

Existing Land Use Condition Report

YRTP- HWY. 7

1.1 Social Environment

1.1.1 Land Ownership Patterns

The Highway 7 corridor is a diverse stretch of roadway covering approximately 40 kilometres in the Region of York. Commencing in the currently undeveloped land at both the east and west extremes of the road's limit in York Region, to its clustering of development in its three Regional Centres, Highway 7 is a driving force behind the success and future development patterns for not only the Region, but for the surrounding areas as well.

City of Vaughan

Commencing at the shared Peel Region –York Region boundary Line (Sunset Corners), Highway 7 is surrounded by agricultural/rural land on both the north and south sides as it heads towards the east into the City of Vaughan. East of Highway 427, on the south side of Highway 7 is the Royal Group Technologies Campus, which is a conglomerate of industrial warehouse and manufacturing buildings. On the north side of Highway 7 adjacent to Highway 427, the land currently sits vacant, but with the imminent development of the Corporate Business Park by the Sorbara Group and the creation of the Vaughan West Business Park, (NW corner of 7 and 27) both of which are components of the Vaughan Enterprise Zone (development of around 1,500 acres of land for industrial and commercial expansion and would include the northerly expansion of Highway 427), this land will not remain vacant for long. With the plans for development taking shape and development currently underway, the future of this area will help to create a stable western anchor for the rapid transit line.

Moving eastwards, land development intensifies with the emergence of some more industrial buildings in the West Woodbridge Industrial Area on the south side of Highway 7 and as the corridor reaches Martin Grove Road, the first residential community becomes visible. The Woodbridge Town Centre (101,020 SF) is on the south side, east of Martin Grove Road and across the street on the north side is the Woodbridge Mall. To the south of Highway 7 and east of Martin Grove Road is the Woodstream Centre (66,000 SF). Immediately to the south of this retail commercial shopping centre is a recently completed Vaughan Grove Sports Park (regional park).

As the route continues, between Martin Grove Road and Pine Valley Drive, the development takes on a small to medium scaled commercial district merged with newer single density neighbourhoods with reverse frontage onto Highway 7 and older houses with direct access from Highway 7. The historical core of Woodbridge is located within this subsection between Kipling Avenue and Islington Avenue. This area is also dissected by varying tributaries of Rainbow Creek as well as the Humber River, creating large, well-forested ravine and open space areas that contribute to the overall low intensity identity of this area of the corridor.

The section of Highway 7 approaching Highway 400 is the most intensely developed area within the City of Vaughan. On the north side of Highway 7, east of Pine Valley Drive, is a large residential area with reverse frontage on Highway 7. Directly opposite is a strip of highway commercial uses including shopping plazas and the Pine Valley Industrial Area, which is a medium-sized industrial park. East of the industrial area begins the domination of the big box users, which can be found both north and south of Highway 7. On the east side of Highway 400 is the continuing-to-develop Vaughan Corporate Centre, which is designated as a regional centre by the Region of York in its Official Plan.

Industrial users continue to dominant the urban environment as the corridor travels east past Jane Street. It should also be noted, that Jane Street provides the first diversion from Highway 7 with an alternative route option heading south along Jane Street and along a variety of eastern alignments before returning to Highway 7 via Bathurst Street.

East of Jane Street, the frontage onto Highway 7 is hindered with the presence of the CN Freight Classification Yard, which breaks the corridor away from its at-grade development pattern. The CN railway car marshalling yard and the associated long overpass creates a gap in the continuity of Highway 7. When Highway 7 returns to its at-grade configuration, it resumes a primarily industrial character along both its north and south sides.

Centre Street provides the second divergence from Highway 7 with the possibility of travelling east on Centre Street and then north on Bathurst Street back up to Highway 7. Between Centre Street and Bathurst Street the majority of the corridor is a single loaded or single sided street, because of the proximity of Highway 407 to Highway 7. As Highway 7 curves north from Centre Street, the west side is primarily small-scale strip commercial and industrial developments. When it curves to the east and a return to its east-west alignment, the north side contains new residential development with reverse frontage along Highway 7. This is the end of the Highway 7 corridor within the City of Vaughan as it travels briefly into the Town of Richmond Hill and then into the Town of Markham.

Town of Richmond Hill

Highway 7 enters into the Town of Richmond Hill as it passes to the south of the Richmond Hill Golf & Country Club at the NE corner of Highway 7 and Bathurst Street. To the east of the golf course, at the NW corner of Highway 7 and Hunter's Point Drive, is the Hunter's Point Village Shops. The remaining land north of Highway 7 between Bathurst Street and Yonge Street consists primarily of single density residential lots with a reverse frontage on Highway 7.

