

Monday, May 14th, 2007

Councilors of the Transportation Committee,
City of Ottawa,
110 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 1J1

Marc Aubin,
1-41 Cathcart Street,
Ottawa, Ontario,
K1N 5B7

Dear Councilors,

My name is Marc Aubin. I am the fifth generation of my family to live in Lowertown. My great great grandparents lived two blocks from where I live now with my father and brother. We live near Sussex far removed from King Edward Avenue.

About 10 years ago, I was walking along King Edward Avenue. It seemed to me that there was something seriously wrong with the avenue. There were no trees. Upon doing some research, I discovered that King Edward Avenue was an awesome boulevard prior to the 1960's. At the same time, I also happened upon a whole series of photographs of King Edward Avenue and the rest of downtown prior to the 60's. I was appalled at what I discovered. The downtown was considerably greener and quieter. It was a more livable place. Living downtown was normal. I think that what happened on King Edward Avenue was a tragedy.

I was 18 at the time and interested in joining some kind of neighbourhood committee. I chose to join the King Edward Avenue Task Force. I thought that the key problem in my community was the state of King Edward Avenue. I soon discovered that trucks were one of the main concerns, but that beautification of the street was also being pursued. I worked long hours and was quite dedicated to this group for 4 years. I came to know the issues surrounding King Edward in quite an intimate way. I really believed we had an opportunity to make a difference for the avenue and Lowertown.

In 1999, after an OMB battle with the city over the official plan, an order was brought down. This order included 1) the complete removal of trucks from King Edward when a bridge was to be built in the east end of the city, and 2) the immediate introduction of the improvement project. This was a great step forward from the community's perspective given that neither the city nor its councilor supported either of these at the time. It was also a great achievement given the number of years that residents had put towards this issue. The task force was formed in 1986. It took almost 20 years before even the current renewal project began.

The environmental assessment for the improvement of King Edward Avenue began in 2000 and ended in 2002. As the assessment began to progress, it became quite clear that the consultancy, Delcan Corporation, was not interested in the improvement of King Edward Avenue as much as its renewal.

You see, councilors, it was explained to us that this was not a beautification project but a “renewal” of the street infrastructure. Delcan explained that this was the direction given to it in the terms of reference for the project. As such, many things that were promised in a community improvement plan, prior to the assessment, were never followed through on. For example, the original improvement plan called for the creation of a T-intersection to replace the off-ramps from the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge connecting with King Edward. This would have provided access to Sussex Avenue and would have considerably reduced traffic speeds in the area. The Delcan Corporation opted for a more traffic-focused approach in which the traffic flow was affected the least possible. As such, they had the T-intersection removed from the plans. The King Edward Avenue Task Force pushed for the inclusion of a T-intersection or roundabout, but this request was not accommodated.

Another one of the major recommendations made by the King Edward Avenue Task Force was the reduction of lanes on the avenue from 6 to 4. Again, the Delcan Corporation was quite uncooperative in its assessment of this option. Although included in its assessment, Delcan failed to make a strong case after repeated demands for an academic explanation. The only reason provided was that reducing lanes on King Edward Avenue would lead to an excessive amount of traffic, and that residents would have to wait for a bridge to be constructed in the east end. On our part, the task force provided academic evidence, in addition to a number of other arguments, that reducing lanes on the avenue could lead to a net decrease in traffic. Delcan was not interested in addressing these arguments or other options such as increased capacity available to commuters on STO buses.

On July 17th, 2002, the King Edward Renewal project was brought before the Transportation Committee. There were many pleas made by many residents of the community to go further than what was being proposed by Delcan. There was a concerted effort to push for an immediate reduction of the street from 6 to 4 lanes. The majority of councilors were not swayed by this option, but agreed on the following motion:

That the four lane option for King Edward Avenue be reviewed for the feasibility of implementation when each of the:

- a. Transportation Master Plan*
 - b. The Rapid Transit Expansion Study*
 - c. The East End Interprovincial Bridge Study*
 - d. The implementation of CN-CP proposal to twin freight lines between Ottawa and Toronto to carry inter-city truck traffic.*
- are brought forward to Transportation and Transit Committee.*

The King Edward Avenue Task Force, Action Sandy Hill, and the Rideau Street BIA also supported this motion.

I was quite disappointed by the entire political process regarding King Edward Avenue. I had the sense that it took a mountain to move an inch regarding any kind of relief for King Edward. Nevertheless, I had some hope for the street given the motion voted on by councilors above.

In 2006, 4 years after the motion was passed, I decided to look into the status of this motion. The first two milestones had come and gone. After receiving a response from Peter Steacey, City of Ottawa, it appears that the city had not followed up on the motion. The directive given by the Transportation Committee has not seen any action.

At the same time, in the summer of 2006, an amazing opportunity presented itself. An announcement was made that King Edward Avenue would be reduced from 6 to 4 lanes for a duration of approximately one year. Finally, there was going to be an opportunity to test the 4-lane option in practice, and not just in theory as done by the transportation experts.

