

The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council
Planning and Economic Development
January 13, 2022

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

Yonge North Subway Extension Transit-Oriented Communities Proposals Markham and Richmond Hill

1. Recommendations

1. Council direct staff to work with the Province, Metrolinx, local municipalities and landowners to advance the Yonge North Subway Extension and Transit-Oriented Communities work to address the Region's interests to more closely align with Regional and local municipal planning visions for these communities.
2. The Regional Chair communicate to Metrolinx, Council's desire for the Yonge North Subway Extension to proceed to tunnel procurement and construction without delay.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Ministers of Transportation, Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Cities of Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan.

2. Summary

This report provides an overview of the Bridge and High-Tech Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC) proposals by the Province and highlights Regional planning issues, implications, and comments heard at their recent public engagement sessions.

Key Points:

- Under the Provincially-led TOC program, the Province is partnering with developers to plan and deliver integrated development with transit expansion.
- Province announced two TOC sites in York Region, at Bridge and High-Tech stations located in the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway Regional Centre.
- York Region is committed to Yonge North Subway Extension (YNSE) implementation and working with the Province and landowners to align Bridge and High-Tech TOC proposals with the planned vision of the Regional Centre and local municipal secondary plans.

- Key areas of Regional interest include appropriate mix of uses, magnitude of population increase beyond planned growth, multi-modal connectivity, provisions of affordable housing and adequate spaces for parks and community services.
- Growth proposed by the TOC proposals is well beyond what is planned for and will impact the planning and delivery of Regional infrastructure and services.
- At the December Provincial TOC public open houses, attendees raised comments concerning density, mobility, housing, mix of use, wind and shadow impacts, community amenities, and others.
- Province's target is to attain zoning certainty for TOC proposals by March 2022, through municipal planning approvals or Minister Zoning Orders.
- The YNSE project is being delivered by Metrolinx – the provincial agency also responsible for GO Transit – and planned to move into procurement and construction next.
- Through 2021, Metrolinx responded to concerns expressed by some Thornhill residents about the alignment under their homes.
- TOC proposals are anticipated for proposed Steeles and Clark stations.
- The status of the Royal Orchard station is yet to be decided but Metrolinx should be encouraged to proceed with preliminary construction while this is being resolved.

3. Background

Provincial Transit-Oriented Communities Program aims to build mixed-use, compact communities around subway stations

The Province passed the *Transit-Oriented Communities Act* in 2020 to facilitate planning and delivery of mixed-use TOC around transit stations along the YNSE and other priority subway projects. Through this process, the Province collaborates with landowners to submit development proposals for sites around transit stations. The landowners will invest in infrastructure to offset capital costs of the transit program.

To implement the TOC program, the Province and York Region executed a [Preliminary Agreement and Transit-Oriented Communities Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) with shared objectives for TOC developments, including:

1. Exchange of Value: Creating new investment and revenue opportunities between the public and private sectors, where possible
2. Increased Transit Ridership: Develop transit-oriented communities, in which residents choose transit as their first mode of transportation
3. Improved Customer Experience: Enhancing station areas to make the interaction with customers seamless (e.g., by creating desirable commerce and retail concourses, etc.)

4. City/Region Building: Develop communities that provide residents and workers with new places to live, work and play

Province announced two Transit-Oriented Communities at Bridge and High-Tech stations, in the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway Regional Centre

In September 2021, the Province announced TOC locations (Attachment 1) at the proposed Bridge and High-Tech subway stations, within the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway Regional Centre. Along with Provincial announcement of the TOC sites, Infrastructure Ontario shared submissions for these TOC proposals confidentially with York Region, City of Markham and City of Richmond Hill staff. Both submissions included background reports prepared by landowner consultants on planning and technical matters. These were circulated to internal Regional and local municipal departments for review and comments on a confidential basis, as requested by the Province.

Bridge and High-Tech Transit-Oriented Communities proposals are located within the approved Langstaff Gateway and Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plans areas

The Bridge and High-Tech TOC development areas represent large land holdings in the Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan and Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan areas beyond the immediate station areas.

The Bridge TOC development area comprises the western portion of the Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan area, extending from Yonge Street to Cedar Avenue (Figure 1). The High-Tech TOC proposal is within the Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan area (Figure 2).