The Bayview Glen Area is designated a Regional Centre by Region of York; a mix of office, retail and other commercial space including a Famous Players Silvercity complex. To the east of the development that straddles Red Maple Road, the land currently remains vacant, but a development, anchored a new Loblaws store, is proceeding. All of the uses are set back away from Highway 7, and have a more direct access point from High Tech Road (another possible diversion from Highway 7 corridor). Again, no development is present on the south side of Highway 7 as the lack of separation between 7 and Highway 407 deems the land unusable for development.

To the east side of Bayview Avenue, Highway 407 jogs to the southeast and creates potential development opportunities (south of Highway 7 and east of Yonge Street which is within the boundaries of the Town of Markham). A high-density residential development exists on the NE corner of Highway 7 and Bayview Avenue and then is separated from the rest of the development because of the German Mills Creek, which is to the immediate east of the development.

From the east of German Mills Creek to another tributary of the river just to the west of Commerce Valley Drive West, the development is a mixture of commercial, retail, office and residential uses. Commerce Valley Drive east to Highway 404 (Town of Richmond Hill easterly limit) the corridor travels through the Beaver Creek Business Park. On the north side which is a mixture of office, retail and industrial users and on the south side (Town of Markham) sits land that continues to develop with office, retail and other industrial uses.

Town of Markham

The Highway 7 corridor crosses Highway 404 and continues to the east, the remaining corridor is located within the jurisdiction of the Town of Markham. On the south side of Highway 7 is the Woodbine/ Cochrane Drive Business Park and on the north side is the Valleywood Business Park. This area contains some of the largest uses (notably Compaq Canada Inc and Hyundai Auto Canada Inc to name a few). This area to Woodbine Avenue is for the majority, developed, but some infill development opportunities are available.

On the east side of Woodbine Avenue, there is a mix of retail and office uses. On the south side of Highway 7 is the Woodside Centre (325,897 SF) and First Markham Place (281,086 SF) which are big

box developments including among others, a Home Depot, Chapters and a Cineplex Odeon movie theatre. On the north side of Highway 7, opposite the big box development, is a low-density residential neighbourhood with reverse frontage onto Highway 7 complemented by an open space area known as Apple Creek Park containing a tributary of the Rouge River.

The land east of Rodick Road to just west of Kennedy Road on the south side of Highway 7 is all apart of the Markham Centre plan (this area is designated as a Regional Centre by the Region of York). For the most part, this land remains vacant, with the exception of a few spots of development on and around Warden Avenue, including the Hilton Suites Toronto/Markham Conference Centre & Spa at 8500 Warden Avenue. On the north side of Highway 7 east of Rodick Road, new medium density residential development is occurring around the Town of Markham's Municipal Offices at the NE corner of Highway 7 and Town Centre Blvd. On the NE corner of Highway 7 and Warden Avenue is the Markham Town Square (179,706 SF). From this retail complex to Main Street Unionville, the north side of Highway 7 is a mixture of low-density residential development and vacant land. It should also be noted that north of Highway 7 on Main Street Unionville is the Unionville Historical District Village.

Continuing east, past Kennedy Road, the north side of Highway 7 is dominated by an open space area containing several small bodies of water draining into Milne Lake on the south side of Highway 7, east of McCowan Road. To the east of the open space on the north side of Highway 7 is the Markville Shopping Centre (985,764 SF- regional shopping centre). The south side of Highway 7 is dominated by commercial users fronting onto Highway 7 and a small area of residential townhouses closer to Kennedy Road.

From McCowan Road east to 9th Line, Highway 7 is a mixture of developments for the most part though; consisting of small-scale commercial development and low density residential. As Highway 7 continues eastwards, past 9th Line and past the Markham- Stouffville Hospital to the York-Durham Line, the land becomes more rural in nature with single-family residential units scattered along both the north and south side of the corridor. Plans for the development of the Cornell community SE of Highway 7 and 9th Line will provide an anchor for development along the easterly edge of the corridor.

1.1.2 Land Use Designations

1.1.2.1 Regional Official Plan

The Regional Official Plan (Consolidated November 1, 2002) states as objective 6 of Section 6.2 Transit Network, that the Region would like to “promote the implementation of a regional rapid transit network.” The Official Plan further indicates that the rapid transit network would include, but not be limited to “f) a transitway in the Highway 407 corridor.”

