised to approve a pilot project banning left turns at Yonge and Wellington in a pilot project beginning August 15 and running through October 15, from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and again from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

When implemented, buses will be exempt from the restriction.

Previously approved in principle by Councillors earlier this year, and requested to the Region of York, Councillors are set to consider the fine details of the pilot at this week's General Committee meeting.

According to the report before Councillors from Ilmar Simanovskis, the Town's Director of Infrastructure, left turn restrictions in the area during peak times are expected to show 'marginal benefits' to help improve traffic in the busy corridor and public feedback will be important in determining future steps.

'Town and Regional staff met on May 20 to discuss implementation of the left turn restrictions,' said Mr. Simanovskis, noting the intersection is under the control of the Region of York. 'The pilot project' will provide sufficient data for the Region to determine what the impacts of the left turn prohibition has on the Regional and local road network. The Region will deploy two portable message signs north and south of Wellington Street and on Yonge Street on August 1 to communicate to motorists the left turn prohibition during peak hours.

'The Region is investigating the use of a Bluetooth reader to be strategically placed to collect travel time data, as well as completing additional traffic studies and observations. As this project has the potential to provide a significant change to the traffic operations at the' intersection as well as surrounding areas, there is a high priority for community engagement and feedback.'

Over the course of the pilot, the Town will be working with residents and businesses to keep them informed through advertising, online surveys, and social media. The success or failure of the project will be measured through social media response, online survey participants, enquiries received at Town Hall, and traffic surveys before and during the pilot project.

'The Town and Region staff will conduct traffic volume counts, travel time and queue surveys before, during and after the implementation of the pilot project,' said Mr. Simanovskis. 'In addition, staff will observe traffic patterns and infiltration in surrounding neighbourhoods. Post-pilot-implementation, staff will report to Council on the findings of the pilot program and provide recommendations.'

Yonge and Wellington averages 18,000 - 20,000 vehicles per day, which is typical for arterial roads in the area, according to Mr. Simanovskis' report.

'[Accepted thresholds] could range up to 30,000 vehicles per day, according to the Transportation Association of Canada guide lines for arterial roads,' he said. 'However, the road experiences traffic delays due to the lack of turning lanes at its intersection with Wellington Street. This corridor is a primary community destination for retail, entertainment and culture. This area also adds a historic small-town and human-scaled character to the downtown.'