

The Hospital Link Road – A Step in the Wrong Direction?

Many residents in Ward 18 and elsewhere in Ottawa were disappointed and puzzled by the recent City Council decision to approve 2011 funding for the 1.2 km “hospital link” of the controversial Alta Vista Transportation Corridor, especially after several public statements by Mayor Watson and other City Councillors indicating that they do not support the development of the full Alta Vista Transportation Corridor (AVTC). Just what exactly is going to be built, when and at what cost still remains unclear.

The cost of this 1.2 km “hospital link” road is now expected to be over \$65 million – which translates into \$54 million a kilometer, making this 2-lane road will be twice as expensive (per kilometer) to build than the cost to widen the multi-lane 401 through greater Toronto. The road designers blame the exorbitant cost of the “hospital link” on the nature of the substrate, as well as the several complex road, rail and Transitway crossings which need to be built.

Alta Vista Ward Councillor Peter Hume supports the link as he contends that it will divert traffic from Alta Vista Drive and Smyth Road and will provide quicker access to the Ottawa Hospital General campus for employees and visitors. However, in examining the current plans for the link road (see map), it is questionable whether it will, in fact, provide a shorter route between the hospital and most areas in our City. What it will do is support future development on the hospital campus and on the National Defence Medical Center (NDMC) lands.

The Ottawa Hospital complex intends to expand significantly in 10-15 years and their expansion is predicated on the development of the full AVTC road from the Walkley/Conroy intersection to the Nicholas/Highway 417 interchange. The current 1.2 km “hospital link”, according to the Ottawa Hospital, is just phase 1 of the entire AVTC road. However, the Mayor has repeatedly stated *“I do not support the (entire) Alta Vista Corridor, as it would be very disruptive and harmful to a number of communities” (2 March 2011 Ottawa Citizen)*. As a result, many suspicions still abound, across the City, that this “hospital link” is just the thin edge of that proverbial wedge, which has been further fueled by the latest designs for the “hospital link” showing it following the original route of the extended Conroy Road to Nicholas Street AVTC arterial road. Furthermore, the City’s Transportation Master Plan (TMP) still contains the plans for the extended AVTC arterial road.

If the rationale for this road is to provide access to the hospital campus, there are many more cost-effective options which should be considered, including paving a 200m extension of Valour Drive to the hospital ring road for emergency vehicles and/or creating a dedicated shuttle service for hospital employees from the Riverside Transitway station. Another and more modest option would be to consider extending the existing Frobisher intersection at Riverside to Alta Vista.

But look more closely, it is not just the hospital campus expansion which is driving this road. Councillor Hume has stated that the future development of the National Defence Medical Center lands relies on it. Sometime around 2022, Canada Lands will be selling the NDMC land to developers who intend to build up to 1,000 high- and medium-density housing units as well as up to 1 million square feet of commercial space on the land. This development is contingent on increased road access, according to Councillor Hume, *“if the transportation work for the hospital lands doesn’t get done, then the (NDMC) development won’t be permitted by the City (Ottawa Citizen, 29 Oct 2008)*.

Many concerns have been voiced through Ward 18 about this high density development and the impact it will have on our communities. For example, in 2005 the Faircrest Heights Community Association wrote Premier McGuinty about the NDMC lands observing that *“heavy pressure from the development industry is the real reason for the rush to declare these lands surplus. If that is the case, then it is yet another example of public policy being blind-sided by political considerations, with local communities being the losers.”*

(<http://faircrestheights.org/cor.htm>)

Riverview Park Community Association President Karin Keyes Endemann noted that over 850 petitioners and eleven Ottawa community associations believe this “hospital link” is *“not only disproportionately expensive, but does nothing to enhance the live-ability of our city. Live-able cities plan for the long term, invest in good public*

transit, encourage walking and biking and set aside ample natural spaces for all the enjoy. We should be emulating the progressive and innovate solutions being implemented by other capital cities around the world”.

The City has now approved funding for the \$65 million 1.2 km “hospital link”, however until the plans for the full 10km AVTC (estimated at well over \$150 million and designed to carry 1800 cars during peak hours) are removed from the TMP and the City of Ottawa Official Plan, the citizens of Ottawa will not have any confidence that this massive 4 lane AVTC arterial road will not be built.

“This is a critical time,” says Keyes Endemann. “The bulk of spend on the hospital link budget will be in next year’s City budget. It’s not too late for Ottawa community associations to work together to identify a viable solution which meets the needs of all residents in Ottawa while still upholding Smart Growth principles. Hence I would like to call upon our neighbours in Alta Vista, Canterbury, Elmvale Acres, Faircrest Heights and Riverview Park to work together (along with our centertown community partners) to, as our Councillor says, ‘unite the City of Ottawa with a shared and comprehensive vision towards a better future, especially when it comes to transportation”.