The implementation of a rapid transit system along the Highway 7 alignment would create an efficient regional transit system linking designated Regional Centres.

Map 5 Regional Structure of the Plan designates the lands located at the intersection of Highway 7 and Highway 400 as the Vaughan Regional Centre, the lands located to the east of Highway 407 and Yonge Street as the Richmond Hill Regional Centre and the lands at the southeast corner of Highway 7 and Warden Avenue as the Regional Centre for Markham. As the Plan intends the designated Regional Centres to be compact, pedestrian-friendly, safe and accessible, a rapid transit system would greatly benefit from an alignment that captured these three centres as there main focal points. Therefore, an alignment that catered to these centres would include the Highway 7 alignment in Vaughan, a Highway 7 alignment or High Tech Road alignment through Richmond Hill and a Highway 7 alignment or a Markham Centre alignment through the Markham Regional Centre, whichever maximizes the effectiveness of the route alignment possibilities.

The Commissioner of Planning and Development Services (senior management team) submitted a report to York Region's Planning and Development Committed for their February 5, 2003 meeting (adopted February 20, 2003) entitles “Advancing the Region's Urban Structure- Policy Principles.” This report

recommended transit supportive development with the highest densities being located within the Regional Centres. Further it recommended overall densities in the Regional Corridors and Centres should achieve an average density of 2.5 FSI while simultaneously supporting stable residential communities.

The development of high-density uses along the corridor will support the introduction of a rapid transit system along the Highway 7 corridor. Without the intensification of development along the corridor, the extent of potential benefits from the transit system would not be realized. The Region will have to work proactively and not allow for the possibility of lower density development along the corridor.

1.1.2.2 Municipal Official Plans (City of Vaughan, Town of Richmond Hill, Town of Markham)

City of Vaughan

The City of Vaughan recognizes the need for a rapid transit system, as they are currently undertaking policy planning studies dealing with the Highway 7 corridor. The two studies that revolve around the corridor are the "Highway 7 Land Use Futures Study" and the "Jane/7 Employment Area Redevelopment Study" both of which are scheduled for completion in the Fall of 2003, beginning the process of designating the Highway 7 corridor as a Community Improvement Plan Area.

The City of Vaughan's Official Plan (OPA 600) states that the City's transportation and public transit system wants to develop and facilitate efficient links between the two centres and the communities, and encourage the evolution of the Vaughan Centre and the Vaughan Corporate Centre as the focal points of the City. Thus, by creating a rapid transit system that would benefit the infrastructure of the City, the Highway 7 corridor would provide the most effective means in doing so.

Town of Richmond Hill

The Town of Richmond Hill is a major beneficiary of the rapid transit system as it provides the hub connection point for both the Highway 7 corridor as well as the Yonge Street corridor. The Town of Richmond Hill states in their Official Plan (consolidated December 31, 1998) in Section 2.2.3.3.2 that "Local transit routings shall be integrated with, and supportive of inter-regional and inter-municipal public transit systems" and in Section 2.2.3.3.4 which states that "Adequate facilities to maximize the level of transit service such as bays, bus shelters, exclusive bus lands where warranted and additional right-of-ways and/or pavement widths which will accommodate bus or other forms of transit will be provided."

Town of Markham

The Town of Markham recognizes the need for a formidable form of transit as they encourage and promote it within their Official Plan January 1999, (updated July 2000). It states in Section 5.6 (Public Transit) "public transportation shall include local and high speed bus services, intra-regional transit and commuter rail services. The Town is willing to co-operate with other public agencies to achieve integration with other public agencies to achieve integration of these facilities and services." As well, "the town supports, in principle, a regional transit system and the establishment of a York Region Transit Operating Authority."

1.1.2.3 Municipal Zoning By-Laws

The municipal zoning by-laws were created and amended to support the development of a rapid transit system along the Highway 7 corridor. Therefore, the zoning by-laws conformed the streetscape to be compatible to the implementation of such a system.

1.1.3 Neighbourhoods

City of Vaughan

The City of Vaughan has two distinct communities within the threshold of the rapid transit line. Commencing in the west, the Woodbridge community forms the first major residential area along the corridor. The present-day Woodbridge community encompasses the former hamlets of Brownsville, Elder's Mills, Vaughanville, and Pine Grove. Woodbridge currently has a residential resident population of 40,000.