Figure 1

Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan Development Concept and Bridge Transit-Oriented Communities Lands



Figure 2
Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan Update Development Concept and
High-Tech Transit-Oriented Communities Lands



Approved and evolving transit-oriented secondary plans already exist for proposed Transit-Oriented Community lands in the Richmond Hill/ Langstaff Gateway Regional Centre

The Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan, approved in 2011, facilitates a high-density, mixed use, transit-oriented community with a range of mobility choices, community services and parks and open spaces for 32,000 residents and 15,000 jobs. This Plan was developed through a two-year comprehensive public engagement process.

Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan is being updated with new land use and density targets. City of Richmond Hill Council, municipal and agency stakeholders, and the public have provided input into the update since 2019. This work is nearing completion with City Council adoption targeted for early 2022 and Regional approval thereafter. The Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan update envisions a future downtown in Richmond Hill Centre, with high-density, dynamic and vibrant destinations for 28,000 residents and 16,500 jobs. The updated policy framework identifies a wide and balanced mix of employment, housing, retail, community and cultural uses with vibrant urban spaces and fine-grained streets for walkable neighbourhoods in this growing community.

Together, these approved and emerging updated Secondary Plans achieve the Region’s vision of compact, mixed use, vibrant TOC supported by housing, employment, cultural and community facilities, integrated with rapid transit connections.

Province is working towards a time-bound approval process to achieve zoning certainty for Transit-Oriented Communities proposals by March 2022

The Province submitted Bridge and High-Tech TOC proposals to the Region and local municipalities outside of the traditional development application and approval process. These TOC proposals follow a unique Provincially led process with expedited review and approval timeline to achieve zoning certainty by March 2022 to meet critical transit project and procurement timelines. These developments are not following the review and decision process timelines legislated through the *Planning Act*.

“Zoning certainty” guarantees heights, densities and land uses at TOC sites. The Province has advised achieving “zoning certainty” may involve Minister’s Zoning Orders or municipal planning approvals (e.g. amendment to official plans and zoning bylaws). TOC developments approved through Minister’s Zoning Orders are not appealable.

4. Analysis

Municipal comments on the Transit-Oriented Communities proposals identified four critical areas of concern shared by York Region, Markham and Richmond Hill staff

Municipal comments on the Bridge and High-Tech TOC proposals were provided to the Province in September 2021 and outlined four critical areas of concern and detailed technical comments:

1. Alignment with approved municipal Secondary Plan visions for lands within TOC sites
2. Densities and population proposed for the TOC sites
3. Process – confidentiality and engagement with Councils and the public
4. Financial framework to support the TOC sites

The Region reinforced the need for the TOC proposals to be revised to address these concerns in a memo to the YNSE Executive Strategy Committee in September 2021 and letter to Deputy Ministers of Transportation and Infrastructure in November 2021 (Attachment 2).

Regional and local municipal staff have actively engaged Provincial staff in an effort to align the TOC proposals with the planned vision of the secondary plans in the Richmond Hill/ Langstaff Gateway Regional Centre. Regional and local municipal staff shared feedback and input at multiple working group sessions and strategic committee meetings for improvements to TOC proposals that more closely align with the areas’ planned vision.

Revised Transit-Oriented Communities proposals need to address key issues and more closely align with the planning framework of local municipal secondary plans

In December 2021, the Province released revised Bridge and High-Tech TOC proposals on the public open house engagement platforms. Updates included boundary adjustments to the TOC development lands, addition of east-west multi-modal connections, provision of a high-level phasing plan, revised shadow and pedestrian level wind studies.

Table 1 compares the revised Bridge TOC proposal with the Langstaff Gateway Master Plan (West Side) targets. A comparison of development concept between the Secondary Plan and TOC proposal is shown in Figure 3.

