

Mayor and Council,

Though triggered by the announcement of the proposed Gordon Street Improvements, this letter will be a bit more comprehensive. At its core is a question that I believe hasn't been adequately answered - What is the vision for Gordon Street South?

The city's Urban Design Concept Plans for the Gordon Street Intensification Corridor document lists the following vision for Gordon Street:

*"Gordon Street is envisioned to become a vibrant pedestrian friendly street framed by mid-rise buildings, continuous rows of healthy trees, and active at-grade uses that engage the street and the sidewalk."*

By that statement, the current Gordon Street Improvements plan constitutes a disaster. This plan is hostile to pedestrians in a number of ways. By increasing the width of the street, it increases the time to cross, decreasing pedestrian comfort and safety. Walking along a street with five traffic lanes is an incredibly unpleasant experience, done only out of necessity. The multi use paths put cyclists and pedestrians in the same space. While this is a much safer combination than the proposed alternative of on street cycle lanes, this plan makes walking much less comfortable.

The larger issue with this plan however, is that its limited scope looks at only one question, "how do we move more cars through this section of Gordon Street?". A holistic approach needs to be taken, looking at car traffic, transit, cycling and pedestrians, how it relates to the number of developments which have been built and will be built over the coming years, and how it relates to the stated vision of Gordon Street South as a pedestrian friendly street.

I often watch city council development applications whose details differ, but the general structure of the meeting remains the same.

- A development is proposed on Gordon which is explicitly listed as being in an intensification area
- The minimum number of parking spaces required by the zoning bylaw is met, but a number of councillors question whether there is enough off street parking
- Those same councillors then worry about the amount of increased car traffic due to the development

Those councillors' comments are a contradiction that ignore induced demand - namely that additional car infrastructure begets additional car traffic. Additional parking leads to more driving. Wider roads lead to more driving. The concept however, also works in reverse. Decreased car infrastructure leads to decreased traffic volumes. When driving becomes less convenient, people choose alternatives.

This presents a perfect opportunity, which has sadly been missed so far, for Council to finally and definitively answer the question - "what is the vision for Gordon Street South?". If the vision is for a street with 5 traffic lanes that is hostile to other road users, then this plan is a winner.

But, if Council wants to uphold the vision of a pedestrian friendly Gordon Street, this plan needs to be completely thrown out. Traffic lanes should be removed, not added. The removed traffic lanes should be repurposed as transit lanes, cycle tracks, or widened sidewalks. The emphasis should be on walking, cycling and transit, with through car traffic on Gordon discouraged. New developments should have less car parking, but increased bike parking. Throw in free Guelph Transit passes too! - a bargain compared to the \$40,000 per spot construction cost of structured parking.

With fewer parking lots more space can be used for parks. Or housing. An active transportation focused Gordon Street can be a denser Gordon Street, helping to relieve the city's housing shortage while at the same time increasing the tax base.

Only a vision for that de-emphasizes cars will lead to a future that is greener, healthier and more affordable.

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