The second community that the Highway 7 corridor encounters is the Thornhill community. Thornhill is divided in half between the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill and runs along both the east and west sides of Yonge Street. Today, Thornhill is a large urban community with over 59,000 residents.

Depending on the routing of the Highway 7 transitway, the residential districts within the City of Vaughan may or may not fall within the catchment area. If the alignment were to remain on Highway 7, east of Centre Street to Bathurst Street, it would miss the entire Thornhill community and would only address the minimal residential development around Dufferin Street. If the corridor were to follow Centre Street, it would travel through the heart of the Thornhill community and would cater to the Promenade Shopping Mall (705,148 SF- regional shopping centre) amongst other attractors.

Town of Richmond Hill

The Town of Richmond Hill has only two of its residential communities with direct access to the Highway 7 corridor, those being, South Richvale on west side of Bayview Glen and on the east side of the Bayview Glen Area, the Doncrest residential community. North of the Bayview Glen area is an emerging mixed-use residential neighbourhood including various medium and high-density residential developments along Red Maple Road.

Town of Markham

The Town of Markham consists of a wide variety of residential districts in and around the Highway 7 corridor. This transit corridor dissects the Unionville community, the Old Markham Village Area and the developing Cornell Community.

The residential community of Unionville for the most part, lies north of Highway 7 and therefore, would be better served by a transitway along Highway 7 instead of through the planned Markham Centre area. If the line were diverted through the Markham Centre area at Town Centre Blvd. it would bypass the entire Unionville community, but would provide direct access to the Unionville GO Station.

As the line heads further east, it will enter into the Old Markham Village residential community near the Highway 7 and Main Street Markham intersection. This community will benefit greatly with the introduction of a rapid transit system, as it will provide a quick and efficient mode of transportation in and around the region.

The Cornell community includes some 1,500 acres between the Little Rouge, 9th Line and Highway 407 would serve as an anchor residential community at the eastern extreme of the transitway. This community, designed by the Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., envisioned this as its first venture into Canada using their New Urbanism concept, refined through various projects in the United States, most notably, Seaside, Florida.

Cornell will provide employment opportunities for up to 10,000 and homes for up to 27,000 in a variety of garden cottages, larger single-family homes, semi-detached units, fourplex villas, street townhouses and apartment units limited to 6 storeys all of which are integrated with one another.

1.1.4 Commercial Areas

The Highway 7 corridor travels through many diverse commercial zones as it crosses York Region from west to east. Retail centres are scattered along Highway 7, but for the purpose of this report, only the major centres will be focused on. The first major commercial area is the one in the City of Vaughan at the intersection of Highway 7 and Highway 400. Big box users on both the north and south sides of the street dominate this section of the corridor. Future development of the Vaughan Corporate Centre will greatly affect and increase the scale of development on the west side of Highway 400.

The next major commercial area is near the intersection of Highway 7 and Yonge Street in the Town of Richmond Hill. This complex includes large-scale big box development as well as a Silvercity Movie Complex and surrounding restaurants. From here Highway 7 continues eastward, passing smaller scale commercial areas on the west side of Highway 404 and then it passes by the next major commercial area, the Woodside Centre and First Markham Place on the south side of Highway 7, just east of Woodbine Avenue. This commercial area lies within the Town of Markham and includes a movie theatre and a Home Depot amongst other big box retailers.

Following this commercial area is the Markham Town Square. This may be on a smaller scale than the other commercial areas, but should be noteworthy as it is the site of the designated “Regional Centre” by the Region of York for the Town of Markham. The next large commercial area is the Markville Shopping Centre, at the NW corner of Highway 7 and McCowan Road, also within the Town of Markham.

1.1.5 Business Areas

The Highway 7 corridor travels through many business/employment areas as it transects the southern area of York Region. Commencing in the west, the corridor begins in the Highway 427 East and 427 West Employment Areas. These two comprise what is also known as the Vaughan Enterprise Zone, which consists of developed and undeveloped parcels of employment land scheduled for expansion.

On the east side of Highway 27 and for the most part, south of Highway 7, is the West Woodbridge Employment Area, which is home to approximately 4,700 employees. The next set of employment areas is east of Pine Valley Drive and south of Highway 7; is the Pine Valley Employment Area stretching all the way down to the northern boundary of Highway 407. On either side of Highway 400 are the Weston 400 Employment Area (on west side) and the Vaughan 400 Employment Area (on east side) as well as the Jane Street South Employment Area, which lies on the south side of Highway 7 from Highway 400 to Keele Street.