Table 1
Bridge Transit-Oriented Communities Proposal and
the Langstaff Gateway Master Plan (West Side) Comparison

Statistics	December 2021 Bridge TOC Proposal	Langstaff Gateway Master Plan (West Side)
Site Area	25.4 hectares	25.4 hectares ¹
Population	43,700 ²	22,300 ²
Jobs	9,400 – 12,300	10,600 – 19,200
Population to Job Ratio	3.6 to 4.6 :1	1.2 to 2 :1
People and Jobs per Hectare	2,089 – 2,203	1,294 – 1,631
Building Height	5 – 80 storeys	3 – 50 storeys
Floor Space Index	3.4 – 25.7	5.4 – 15.9

¹ Area in the Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan intersecting with the Bridge TOC proposal

² Population calculated based on 2.13 persons per unit factor, as per the Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan

Figure 3

Development Concept - Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan and Bridge Transit-Oriented Communities Proposal

Langstaff Gateway Secondary Plan

Bridge TOC Proposal



Table 2 compares the revised High-Tech TOC proposal with statistics derived from the draft Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan policy framework. Figure 4 shows renderings of development concepts for the draft Secondary Plan and High-Tech TOC proposal.

Table 2

High-Tech Transit-Oriented Communities Proposal and Draft Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan Comparison

Statistics	December 2021 High-Tech TOC	Draft Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan
Site Area	20.1 hectares	21.8 hectares ¹
Population ²	35,300 – 36,700	17,700
Jobs ³	9,600 – 12,600	14,500
Population to Job Ratio	2.8:1 – 3.8:1	1.2:1
People and Jobs per Hectare	2,303 – 2,383	1,475
Building Height	40 – 80	8 – 70
Floor Space Index	10.3	4 – 9.5

¹ Area in the Secondary Plan that most closely aligns with the High-Tech TOC proposal

² TOC population based on average unit size 76.5 m² and 1.74 persons per unit factor. Secondary Plan based on average unit size 95.02 m² and 2.15 persons per unit factor

³ TOC jobs based on 20 m² per employee for office and 40 m² per employee for retail. Secondary Plan jobs based on 20.90 m² per employee for office and 37.16 m² per employee for retail

Figure 4 Development Concept - Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan Update and High-Tech Transit-Oriented Communities Proposal

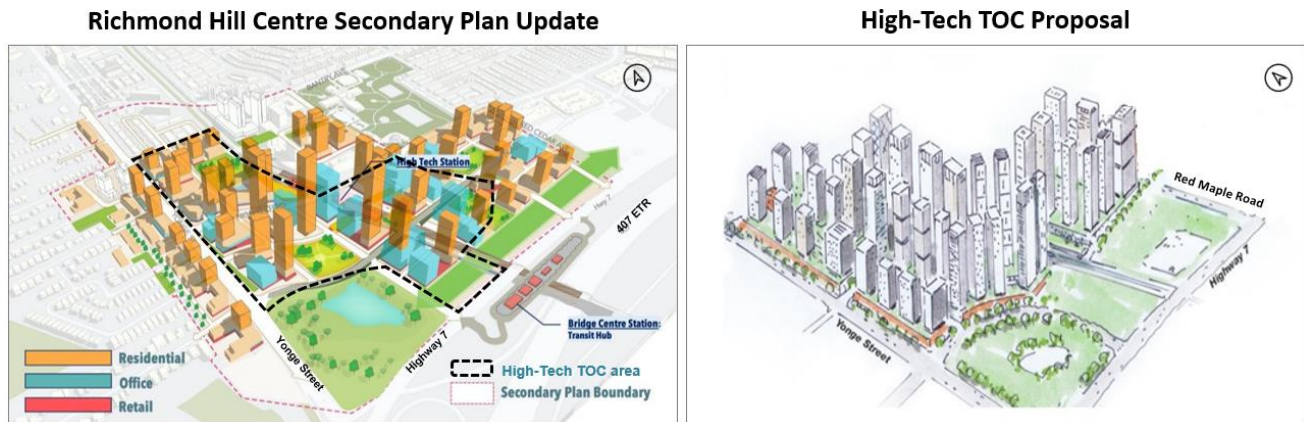


Table 3 highlights key issues raised by York Region and local staff with the Province that remain outstanding to date:

Table 3 Outstanding Regional Issues on the Bridge and High-Tech Transit-Oriented Communities Proposals

Theme	Issue	Details
Growth and Density	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed population growth and Gross Floor Area (GFA) beyond what is planned for in the Regional forecast and local municipal secondary plans 	<p>High-Tech TOC proposes about 2,300 persons and jobs per hectare (PJ/Ha) while the Bridge TOC proposes about 2,200 PJ/Ha. In 2020, Regional Council endorsed planned MTSA density target for this area at 400 PJ/Ha. By comparison, density at Toronto's Yonge and Eglinton area is 600 PJ/Ha (see Attachment 3)</p>
Mix of Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is need for a more appropriate mix of uses, including residential and non-residential GFA that provides a healthy balance for a complete community 	<p>Resident to job ratio at Bridge and High-Tech TOC proposals is about 4:1 and 3:1 respectively. Regional Official Plan directs a long-term resident-to-employee target ratio of 1:1</p>

