

Roman Blames Municipal Divisiveness For Thornhill Highway Rip Plan

By HAL BLAINE

Things like the proposed provincial widening of Yonge Street to seven lanes through Old Thornhill Village are going to be pretty hard to stop unless a feeling of co-operation directs the councils of Metro and the surrounding regions of Durham, York and Peel. And the co-operation of the local towns, townships and boroughs is important too.

So says Markham Town Mayor Anthony Roman, chairman of our York Region engineering committee.

Mayor Roman sees the attitude of the majority of York Region's municipal representatives as blocking any move toward achieving inter-municipal co-operation on such things as overall traffic solutions.

"Here's an opportunity for people at all levels to sit down and try to plan, to start to talk. The specifics can be worked out later. Perhaps our mistake (in the engineering committee report on transit to York Region Council) was that we came in with too specific a report from regional engineers without sufficient consultation with the local municipalities and the province."

"We tried again last week, but I don't think we got the point across very strongly. The majority of the people on region council were still dead against it," said the Markham Mayor.

"The region a year ago said the province should consider widening Bathurst instead of Yonge Street. . . there are some pretty devastating proposals being made (in the Yonge Street widening) regarding certain properties. . . Markham certainly will be making submissions on it. . . region in turn may have to get involved."

2 ALTERNATIVES

"We have suggested construction of Highway 404 to four lanes should be immediate. . . this is an example of an alternative to widening Yonge. Part of the problem lies south of Steeles (the region-Metro boundary) . . . especially south of Finch, Yonge Street has been widened and there are highways plans to widen it all the way to Richmond Hill," said Markham Mayor Roman.

He says Markham representatives are anxious to meet with Highways Minister John Rhodes to discuss the Yonge Street widening before there is any final decision. Roman feels the Bathurst and Highway 404 alternatives should be considered first.

An interesting point brought out by the still unfinished region - provincial study is that only 11% of the regular work force in York Region goes to the Toronto core and would want to use the improved Highway 11 along Yonge Street. The rest would probably favor other routes to the east and west of Yonge Street.

TRANSIT BLOCKED

"We (York Region Council's engineering committee and staff) wanted to get started on Metro-Regional transit. . . with everybody sitting down to decide what should be done," said Roman. But this possibility is now closed off at least for the time being by the rejection of Metro - Regional transit proposals in both Durham and York Region councils.

Vaughan Planning Chairman Fraser says his town council so far has taken no formal position on the latest provincial proposal for Yonge Street, although they previously joined with Richmond Hill, Markham and York Region in asking for consideration of the Bathurst Street alternative.

"(They (highways officials) have showed the widening plan to us. . . said they were doing it. Vaughan councillors don't particularly think highly of the parking lanes. The plan is actually for six lanes (with a centre turning lane) with one of the six lanes painted out for parking on each side."

SNOW PROBLEMS

"We would rather have the curb moved out over this parking lane. . . we've always had a problem with snow ploughing. There has never been a wide enough boulevard to hold the ploughed snow and still keep clear a sidewalk," said Councillor Fraser.

"Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham have all taken the position Yonge Street should be a local road. That means it certainly shouldn't be a six-lane highway."

Fraser says the municipal opinions sent to the province get what really amounts to the wastebasket treatment. They are falling on deaf ears.

"They were aware of that (the local wishes) before the design work (for Yonge widening) was done. It's a question of provincial policy. I don't know what the region has done, if anything."

OWN BATHURST

"Surely Bathurst Street makes a better highway if you're going to move people. The Department of Transport does own Bathurst from Steeles Avenue to Langstaff Road. It's not generally known but that stretch was assumed by the province when the Highway 7 bypass was built around Thornhill and up Bathurst," said the Vaughan councillor.

Fraser says that in Vaughan there aren't many direct problems for property owners in the Yonge widening design. There are almost no properties affected on the west side of Yonge through Old Thornhill Village. Most of the properties hit are in Markham on the east side. There will be some taking of property and leasing back

ings recently held at Richmond Hill and Thornhill. A reporter was told the widening would only involve demolition of one building, and this wasn't of those three town staff considers would have to be demolished between Elgin and John Streets.

MANY DEMOLITIONS

Actually, Markham Town planning staff expects nine dwellings and commercial buildings will have to be demolished for the Yonge Street widening. Three of these buildings have historic significance. Demolition of several other buildings is considered a likely possibility.

The plaza between John and Colborne Streets will lose 15 parking spaces. On the north side of Colborne the paint and wallpaper store is substantially within the proposed new pavement and almost all of it is within the right-of-way. Demolition will be inevitable for this building, says the staff report, with the building not being in the Goulding historic sites survey. But there is evidence this building dates back to 1843 and was part of the Gallanough family estates, says the report.

Further north of Colborne the new pavement will virtually destroy the existing facilities for parking and the expanded right-of-way would only be a foot or two away from the front wall. "Accessibility to a parking area at the rear of the property is very poor and the future of this plaza would seem highly uncertain," says the report.

The antique store at Yonge and Centre Streets would be partly within the new pavement and would have to be demolished. Demolition would also be certain for the insurance office to the north which

would be partly within the pavement and probably entirely within the right-of-way.