As Highway 7 continues eastwards, the next employment area it crosses is the Keele Employment Area, on the north side of Highway 7, east of Keele Street and west of the Don River, and is home to the largest amount of employees of all the employment area in the City of Vaughan with over 18,000 employees. Beside the Keele Employment Area is the Langstaff Employment Area, which extends from the Keele Employment Area boundary to Dufferin Street.

If, however, the transitway diverts off of Highway 7 and along alternative alignment(s), then other employment areas could be captured directly. One of the alternatives would include heading south on Jane Street, which would capture both the Steeles Employment Area and the Steeles Campus Employment Area, which together represent some additional 8,000 employees. However, it only seems logical to maintain the transitway along Highway 7, as it would capture the highest volume of employment areas within the City of Vaughan.

As Highway 7 dissects the Town of Richmond Hill and the Town of Markham, it crosses through many employment areas. On the north side, in the Town of Richmond Hill, Highway 7 passes through the Bayview Glen Area, and as it heads toward Highway 404, the Beaver Creek Business Park on the north side and the Highway 407/Highway 404 Business Park on the south side of Highway 7 in the Town of Markham.

As Highway 7 crosses beneath Highway 404, the remaining corridor exists all within the Town of Markham. On the north side of Highway 7, between Highway 404 and Woodbine Avenue, is the Valleywood Business Park and on the south side from Highway 404 to Rodick Road is the Woodbine/Cochrane Drive Business Park and beside that is the developing Markham Centre Business Park. On the north side of the road is the City Centre Business Park, which includes the Markham Civic offices just west of Warden Avenue.

The last major employment area that the transitway passes is the Bullock Drive Business Park on the north side of Highway 7, east of McCowan Road. East of this small employment area, the transitway continues to its' eastern limit into the mostly rural area east of 9th Line.

1.1.6 Future Development Plans

Recently designated and emerging areas of land development identified within the corridor include:

- The Vaughan Enterprise Zone at Highway 7 and Highway 427, which would see the expansion of the current industrial/commercial area with the construction of approximately 1500 acres of land for future industrial and commercial uses;
- The Milestone Corporate Group and Giffels have developed conceptual plans for industrial, office and retail facilities on a 40 acre site on the NW corner of Steeles Avenue and Keele Street in Vaughan (north of York University);
- The Metrontario Group owns land at the NW corner of Centre Street and Bathurst Street, adjacent to Promenade Mall (705,148 SF), where plans for development include a new seniors' retirement building;
- The development and intensification of the Vaughan Corporate Centre at Highway 7 and Highway 400, which is a designated regional centre in the Region of York Official Plan;
- The Bayview Glen Area in Richmond Hill at Highway 7 and Yonge Street, which is a designated regional centre in the Region of York Official Plan;
- The Markham Civic Centre and the future development of the Town Centre Business Park (all part of Markham Centre), a 17.6 acre site on the south side of Highway 7, just west of Warden Avenue;
- The Markham Centre at Highway 7 and Warden Avenue, which is a designated regional centre in the Region of York Official Plan;
- The Cornell and Box Grove Communities east of 9th Line in the Town of Markham; and
- Any other infill development or development east of 9th Line, including possible expansion of the Markham-Stouffville Hospital.

1.1.7 Recreation and Tourism Areas

The recreation and tourism areas within the Highway 7 corridor cater to all members of society. From the vast majority of parks, community centres, arenas, libraries to the many shopping locales, the Highway 7 corridor provides a plethora of activities.

Commencing in the City of Vaughan, the more prominent areas include the large big box outlet areas that exist on the SW and SE corners of Highway 7 and Highway 400. On the SW side is The Colossus Movie Theatre, a re-development of the old Highway 400 Drive-in. On the SE corner is the AMC 30 Interchange movie theatre that exists within a large big box complex that also contains Dave and Buster's, a multi-faceted entertainment complex. Amongst these two anchor areas of development, other retail developments including Walmart, the Seven/400 Power Centre surround the area creating a large retail area in a prime location to capture visitors from both the Highway 7 traffic and more importantly, Highway 400 traffic.

As Highway 7 moves into the Town of Markham, the major tourist attractors include the historical areas of Main St. Unionville as well as Main St. Markham. Both showcase the historical elements of past development through the restoration of historical buildings and the small-town retail shops fronting the two streets.

Many other tourist attractions surround Highway 7 as it passes from west to east through the Region of York including shopping centres, golf courses, and parks and open spaces, all of which are within a reasonable distance of the corridor itself.