Theme	Issue	Details
Fine-grained Street Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TOC development should deliver fine-grained streets, multi-modal travel network including automobile, cycling and pedestrian connectivity at the proposed Garden Avenue extension east of Yonge St in Richmond Hill Centre 	High-Tech TOC proposal includes pedestrian and cycling paths in lieu of the originally planned Garden Avenue east-west street
Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While the Province indicated affordable housing would be addressed at the TOC program level, it remains unclear how the proposals will achieve Regional affordable housing targets 	Regional Official Plan requires 35% new housing units in Regional Centres to be affordable. Affordable housing remains a critical priority in complete communities
Development Phasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TOC proposals lack detailed phasing plans to ensure sequencing of development is coordinated with infrastructure availability 	Proposed growth well beyond what is planned by the Region and local municipalities needs to be assessed in the context of the Region's infrastructure master plans and fiscal sustainability
Parks and Community Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional spaces for community facilities, school sites and open spaces are required to serve proposed residential growth and be phased appropriately as development advances 	More in-depth financial and implementation frameworks are needed to ensure successful delivery of adequate municipal parks and community amenities in the TOC proposals

Growth proposed through Transit-Oriented Communities proposals impacts planning and delivery of Regional infrastructure and services

Intensification and the magnitude of growth proposed by the TOC proposals is significant and will impact the planning and delivery of physical and social infrastructure, including roads, sewer and water, waste management, emergency and social services and other community facilities to support future residents and workers in the area. Proposed TOC densities and growth assumptions were not contemplated in the Regional Transportation and Water and Wastewater Master Plans. Further analysis is required to fully assess necessary upgrades, impacts and implications to Regional infrastructure systems, and planning and delivery of Regional transit, community and social services and programs.

The financial cost of providing hard and soft infrastructure supporting and benefiting TOC needs to be fully assessed. There is also an obligation of ongoing operations and maintenance and lifecycle costs for Regional infrastructure delivered. Clarity around the Region's total commitment needs to be achieved as part of a detailed financial analysis and framework requested from the Province to help understand financial impacts to the Region and local municipalities.

Province and proponent-led public consultations for the Bridge and High-Tech proposals were held in December 2021

The Province and landowners in the High-Tech and Bridge TOC areas hosted virtual open houses to receive public input on the TOC proposals in December 2021. Residents living within a one-kilometre radius of TOC sites were notified of the open houses through mail-out postcards. The proponents also launched online engagement websites to share detailed concepts and studies for the TOC proposals and elicit feedback by early January 2022.

Approximately 200 people attended the TOC public open houses. Landowners (Metrus and Condor) and representatives from the Ministries of Transportation and Infrastructure presented the TOC development proposals followed by public input. Common themes and issues raised during the comment period include:

- **Density:** Need for appropriate population and employment intensification around transit hubs, particularly at High-Tech and the Bridge station with future access to five rapid transit modes including: subway, GO rail, GO bus, VIVA bus rapid transit, and 407 transitway (YRT conventional bus service will also operate out of Bridge Station)
- **Travel, Mobility and Parking:** Ensure there are safe pedestrian crossings, parking for residents and commuters, and active, pedestrian-only streets in the proposals. Integration of local and rapid transit with subway is key
- **Housing:** TOC developments should deliver a minimum 35% of affordable housing units required through municipal policies. Delivering affordable housing and including family-sized units in future developments should be a priority
- **Mix of Use:** Ensure there is a balance of residential and job growth at a 2:1 ratio. Proponent noted the TOC plans contain a minimum and maximum employment target, which yield resident to job ratios at 4:1 and 3:1
- **Community Services and Amenities:** Need for adequate community amenities such as schools, community centres, and libraries to meet the needs of future residents
- **Greenspace:** Preserve woodlot at Yonge Street and High-Tech Road from development as it is a community landmark; the Bridge rail deck park is key asset for the Langstaff community
- **Wind and shadow impacts:** Building and street design should mitigate wind effects and shadow impacts on surrounding uses

- Development timeline: The proponent anticipated TOC developments to begin after YNSE construction commences, with a 25- to 30-year build-out timeframe

While municipal review of the revised TOC proposals is constrained by Provincial zoning certainty deadline, it is important the proposals align with planned municipal visions developed with public and technical input. Regional Centres are intended to be vibrant destinations for jobs as well as population growth. Staff will continue to work with local municipal partners, community members, the Province and landowners to plan for livable, complete communities.

