

General Response from Jill Stephen (Director, Rapid Transit) to emails received in response to Ryan McGreal's Raise the Hammer article "City Abandons Two-Way Conversion in LRT Plan", by Ryan McGreal, published December 02, 2010.

The posting on this subject on Raise the Hammer has generated lots of discussion in the community. We have received lots of emails and telephone calls on this subject since the posting went up. I hope the following will help clarify the current proposal.

Staff investigation of LRT on the B-Line corridor began in 2007, following the MoveOntario 2020 announcement. As the studies and design work has progressed from the feasibility stage to the preliminary design stage, the plans have become more detailed and some proposals that had been put forward in earlier stages have needed to be changed. At all times, the LRT investigations have been driven by the Vision Statement (developed Corporately by the Corporate Working Team, endorsed by the Public, and approved by Council) and the Benefit:Cost Ratio. That is, staff have worked to ensure that the B-Line meets the goals of stimulating the economy, improving quality of life, revitalization, providing environmental benefits and connecting key destination points in a way that ensures that the benefits received are greater than the costs incurred.

The Downtown Transportation Master Plan (updated in 2008) was endorsed by Council in August 2008. A basic premise of this Plan was that Main Street and Cannon Street would be paired as the primary corridors for through traffic, and that York/Wilson and King Street would be paired as routes for traffic destined to stay in the Downtown. The original Downtown Transportation Master Plan (2001) included recommendations for 2-way conversions of York/Wilson and King; however, given the ongoing studies regarding rapid transit, only the two-way conversion of York/Wilson was moved forward to implementation stage (now nearing completion) in 2008. A decision on the conversion of King Street was deferred until the completion of rapid transit design work.

In 2009, the proposal to convert King Street to 2-way traffic was brought forward as part of the ongoing rapid transit studies. At this stage, our work was still very high-level; more detailed than feasibility work, but not detailed enough to be called preliminary design. The proposal for LRT was for centre-run, two-way LRT, with one traffic lane in each direction in the majority of the corridor. At the eastern and western ends, there would be two lanes of general purpose traffic in each direction, as well as 2-way LRT down the centre of the road. This premise was included in the Metrolinx Benefits Case Analysis work.

In community consultation in 2009, we heard from many businesses and residents that they did not support the removal of their ability to turn left mid-block. Centre-run LRT would require left turns only be allowed at signalized intersections. The downtown-area businesses were also concerned about way-finding and the loss of on-street parking and loading that would result from two-way conversion of King Street. Furthermore, residents and businesses were concerned about the removal of rubber-tired traffic from King Street in International Village and the provision of access to buildings in that area with underground parking.

We had cross-sections of the corridor drawn up based on optimal (greenfield) lane and sidewalk configurations and based on existing right-of-way widths, in both cases with

two-way traffic. We found that, because the right-of-way is so narrow in some places (as narrow as 15m), we could not fit everything in without significant property acquisition and demolition. This would have significant costs on many levels: socially, environmentally and economically.

Furthermore, we recognized that there are some everyday operations that are critical to the success and livability of our City. These include emergency response, waste collection, local bus service, deliveries, sewer and watermain maintenance and utility works to name just a few. A two-way traffic, two-way LRT cross-section in the narrower sections could only allow these day-to-day activities to occur if:

- Property was acquired to widen the right-of-way and provide more space for operational and delivery vehicles to pull over and traffic to pass without going onto the LRT tracks; or
- It is deemed acceptable for all traffic to wait behind buses, garbage trucks, etc. while they stop and start along the corridor; or
- When work is ongoing in these corridors, the streets are closed and all rubber-tired traffic is diverted to other streets; or
- All operational activities are conducted at night when traffic levels are lower (still requires diversion of traffic or traffic queues behind operational vehicles); or
- LRT operates in mixed traffic like a TTC streetcar.

None of the above options meets the intent of an efficient, reliable, comfortable alternative to private automobile use.

The B-Line corridor ranges from about 15m wide on King Street East to over 40m wide at in front of McMaster University. The characteristics of the corridor, including land use, also vary along the corridor. There are sections with residential and businesses right to the front property line, and other sections where buildings are set a fair distance back. There are schools and institutions, parks and open spaces, homes, places of worship and businesses. There are areas where there is two-way traffic today, and areas where it is one-way traffic. Some spots rely on on-street parking and loading because there are no other alternatives, while other businesses have dedicated lots or rear accesses. There is no “one-size-fits-all” cross-section that can be applied all along the corridor, nor would we want to do this. A key component of the B-Line work is building on strengths that are already there. We are also aiming to make improvements where we can.

The B-Line is currently in the planning, design and engineering stage. This stage will bring us to a point where we know what the corridor will look like, how wide the lanes and sidewalks can be, where the stops are, how the LRT and traffic will move, where parking and loading can still occur on the road, what the land use will be, where we make changes, and where we leave things as they are.

A misconception that is evident from the emails I have received in the last 2 days is that people believe the move from two-way traffic on King Street is based on maintaining it as a free-flowing street for cars and trucks. This is not the case. In many places between Dundurn and Parkdale, we will be reducing the number of lanes from 4 to 2. One lane will move traffic and one will be for loading, parking and local bus service. The use of bump-outs in some areas will slow traffic, as will volume, and lane configurations. Drivers will be able to get to Downtown, but King Street will not be their preferred route for driving from end-to-end across the City. In some cases, we will reduce the number of through lanes to one, a wider lane that includes space for vehicles to pull over or park or to pass stopped buses or garbage trucks. This approach to LRT and roadway design

achieves many of the objectives of two-way traffic advocates, without eliminating loading space for businesses, without eliminating local bus service, without removing all traffic from International Village, without running LRT in mixed traffic for long stretches (it is proposed to be in mixed traffic in International Village), without forcing maintenance activities to take place at night, and without costly (socially and economically) land acquisition.

In a greenfield situation, we would want provide 3.5m wide traffic lanes and LRT lanes, plus wide sidewalks and platform areas. However, we are working within an existing corridor and are not proposing to widen the right-of-way to provide for LRT. Typical rights-of-way are 20m wide. If we were to provide an eastbound traffic lane, an eastbound LRT lane, a westbound LRT lane, a westbound traffic lane, a single parking/loading lane, sidewalks wide enough for urban Braille and a centre LRT platform, we would need almost 26m. Reducing the lane widths to 3m each takes us to 24m. Eliminating parking/loading takes us to 21m. Narrower sidewalks are then required to get to 20m wide. This is not a desirable cross-section.

At the Sherman stop, we have less than 20m, and will be working within the right-of-way to fit the necessary elements in. This means some compromises. We are proposing a 2.5m walk, 3.7m lane, 3m platform, 6m LRT (2 lanes) corridor, and 4m combined platform/walk. Not ideal, but it works. Cars will not go speeding along King Street, but they can get through. Wider sidewalks would be great, but we are providing enough space for walking and wheelchairs. LRT will operate in dedicated lanes.

We are not currently proposing to convert Main Street to two-way traffic. There is still a need for some traffic to move easterly across the City, and Main Street fulfills this role. This does not preclude future discussions about conversion, however. It also does not preclude future discussion about lane reductions to provide wider sidewalks. Either could be reviewed again in the future.

Kind regards,

Jill