

Alta Vista Transportation Corridor (AVTC) backgrounder – January 2011

Background

The AVTC has appeared in municipal plans as a transportation corridor since the mid-1960s but has been the subject of controversy for much of that time. In the summer of 2001, the City initiated an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Corridor and in September 2005, the final presentations were made to Transportation Committee. Although one of the justifications cited for building the Hospital Link portion of the AVTC - from Riverside Drive to the Ottawa Health Science Centre and Hospital Complex (OHSC) via its Ring Road - was to provide better access to the Hospital, no explicit mention of OHSC support for the Hospital Link route was noted in the report on the AVTC tabled to the City in September 2005

In 2005 the Transportation committee unanimously approved a compromise motion which would allow development of a road linking Riverside Drive to the General Hospital but would put on hold (subject to two more Official Plan (OP) reviews) any other road development in the corridor. In October 2005, City Council carried the Transportation Committee recommendation to "receive" the EA report as opposed to accept or endorse the report and to only have the hospital link from Riverside built.

In December 2005 an EA "bump-up request" for the AVTC was sent to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment by a coalition of community groups (the members of which included several Riverview Park residents). The Province was asked to reject the EA's conclusion to construct a four-lane road from Walkley Road to the Queensway. The Petitioners asked to have the 'class' EA bumped up to an 'individual' EA which would let a transit-only option be considered. They claimed that the EA process was biased in favour of a road, contrary to "Smart Growth" and the City's Vision 2020 planning principles which encourage people to use public transit or walk/bike instead of driving their own cars.

An evaluation of all the comments and responses was completed and submitted to the Minister of the Environment in July 2007. The Minister of the Environment declined the appeal in January 2008. In the meantime, there was some controversy when preliminary bulldozing and drilling activity took place in the corridor in fall 2007 (prior to Provincial approval of the EA), even though the activity was for the purposes of geotechnical (soils) and environmental investigations to confirm the existing ground conditions along the proposed Hospital Link portion of the corridor. Some experienced environmental practitioners felt that this activity was prohibited under both federal and provincial environmental assessment legislation, since it could be seen as, in fact, helping enable the project to move forward before there was a provincially approved EA.

In April 2008, the Riverview Park Community Association (RPCA) Board passed a motion to oppose the AVTC proposal as accepted by the project's Environmental Assessment. As the community, through the boundaries of which this arterial roadway to the Hospital would flow, Riverview Park has repeatedly voiced concerns about the viability of this roadway, including concerns about the road meeting Alta Vista, at grade.

In 2009 a request was made to the Ottawa Hospital, via Councillor Hume's office, for statistics on where the hospital staff resides in order to calculate employee commuting travel patterns as a proxy of who might use the new Hospital Link Route. OHSC officials responded that they were unable to provide this information, due to privacy concerns.

There has also been some confusion about the width of the Hospital Link (2 lanes or 4) and whether it is just the first stage of a road which would run through greenspace from the Conroy/Walkley intersection, past the Hospital Lands and Ottawa Hospital Complex, with an at-grade crossing of Alta Vista Drive and bridges over Riverside Drive and the Rideau River to link up with Nicholas Street at the 417. Although the Hospital Link (the first phase of the AVTC) is supposed to only be two lanes, the approved EA provides for up-to four lanes to eventually be constructed. Moreover, the Executive Summary of the "Hospital Lands Area Plan" released in May 2008 (page 9) states, "The first phase will comprise two lanes of the **future 4-lane parkway extending from Riverside Drive to the Ottawa Health Sciences Centre** (*emphasis added*). A reference to the design of first phase known as the Hospital link of the proposed AVTC was reiterated on page 11 of the document where it stated that "The Hospital Link will comprise 2-lanes of the **future 4-lane parkway**". (*emphasis added*)

The detailed design work associated with the Hospital Link section of the AVTC (between Riverside Drive and the Hospital Complex) continued during 2010. The City was also scheduled to start some of the prerequisite utility relocation work along the corridor. The project itself requires construction to be phased over a 3 year period pending funding approval and the availability of funds.

The City draft 2011 budget announcement on January 19, 2011 of \$55 million for the construction of the Hospital Link provides for \$5 million in 2011 to allow for prerequisite modifications and relocation of existing infrastructure in advance of actual construction of the roadway to the Hospital. The remaining \$50 million is forecast to be spent in 2012 for the road construction itself. In addition to the aforementioned concerns that this is just the first stage of a new, longer four-lane arterial road and the absence of information about potential use by OHSC staff, the 1.2 km Hospital Link of the AVTC remains controversial for its cost, (nearly \$46,000 per metre) and whether it is actually needed at this time (the traffic study did not assess whether the proposed road would improve access to the hospital in any significant way) as well as the impact on much-used recreational green space. Concerns have also been raised that this road has been planned to support a high density housing development on the NDMC land. However, the adjoining National Medical Defence Centre – NDMC – apparently may only be available for redevelopment in 2022.

For more information and background on the Corridor and the EA bump-up residents can visit the Ottawa East Community Association AVC website at <http://www.queenswaycoalition.org/AVC.html>

Information on Riverview Park can be found at <http://www.riverviewpark.ca>