Status of the Royal Orchard Station is pending confirmation

The project currently includes four stations within York Region – Steeles, Clark, Bridge and High-Tech. TOC proposals are anticipated by the Province for proposed Steeles and Clark station areas. Royal Orchard has been proposed as a Major Transit Station Area with strong TOC opportunities. If the station is not built or protected for in some fashion, the distance between stations (Clark to Bridge) will be the longest in the entire subway system at approximately four kilometres.

York Region remains committed to implementing the Yonge North Subway Extension and working with the Province to align Transit-Oriented Communities proposals with approved and emerging secondary plans for these areas

York Region is committed to the YNSE project, supporting seamless travel, additional housing options, jobs and economic vitality in our communities. In planning for the arrival of extended subway services and stations along the proposed alignment, it is imperative to ensure livable, complete communities are planned and built around future stations including those built through the Province's TOC Program.

Whatever the outcome of the TOC deliberations, there is no question that the Yonge subway extension is long overdue with its current terminus at Finch Avenue remaining unchanged since 1974. In a [March 2021](#) update from Metrolinx, Regional Council was advised of the status of the project. Council also received an update in a [June 2021](#) report. The project is now fully funded and Metrolinx is charged with delivering the Yonge subway as one of five priority projects identified by the provincial government.

Metrolinx has responded to community concerns and further refined the alignment

Through 2021, progress has been slowed due to alignment concerns through parts of the Thornhill community. Metrolinx worked through most of 2021 to address community concerns and has finalized a route that minimizes impacts – through construction and beyond. This project is now poised to catch up with the procurement and construction stages that other priority projects have already achieved. Council should be encouraging Metrolinx to advance preliminary construction for the YNSE without delay.

5. Financial

Proposed TOC growth, well beyond what is planned for in the municipal secondary plans, requires assessment and possible funding of additional infrastructure and services to support projected demands and ensure municipal financial sustainability. The proposed additional growth has not been contemplated by any of the current Regional Master Plan, Development Charge Bylaw update, and Municipal Comprehensive Review work.

A shared objective of the TOC program is to create and exchange value. It is unclear how potential financial benefits created by the TOC will be shared. In addition, the Region also needs to determine and confirm with the Province that the TOC program will not diminish the Region's ability to raise revenue, including through development charges.

The financial framework to support TOC is currently being examined by the Province. Additional financial impacts to the Region and local municipalities will be made available when this analysis concludes.

6. Local Impact

The proposed population and density for Bridge and High-Tech TOC proposals, will impact local municipal provision of local streets, water and wastewater infrastructure, and community services including community centres, libraries, emergency services, parks and open spaces. While planned subway infrastructure will facilitate population and employment growth in the Richmond Hill/ Langstaff Gateway Urban Growth Centre and local Secondary Plan areas, the TOC proposals need to support and align with the planned vision and established policy framework for building vibrant, mixed-use and livable complete communities.

7. Conclusion

The Province-led TOC program aims to build compact, high density mixed-use communities around future transit stations through partnerships with private landowners and in collaboration with municipal and community partners. The two TOC proposals in York Region, Bridge and High-Tech TOCs, are within the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway Regional Centre. These proposals do not currently align with the planning framework established through secondary plans for these planned and growing communities.

To support the Provincial timeline of achieving zoning certainty, pending Council direction, staff will work with the Province, Metrolinx, local municipalities and landowners to ensure proposals align with and advance Regional and local municipal interests and secure commitments through necessary agreements and implementation tools. In the meantime, work necessary to advance construction of the subway project should proceed without delay.

For more information on this report, please contact Karen Whitney, Director, Community Planning and Development Services at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71505. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



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January 7, 2022

Attachments (3)

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