



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

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Comments on Environmental Study Report(ESR) - Stouffville Corridor Rail Service Expansion

Transport Action Ontario is pleased to submit comments on this report. We had previously commented on this study during PIC#2 (our letter of January 30, 2014), where we made 8 comments. Six of those related to concerns about the narrow scope of the study. We recommended additional study on

- (a) Extending track twinning to Major Mackenzie Drive
- (b) Including electrification
- (c) Adding additional stations
- (d) Establishing a connection at Scarborough GO station/fly under needed at Scarborough Junction
- (e) Considering parking and station access
- (f) Improving bus connections to TTC Route 53 Steeles E. at Milliken Station

These comments all related to a vision of converting the GO system to a frequent all-day electrified rapid rail service ("surface subway"), as per European cities, as cited in our 2013 report "Regional Rapid Rail: A Vision for the Future". Subsequent events have supported this vision. In April (Premier's announcement), and again in June (Provincial Budget), the province committed to introducing Regional Express Rail (RER) on all lines owned by GO, including the Stouffville Line, within 10 years. In addition, John Tory, a leading Toronto mayoral candidate, has proposed converting the Stouffville line to a surface subway as part of his Smart Track plan. Finally, the Stouffville line is being studied as a promising option in the Metrolinx Yonge Relief Network Study.

All signs therefore point to this line being a high priority candidate for electrification and frequent service in the near term. A new or amended Environmental Assessment will shortly be required. It is unfortunate that this ESR just completed did not cover these aspects, as we recommended, as this would have saved time and money. However, we urge prompt amendment of the ESR to incorporate these aspects.

The scope of this ESR, although modest (track twinning and related station changes between Scarborough Junction and Unionville), does represent necessary work for RER. We have several comments:

- The report cites several existing bridges (Hagerman, 14th Ave fly under, Highway 401 and CP Rail) where a minimum clearance of 7.4 m for future electrification is not present. The report recommends (pg 117) to “consider adjusting the proposed track profile”. In view of the provincial announcement, “consider” is too weak and profile adjustment should be a definitive recommendation. However, we also understand, per previous Metrolinx/GO studies, that 7.4 is indeed the preferred minimum clearance, but current regulations only require 7.0 m and a clearance as low as 6.9 m can be made to work.
- Similarly, the report recommends (pg 117) to “consider establishing a minimum of 7.4 m of vertical clearance.....to protect for potential future electrification clearances”. Again, “consider” is too weak.
- As cited in the ESR (pg 92), the public has been vocal about issues created by train whistles. The report correctly states that special exemptions for anti-whistling can be issued, provided certain conditions are met. However, the report states that “This process must be initiated by the municipality (to Transport Canada) and not GO Transit”. We believe this statement is incorrect. As you may know, the City of Markham has set up an Anti-Whistling Working Group, which includes GO Transit. The group has determined that, based on recent revisions to Transport Canada’s “Guideline No. 1 Procedure and Conditions for Eliminating Whistling at Public Crossings (2011-10-20)”, the railway and the municipality make the final decision (agreement) on anti-whistling. The parties may request Transport Canada to inspect the crossing, but this is not a requirement. Thus this sentence should be revised to say “The process must be initiated by the municipality and is submitted to the railway (in this case GO) for agreement, using Transport Canada guidelines for guidance”.
- In view of the significant increase in the number of trains between Unionville and Mount Joy stations, whistle cessation and noise abatement will also be required north of Unionville station. Electrification will assist somewhat on noise and emissions abatement.
- The report authors may not be aware that the City of Markham has initiated planning studies on the Markham Centre mobility hub, centred on Unionville GO station. Metrolinx is represented in the study. Some of the cases show the Unionville station platform moved south about 300 m, under Highway 407, with parking both north and south of the Highway. All cases show the track under a deck, with development on both sides. Public meetings on this are slated for November. The ESR may wish to refer to this work in more detail.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this report.

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