

St. Clair Avenue West Streetcar Right-of-Way (ROW)

Like many, I feel one of the cornerstones of a sustainable and successful Toronto is a good transit system. It must be clean, fully accessible, extensive, dependable and affordable. When I compare Toronto’s transit system with other ‘worldclass’ cities, Toronto does not compare well at all. To catch-up with cities such as Washington D.C. or Mexico City, let alone Tokyo or London, we need to be designing a plan to extend our subway service – not dreaming in technicolour about streetcar right-of-ways, as the Mayor and the TTC have been.

The \$100 million St. Clair West Streetcar ROW Project continues to be mired in bad- *‘close-your-eyes-and-hope-it works’*-planning. I remember sitting in the first meeting regarding the ROW proposal with City’s Transportation Services, the TTC, and Councillors Mihevc, Nunziata, and Palacio. I was flatly against a proposal which would reduce the capacity of a main east-west major arterial roadway by one half; frankly, we need all the road capacity we have for at least the foreseeable future, especially with the prospect of “sin-free” electric (i.e. ZENN car) or compressed air (i.e. MDI-CAT car) powered cars actually on the horizon. The City’s Transportation Services was opposed at that time but was gradually co-opted into supporting the proposal in the end.

As a pro-transit advocate, I wanted to support this streetcar proposal on St. Clair Avenue West but the plan just won’t work – too much road capacity is given to the streetcar ROW; queuing lanes are too short so overflow traffic blocks thru-lanes; u-turn movements should never be encouraged (particularly not a cornerstone of traffic operation); the right-of-way hinders the operation of our road system plan by blocking north-south streets, removes rush-hour business parking, removes trees, and actually reduces the width of the sidewalk in areas. The TTC has not even worked out a snow-clearing plan. The streetcar project’s promised payback of more reliable service without any additional speed or capacity, does not overshadow the drawbacks of this project.

In addition to being used to backwardly justify increased development height and density along St. Clair Avenue West (13 storeys, west of Christie St.), the St. Clair streetcar is the template for the Mayor’s new Transit City plan (www.transitcity.ca) which calls for many new streetcar lines across the city (no new subways), including an underground streetcar along Eglinton Avenue from Keele Street to Laird Drive. I have made it clear to the TTC that a subway is what Eglinton Avenue needs considering this stretch proposed to be underground is equivalent in length to the Yonge subway from Union to Lawrence. Can you imagine spending all the money and effort tunneling that far just for a streetcar tunnel that cannot be later upgraded to a subway tunnel? I cannot.

Needless to say, the \$6 Billion Transit City plan will change our city just as the St. Clair streetcar ROW has changed St. Paul’s.

When transit-priority, environmentally friendly buses on St. Clair could give a better transit service while keeping the existing road capacity and the opportunity to widen the sidewalks and boulevards, why would City Council spend \$100 million this way? Their intent may have been noble but their execution missed the mark for a city of Toronto's caliber.

111 St. Clair Ave. W. – Imperial Oil Building

I'm sure many of you have noticed the large hole in the ground at 111 St. Clair Ave. W., the soon-to-be former Imperial Oil Building. As part of an internal company restructuring, the building on St. Clair is no longer needed for office space and will be sold off by Imperial Oil in the next few months. Prior to the sale, the Ministry of the Environment must certify the integrity of the site for all future uses, including residential which has the strictest guidelines for environmental standards. In researching the area, a large deposit of furnace oil was detected 40 feet below the surface. These pools of oil left from many decades ago must be removed and thus soil remediation work has been ongoing for the past year.

Monthly meetings have been coordinated with the residents on Foxbar Road, representatives from Imperial Oil, contractors working on the site, City Inspectors, Provincial regulators as well as Pierre D'Aoust from my office. Work is scheduled to be complete by March of this year with a few touch-ups such as sod-laying and other plantings to be completed in the spring.

As far as City Council goes, there continues to be many disconcerting trends as there was during its last term. Our cost of living continues to increase while we get less and less for our tax-dollar in this city.

If you have any questions on these or other issues, please contact my office via www.MichaelWalker.ca, councillor_walker@toronto.ca, or 416-392-7906.