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Plan will create traffic chaos on Eglinton



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Construction continues on the Eglinton Crosstown line as residents in parts of north Toronto protests a new plan proposed for Eglinton Ave. (STAN BEHAL, Toronto Sun)

At city council this week, planners hope to ram through a series of Official Plan amendments that will take them one step closer to creating long-term traffic havoc on Eglinton Ave and in north Toronto's surrounding neighbourhoods.

Their grand vision to create a Grand Boulevard on Eglinton Ave. — following the completion of the \$5-billion Eglinton Crosstown LRT — is contained in their Eglinton Connects study and report.

Led by Chief Planner Jennifer Keesmaat, the plan is to create a “complete street” that balances space for pedestrians, cyclists, transit and vehicles. Under the planning “vision,” Eglinton — now a major arterial thoroughfare — will become “multi-modal.” That means it will incorporate wider sidewalks with lovely street furniture, public art and “big trees,” protected cycling lanes, on-street parking and with whatever space is left, one lane in each direction for cars (reduced from two and often three lanes in each direction` during rush hour.)

Vision is welcome in our city but certainly not when it is the same old tunnel vision. In a repeat of Jarvis St. and St. Clair Ave. W. (minus the bike lanes), the city's planners refuse to get it through their thick heads that people still drive cars and that an arterial thoroughfare simply cannot accommodate everything, unless one wants to increase gridlock.

To add insult to injury, there is the wonderful Beltline, which cuts through midtown Toronto —just south of Eglinton from the Allen Expressway right to Mt. Pleasant — and is used as a cycling and jogging trail. With a few improvements, it could absorb the cyclists who commute regularly, summer and winter.

But what's planning if you don't mess with success? And here's where it gets really controversial. To absorb vehicular and truck traffic (EMS, fire and garbage trucks) the city planners have come up with a scheme to create two-way public lanes (or alternative arterial roads) that would run parallel to Eglinton and be located just south and north of the current thoroughfare. To do so, the Official Plan would need to be changed — one of the recommendations Keesmaat and her planners hope to push through council this week.

Full disclosure: I live on a street that runs south of Eglinton, where construction on the LRT has begun in earnest. It has become virtually impossible already to get north of Eglinton Ave. without weaving a circuitous route through the neighbourhood. But I suspect the traffic will only get worse on our neighbourhood streets if Keesmaat and Co. get their way.

Connects Planning Study and my own councillor, Josh Matlow, included news of a May public information session in his April e-newsletter, the proposals are clearly a dog's breakfast. The very controversial public lane-way changes are a classic case of a plan that is hidden in plain sight — that is, buried in mounds of paper and recommendations.

Still, it would seem Keesmaat's grand vision has been incubated under the most perfect of circumstances seeing as the lion's share of media attention at City Hall as of late has focussed on the city's "enfant terrible" — Mayor Rob Ford. And what better time to ram through changes with major consequences than in the summer when fewer residents are paying attention.

Area resident Jane Steele Moore said she found out about the Eglinton Connects proposal quite by chance last fall when she noticed a flyer in her mailbox. It was only when she attended a public session at Forest Hill Collegiate and started to ask questions that she realized that part of the plan was to create the new public lane—that would absorb the traffic overflow, including trucks. The city report to the June 19 planning and growth management committee indicates that the intent of the lane-ways is to make the "pedestrian and cycling environment" on Eglinton safer.

Steele Moore attended the June 19 meeting at which it was made clear that the goal is to create a continuous system of two-way rear lane-ways behind new mid-rise buildings that will be developed on the north and south sides of Eglinton. Their creation would be a "condition of development" because the residents of new buildings will have no access to Eglinton, she said.

According to staff report, the plans are extensive both in my Avenue Rd.-area neighbourhood and in neighbourhoods east of Mt. Pleasant right through to Bayview.

"They're taking all the new development and hiding it," said Steele Moore. "They're trying to put the traffic in the closet."

She warned what the city planners aren't telling people, or being honest about, is that at least two houses on each street will have to be expropriated to accommodate the lane-way plan and with nowhere to go, traffic from the mid-rises will spill onto neighbouring streets.

She said most of the people in her neighbourhood have no idea about the plan and those who do are in "shock." She is so upset, she created a YouTube video at to advise Eglinton-area residents.



The city's own March 25, 2014 transportation services report says diversion of traffic from Eglinton could increase traffic in surrounding neighbourhoods by about 10% and that further study of neighbourhood traffic patterns should be done before any new policies are put in place.

I tried to reach Keesmaat on Friday and for most of this past weekend to ask her if such traffic studies had occurred, along with other questions. I was informed by her flak, Bruce Hawkins, that she "works hard to make herself as available as she can for all media" but that she was too busy to speak with me, even on the weekend.

This is the same Keesmaat who spent \$372,000 on a flashy dog-and-pony show to promote herself on the transit tax issue last year and who I noticed was busy tweeting about subjects near and dear to her heart, including Eglinton Connects, this past weekend.

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the city's research shows residents living in mid-rise buildings along avenues "have lower automobile ownership rates." He did not produce the city's research when I asked for it.

He also indicated that the city "will not be expropriating property" to develop new lane-ways, although if Hawkins or Keesmaat were to survey the situation even in my own neighbourhood, they would see that it is physically impossible to create two-way lane-ways without doing so.

Mayoral candidate Karen Stintz, whose ward takes in the neighbourhood north of Eglinton and who voted for the Official Plan changes in the June 19 planning committee, said in an e-mail she will be holding another community meeting to "clarify the misunderstanding" of some residents that the laneways will change.

Matlow's senior policy advisor, Andrew Athanasiu, said the councillor "would oppose" any lane-ways off of Eglinton in his ward being converted into arterials.

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