The Post Office and adjacent plaza would be little affected, but demolition of the single family dwelling north of the funeral home is considered a likely possibility by town staff.

Demolition is considered almost certain for two homes south of Royal Orchard Boulevard, the new right-of-way coming within five feet of the front wall of one and right along the front wall of the other. The shoe store and plaza north of Royal Orchard would lose eight and eight parking spaces respectively.

The Markham Town staff sees merit in a Yonge Street improvement, without widening, for the following reasons:

- The quality of the roadway will be improved.
- Sight distances through grade changes will be improved.
- Left turning movements will be more safely accommodated without impeding the flow of traffic.
- The general roadway, sidewalk and landscaping features will be improved.

The town staff sees no problem with the province's proposed re-alignment of Elgin Street and Arnold Avenue to a single intersection, finding the worries about this to be unfounded.

HARMFUL WIDENING

But town staff opposes the widening of Yonge to seven lanes, favoring instead improvements providing for four through lanes and a centre left turning lane. Staff also feels York Region should undertake studies to determine if alternative routes such as Bathurst

Street and Bayview Avenue could adequately handle the traffic if Yonge Street weren't widened.

Staff says the widening as proposed will cause serious problems for a number of properties. "Although lost parking in part will be replaced by on-street parking, it can only be assumed that this is temporary. Once the parking lanes are lost, there won't be any legitimate parking for many businesses," says staff.

"The other concern is that the province may turn Yonge Street over to the region, which will need to make the decision on converting the parking lane to traffic lanes."

"The total pavement width (81 feet) is such as to make left turning movements out of businesses very hazardous. It will be necessary to cross three lanes of one-way traffic, plus a median lane which will have unpredictable movements, in order to get into the desired flow of traffic," says staff.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

"It is anticipated that development along Yonge Street will be considerable by the year 2000. Vaughan Town anticipates an additional 50,000 people between Yonge, Dufferin, Steeles and Highway 7."

"Richmond Hill expects an addition of 80,000 people in an area bounded by Highway 7, Elgin Mills Road, Bathurst Street and Bayview Avenue. In Markham an estimated increase of 45,000 to 50,000 is expected for a fully developed Thornhill. The grand total of this anticipated growth represents a population increase of 160,000 to 165,000 by the year 2000."

"In light of such development, what function can

tion should include rail, as well as bus and subway, and ensure all modes are co-ordinated. Unnecessary waiting at stops because schedules aren't posted, poor connections, separate ticketing of bus and rail routes — these all discourage co-ordination of existing rail services. They are problems which could and should be quickly rectified.

"Hopefully Transportation Minister Rhodes will direct more attention and resources to answer existing needs such as these, instead of building the experimental train project at the CNE now to cost \$30,000,000," said MLA Deacon.

RICHMOND HILL CRITICAL

"It should also be pointed out that Yonge Street at the present time is seriously congested in Richmond Hill and Aurora. Richmond Hill by far is the most critical (area) but it (Yonge through Richmond Hill) could never be more than four lanes in width. It would appear to be much more desirable to develop a network which doesn't result in the most heavily travelled road being restricted at given points," concludes the Markham Town planning staff report on Yonge Street widening through Thornhill.

Local MLA Deacon of Unionville says the provincial-regional traffic patterns will be of great value if it isn't used to determine the need for wider and bigger road systems, but rather to find the most efficient way to satisfy traffic needs.

TRANSIT ALTERNATIVES

"This has to include public transportation as well as the needs of the private automobile. Aand public transporta-

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In spite of all this local worry about the Yonge Street widening, indications are that construction is imminent not only through Thornhill but all the way up to the Vaughan-Markham Roads intersection in central Richmond Hill.

MINISTRY STATEMENT

Several days ago an interview granted a Metro newspaper by an unidentified spokesman for the Ministry of Transportation and Communications said the Ontario government may widen five miles of Yonge Street from Steeles Avenue northward through Thornhill, Langstaff and Richvale, right to Vaughan Road (Major Mackenzie Drive).

Instead of describing the new widened Yonge Street as being proposed for seven lanes, the highways spokesman talked of five lanes. He said the provincial Highway 11 (Yonge Street) would be widened from four 10-foot lanes to four or five 12-foot lanes, one of the lanes to be designated as a left turn lane.

the actual right-of-way. Service station pump islands at Grandview Avenue, Doncaster Avenue, Clark Avenue will be only 10 feet, 15 feet and 12 feet respectively from the right-of-way.

CROWDS APARTMENTS

Apartments buildings should be set back 90 feet from major highways, according to Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation standards. But along Yonge, between Clark and Elgin, the setbacks will be between 45 feet and 85 feet.

At Elgin Street, gas pumps will be only five feet from the right-of-way. An unfinished apartment building next door will be only 56 feet from the right-of-way. North of Elgin the town staff feels demolition will be unavoidable for a commercial building and two single family dwellings, since their front walls will be right up against the new pavement. Both these homes are listed in the Goulding survey as historic sites.

These demolitions are at variance with indications of provincial representatives at two public information hear-

ings recently held at Richmond Hill and Thornhill. A reporter was told the widening would only involve demolition of one building, and this wasn't of those three town staff considers would have to be demolished between Elgin and John Streets.

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