

A Highway 7 Corridor Study

**Urban Design Guidelines for the Development of Highway 7
from Main Street Unionville to Markham Road**

by

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A Report
Submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning
for the Degree
Master of Planning
Queen's University

April 25, 1996

Executive Summary

This report of the Highway 7 Corridor (Main Street Unionville-Markham Road) Study presents the urban design guidelines for the road right-of-way as well as the lots facing onto the highway. It also develops urban design principles and criteria, analyzes the existing problems, and provides recommendations for implementation.

The urban design principles and criteria for an attractive street are developed from a literature review. They include:

- The street space should be well defined. The 1:2 to 1:4 ratio (street building height to street width) is appropriate for an attractive urban street.
- The street should be accessible for not only automobiles but also pedestrians and bicyclists.
- The street should be livable and safe for residents, shoppers, pedestrians and other street users.
- The street should have a complete landscape system to create shade in summer and allow sunshine in winter.
- The buildings and other man-made structures on the street should be well designed and maintained.
- The historical characteristics in the study area should be conserved.

From July 1995 to January 1996, several trips to the site were made. Based on the site investigation, the existing problems on the highway 7 section were identified as follows:

- The ratio of the street building height to width is beyond 1:6 and the sense of street definition is very weak.

- The highway section is an unobstructed road for automobiles but an uncomfortable place for pedestrians.
- There is not enough public watching on the road and therefore the street is not safe.
- The street continuity does not exist because the linear greenland along the street is not built and the existing buildings are separated by parking lots.

As these problems exist, the Highway 7 section is not a good place for outdoor commerce, communication, and recreation.

In the meantime, some attractive streets in the Greater Toronto Area, such as Main St. Unionville, Markham Rd., St. George Street, Kensington Street, and Yonge Street, were also examined to help find the differences between an attractive street and an unattractive street.

The examination of relevant policies helped establish the guidelines for the highway section. The Office of the Greater Toronto Area has identified Highway 7 as a corridor in the GTA urban structure. The GTA also commissioned an urban design study for the entire Highway 7 corridor which was a foundation for this report. At the Regional level, the Region of York Official Plan has also identified Highway 7 as one of the regional corridors to add housing units, employment, and services in a mixed-use form. At the local level, the Markham Transportation Planning Study suggested that a corridor contain a broad mix of land uses and be more compact and denser than surrounding areas.

Accordingly, the urban design guidelines for the Highway 7 section were developed as follows:

- There is generally sufficient ROW along the highway section to build a separated transitway and therefore the highway can be widened to six lanes including two exclusive bus lanes.
- 8m setbacks are required for the development on the Highway 7 from Main Street Unionville to Kennedy Road. In the other areas, developments should be built to the existing highway property lines.
- In the areas near the Unionville Core Area and Markham Village, two- to three-story building are appropriate. In the other areas, three- to six-story buildings are required.
- Any new projects on the Highway 7 section should have a net floor space index of 2-3x coverage.
- Different land uses and street related building types are required on the highway section.
- Eco-parks can be established in the Rouge Valley area and a linear greening system should be built.
- New buildings should be compatible with the adjacent buildings in terms of roof forms, fenestration, building materials and colours, and architectural details.
- A complete street furniture system including street lights, business signs, and other street amenities should be well designed and built.

Implementation of this study requires commitment from the Town of Markham, landowners, residents, and other relevant public and private agencies. Support from the Region of York and the OGTA is also required. It is suggested that a secondary plan and zoning bylaws be developed and adopted by the Town of Markham.