



Corporate Report

NO: R158

COUNCIL DATE: July 24, 2006

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **July 18, 2006**
FROM: **General Manager, Engineering** FILE: **1705-018**
SUBJECT: **Widening of 24 Avenue, with Centre Medians & Protected Left Turn Bays**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Engineering Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report for information.
2. Authorize staff to:
 - (a) continue with the acquisition of a right-of-way to provide access for Sunnyside Shopping Centre at 154 Street (which has signalized access to 24 Avenue);
 - (b) continue with the interim left-turn median break on King George Highway to provide Sunnyside Shopping Centre with full movement access to King George Highway until such time as either the various commercial accesses along King George Highway can be formalized with a joint use arrangement, or King George Highway is widened to four lanes plus a left-turn lane;
 - (c) work with the owner of Peninsula Village Shopping Centre to develop improved access options for that shopping centre;
 - (d) study pedestrian crossing needs on 24 Avenue and incorporate improved facilities as appropriate;
 - (e) facilitate discussions with Sunnyside Shopping Centre and properties to south for a long-term joint access from King George Highway; and
 - (f) forward a copy of this report to Mr. Cox.

INTENT

In response to public correspondence, petitions, and a delegation to Council expressing concerns about the recent construction of medians and protected left-turn bays on 24 Avenue, this report provides the background to the project, the nature of the concerns, the technical justification for access management by means of medians, and the actions taken by the Engineering Department to provide alternative access improvements to address the concerns that have been voiced.

BACKGROUND

Traffic volume counts taken in 2002 on 24 Avenue between 152 Street and King George Highway revealed volumes of 18,000 vehicles per day. This is the threshold where a two-lane urban roadway typically begins to reach its full capacity and is the trigger point used in developing our arterial widening program. Further influencing the decision to widen 24 Avenue to a four-lane divided standard was the commencement of development of the Grandview Heights area with the Grandview Corners commercial development on 24 Avenue at 160 Street. Other development applications, such as the Morgan Heights neighbourhood are in process and redevelopment in the area is expected to proceed at a rapid pace. This redevelopment requires improved services, including improvements to the Major Roadway Network to accommodate the traffic volumes associated with current and anticipated future development which will more than double volume on 24 Avenue. The first roadway projects in a series of planned roadway improvements to respond to the needs of the overall development, and not just the commercial development, have been constructed. These projects include:

- Replacement of the two-lane 24 Avenue overpass of Highway 99 with a four, plus left-turn, lane structure;
- Widening of 24 Avenue between 162 Street and Highway 99;
- Widening of 160 Street between 23 Avenue and 25 Avenue; and
- Widening of 24 Avenue between Highway 99 and 152 Street.

It is the latter project which has given rise to public opposition and comment, particularly from owners and tenants of the fronting commercial properties, regarding changes to property access. Advance notification was sent and two public open houses were held in May 2005 to present the intended project and to solicit public input prior to finalizing the design. A total of 60 people registered their attendance at the May 15 public open house and 89 people registered their attendance at the May 31 public open house. A total of 33 comment sheets were received from members of the public. Of the 33 comment sheets received, 16 indicated that they supported the widening project, 13 indicated opposition, and 3 did not indicate an opinion. Of the 13 that indicated their opposition, only 3 made specific comments about how the installation of a raised median on 24 Avenue might affect their accessibility.

DISCUSSION

Raised center medians on a busy arterial roadway serve to manage turning vehicles and access; and thereby, increase capacity and safety and can be landscaped to beautify the area. Center medians eliminate the potential for head-on collisions and significantly reduce conflicting traffic movements associated with left-turns to and from fronting properties, with their associated collision potential. Based on studies in other communities, it is estimated that center medians can reduce collision frequency by as much as 50%. It is particularly important to have raised median channelization throughout the extent of intersection left-turn lanes, to prevent opposing left-turns from taking place across the multi-lane intersection approach.

Immediately after constructing the median curbs on 24 Avenue between Hwy 99 and 152 Street fronting business owners, tenants and members of the general public started to voice opposition to the access restrictions to commercial properties. The comments cited opposition for the following general reasons:

- Retail sales will decrease;
- Property values will go down;
- Businesses will fail; and
- The length of routes to and from stores are too long and inconvenient.

In developing projects of this nature which introduce control in commercial areas, staff have researched several studies in U.S. communities which have assessed the longer term effects on businesses which have such restrictions. Their studies show that most of the impacts are short term.

Specific Comments Raised by the Mr. Cox Delegation & Others

Mr. Cox, the owner of “Buck or Two Dollar Store” in the Peninsula Village Shopping Centre, appeared before Council as a delegation on May 31, 2006, and raised two primary issues; namely:

- Difficulty for tractor trailers to access his warehouse facilities at 15531 – 24 Avenue; and
- Loss of left-out from Peninsula Village onto 24 Avenue.

Other concerns that have also been received include:

- Loss of left-in and left-out access for Sunnyside Shopping Centre at the southwest corner of King George Highway and 24 Avenue; and
- Concerns over the safety of pedestrians crossing 24 Avenue in the vicinity of Peninsula Village Shopping Centre.

Comments and Action Taken on Concerns Raised

1. Truck Access to 15531 – 24 Avenue

15531 – 24 Avenue is a commercial warehouse and service building (please see Figure 1). Prior to road widening and median installation, staff have been informed that tractor-trailers accessed the subject warehouse from eastbound on 24 Avenue, then backed out across 24 Avenue, stopping traffic, to make the return movement. Due to the proximity of the driveway to the signalized intersections at King George Highway and at 156 Street, the back-to-back intersection left-turn lanes do not allow retention of left-turn access to the Strata.

