

Expand study of Stouffville GO line: developers

BY AMANDA PERSICO
apersico@yrmg.com

Developers in north Markham are hoping a study into GO train service on the Stouffville line will look further north and consider new modes of transport.

GO Transit is conducting an environmental assessment for an expansion along the Stouffville Railway Corridor, between the Unionville GO station and Kennedy GO station in Scarborough.

The project will accommodate more than 13,000 riders on a week-day, which amounts to more than 3.2 million annual trips.

In 2012, morning ridership was about 7,300 riders, which is expected to rise to 11,600 by 2023.

The assessment includes additional track, improvements to existing stations, increased service and connections with other proposed and future transit systems.

During this week's Town of Markham development services committee, those in the consulting and transportation engineering business argued only extending train service into the Unionville GO station will not be enough to meet future demand and more attention

should be paid to the section of track north of Unionville.

John Long of LEA Consulting Ltd., who also represents the Mackenzie and Hwy. 48 Landowners Group, made up of about a dozen landowners in the area, wants to see the study's scope expanded to include a possible transportation hub at Major Mackenzie Drive.

More than 7,000 riders ride the GO between Lincolnville in northern Whitchurch-Stouffville and Kennedy station in Scarborough.

More than half of those riders, about 4,100, board the train prior to the Unionville station, Mr. Long said.

Major Mackenzie Drive is listed in the region's transportation master plan as a major east-west collector in the future, he added.

"This Stouffville line is a very important part of Markham's transit," Mr. Long said. "Markham has to look at the different geographical options and look at new technologies. The new technology presented by GO is more GO trains."

He also called on Markham council to push for rapid urban transit along the Stouffville Railway Corridor.

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New technology could include electrified light rail transit (LRT), which is faster than diesel trains and can accommodate more frequent stops.

The GO train travels about 40 km/h, while the subway rolls along at about 32 km/h, Mr. Long said. An electric LRT system can travel between 45 and 80 km/h depending on the number of stops.

Not only is LRT faster, it can also be built at surface grade, making it easier to connect with future transit systems, Mr. Long said.

"Rapid urban transit is a balance between speed and stop frequency," he said. "This needs to be fought in both a technical and political way."

The environmental assessment process started earlier in February and is expected to be complete by the spring of 2014.

That means there is still time for Markham to make its opinions heard.

"Having more morning and evening service will not solve the problem," said Regional Councillor Jim Jones. "We need to have this debate with engineers and transit experts. Having an integrated transit system will help create a competitive economy for the GTA."

The city has asked GO Transit to expand its assessment scope twice before, the city's engineering director Alan Brown said.

The committee also wants to see a workshop set up to discuss all options for the Stouffville rail line, which includes expanding the environmental assessment study to Major Mackenzie Drive as well as other rail alternatives.

"We're not getting GO's attention," Mr. Brown said. "We need to get their attention before GO proceeds without looking at the long-term needs for this corridor."

GO hosted public information sessions this summer to introduce the project and plans to host more this fall.

Residents, stakeholders and agencies can comment on the project after the public information sessions and ask to be added to the project master e-mail list.



FILE PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Commuters scramble to board the GO Train in Unionville. A landowners group says GO should be making long range plans for expansion further north, possibly with light rail.

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