A reciprocal access agreement exists between neighbouring properties which allows direct left turn access from King George Highway to the warehouse (alternate Route “A” on Figure 1) with flow-through movement to exit via right-turn onto 24 Avenue. The complainant argues that this is too complex for delivery drivers who simply drive to the address of delivery expecting full direct access. Another available alternative will be for deliveries to be made approaching westbound on 24 Avenue. This can be achieved by driving South past 24 Avenue to 156 Street and returning via 156 Street to 24 Avenue and the site (alternate Route “B” on Figure 1).

Action

To help improve this access route, the City will be improving the intersection geometry at 156 Street and King George Highway to facilitate truck turning movements. This work will be carried out over the next few months.

2. Access to Sunnyside Shopping Centre

Prior to widening of 24 Avenue, Sunnyside Shopping Centre had one exit to King George Highway southbound, and two driveways on 24 Avenue, fronted by a painted median. Although this painted median restricted legal traffic movements to/from the site to right-in/right-out, many drivers with no physical barrier in place chose to make left-turn movements. Installation of the raised median for the back-to-back protected left-turns bays has precluded these left-turn movements.

Action

To compensate for this restriction, the exit onto King George Highway has been improved to provide for better access, including a median break on King George Highway, to allow left turn movements. This, together with the 24 Avenue / King George Highway signalized intersection, provides the equivalent of full movement access to 24 Avenue. In addition an agreement has been reached with the property owner located between the Sunnyside Village Shopping Centre and 154 Street that will allow traffic to/from Sunnyside Village Shopping Centre to access 154 Street, and via the signalized intersection of 154 Street / 24 Avenue,

full movement access to 24 Avenue. This has been informally agreed to by Sunnyside Shopping Centre, and subject to this agreement being formalized, construction of this new access will commence soon. With these initiatives, access for Sunnyside Shopping Centre is equivalent to the pre-construction case, and in some respects even enhanced (please see Figure 2).

3. Access to Peninsula Village Shopping Centre

Prior to widening of 24 Avenue, Peninsula Village Shopping Centre had one right-in/right-out access and one full movement access from 24 Avenue plus a full movement access from King George Highway to underground parking, plus an entrance only, and an exit only to/from King George Highway southbound. With the widening of 24 Avenue, the only change to the access to the Mall is that left-turns out of the shopping centre onto 24 Avenue have been eliminated at the one, formerly full movement access location on 24 Avenue. Traffic wishing to exit the shopping centre to go southbound on King George Highway or eastbound on 24 Avenue must now exit onto King George Highway. Prior to the road widening, 70% of motorists with these destinations already utilized this egress point (probably due to its greater ease and safety), and only 30% used the now precluded left-out on 24 Avenue.

Action

Staff met with representatives of RioCan, the owners/managers of the Peninsula Village Shopping Centre. RioCan indicated that business has been down during the construction period but remained hopeful that it would return with the opening of the 24 Avenue bridge and the completion of construction on 24 Avenue. The Engineering Department and RioCan staff agreed to set up a meeting with the mall's tenants to discuss their concerns, clarify a number of misconceptions/misunderstandings regarding current and future road works in the area, and the impacts that these may have on accessibility (primarily the exit) from Peninsula Village and explore actions to mitigate negative impacts to the Mall's customers.

4. Pedestrian Crossings Across 24 Avenue

During the construction phase of the project, concerns were raised by a few individuals regarding the need for a safe pedestrian crossing across 24 Avenue at/near the main access to the Peninsula Village Mall. Prior to the construction occurring, a pedestrian attempting to cross at this location would have had to contend with either eastbound left turning vehicles entering the mall or southbound vehicles making a left turn out of the mall. Crossings would have been somewhat difficult.

Post construction, pedestrians wishing to cross at the Mall's main access can do so across the east leg of the access without being in conflict with left turning traffic leaving the mall although they do have to contend with a new second

eastbound lane of through traffic. They can also utilize a portion of the raised median as a refuge point between crossing the eastbound and westbound lanes on 24 Avenue. This post construction crossing condition is more safe, but still is not advisable. The best and safest crossing of 24 Avenue for pedestrians is at the signalized intersection of 154 Street, approximately 130m east of the main entrance to Peninsula Village. Detouring to this safer crossing point would entail an additional walking time of approximately 4-5 minutes.

Action

Pedestrian crossing needs will be studied to determine if additional crossing facilities are required once construction is complete and 24 Avenue reverts to normal traffic flow.

CONCLUSION

The installation of the raised centre medians and protected left-turn bays on 24 Avenue assists in the safe and efficient management of the large volumes of traffic that are expected to use this important arterial road corridor now, and in the future. Traffic projections based on planned future development indicate that traffic volumes during peak hours will double, and in some areas triple, from what exists today on 24 Avenue.

The City must strive to balance the need for safe and efficient movement of people and goods with the need for access to adjacent properties, which supports community and business development. The actions taken to date, and those ongoing, for improved access to commercial centres are an attempt to reach that balance. It is recognized that the unavoidable impacts of construction are concerning to fronting businesses and that some adjustment may be required in the routes of patrons to these establishments, but the additional capacity and safety of this roadway improvement will support a higher level of activity and economic potential for the area.

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Attachments