King Edward Avenue has been operating with 4 lanes for the past year. The predictions of excessive traffic were clearly wrong. The traffic is being managed well. There have been no reports in the media of traffic chaos on either the Quebec or Ontario sides of the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge. This is proof that a 4-lane option is possible for this avenue. The only real thing required now is a small traffic study to prove what has been observed.

The reduction of the street from 6 to 4 lanes has many implications. To reduce King Edward Avenue to 4 lanes would have many benefits for the residents of Lowertown. We've lived with worsening conditions around this street for 40 years now. The implication that motorists and truckers will be inconvenienced is a fair consideration, but the fact that residents have been inconvenienced for 40 years is also worth noting. This is really a policy decision, and not really a traffic engineering decision. The traffic engineers will tell you that 4 lanes aren't enough, and that 6 lanes aren't enough in fact. If we were to only take engineering conclusions into consideration, then there would be a highway running down King Edward Avenue today.

Councillors, I'm asking you to take a stance on something very important here. It's the concept of drawing the line. King Edward Avenue is in the state that it is today due to urban sprawl. The only congestion on that street is caused by commuters who insist on living in Gatineau. They have a full right to do so, but their choice of lifestyle includes unsustainable sprawled out communities and a dependence on cars. This does not give them the full right to passage into older more densely populated communities such as a Lowertown. There are other options including plenty of capacity on buses.

Given the changing "climate" of our times, I think that the 4-lane option is also appropriate towards larger goals. It has become evident that global warming is now a fact. Poor planning by most municipalities including the City of Ottawa has contributed

to the dependence of people on the automobile. Why are so many people driving cars? The reason is that we have planned our cities out in such sprawled and unsustainable ways that we are forced to use our cars by default. A further complication results from the fact that the centres of older cities, such as Ottawa's, were not built to accommodate an infinite number of cars. Further poor planning substantially damaged the quality of life in downtown communities where roads were widened and trees cut down to make way for the people of the sprawled out suburbs. We need to start turning this around. We need to focus on improving the quality of life in the downtown, and to encourage more use of the transit system.

Reducing King Edward Avenue from 6 to 4 lanes is sending a clear message. It is stating that we will no longer sacrifice the quality of life in densely populated and environmentally sustainable areas such as downtown Ottawa to support commuters who continue to live in highly unsustainable living arrangements such as the sprawled out suburbs and strips of the City of Gatineau. The quality of life of densely populated areas must be a priority over that of poorly planned and highly wasteful suburban developments.

Four lanes on King Edward Avenue is a reasonable solution. We are asking for reasonable accommodation here, and not for the MacDonald-Cartier Bridge to be shut down and for King Edward Avenue to be returned to the community. We are not asking for the whole pie. There will be a bit more traffic and congestion; nevertheless, there are still going to be trucks coming down King Edward Avenue for many years still. The community is not asking for the street to be shut down. The 4-lane option for King Edward Avenue is a more equitable solution.

Arguments For & Against Reducing King Edward to 4 Lanes

The following is a list of arguments both for and against the 4-lane option for King Edward Avenue. Counter-arguments have been provided for the arguments against the 4-lane option.

Arguments For:

- Creates a large green space
- Provides a buffer zone between the community and the cars and trucks
- Reduces noise
- Reduces vibrations
- Creates a spectacular entrance to the city of Ottawa and considerably enhances the street environment
- Shortens the distance for pedestrians to cross the street
- Slows down traffic
- Reestablishes historic conditions
- Encourages commuters to use alternative modes of transportation, such as buses
- Provides some relief to the long-standing issue of large trucks and poor living conditions on King Edward Avenue
- Less costly to build 4 instead of 6 lanes now, then building 6 and tearing it all down to make 4 lanes in years to come

- Encourages people to live on King Edward and downtown
- Helps revitalize the community
- Only 4 lanes come on and off of the MacDonald-Cartier Bridge and connect with King Edward Avenue
- Encourages development of empty lots and investment in existing properties
- Reduces air pollution

Arguments Against:

1) Increased congestion (based on traffic modeling)

Counter-argument 1: King Edward Avenue has been reduced to 4 lanes for the past year. There has been traffic, but neither residents nor the project managers of the construction job have observed any major congestion. In theory, 4 lanes is not such a great idea, but in practice, it works.

Counter-argument 2: The additional congestion will be during commuting hours. This congestion can be absorbed by the transit system, and other alternatives available to commuters.

Counter-argument 3: There is a trade-off between commuters and Lowertown residents. Residents will be provided with some relief while trucks and cars continue to move along the avenue but with some extra traffic.

2) Increased pollution

Counter-argument 1: Given the observation that traffic has not increased considerably over the past year at a 4-lane configuration, the argument that pollution will increase is fallacious.

Counter-argument 2: The addition of trees to King Edward Avenue will counter the effects of pollution.

Counter-argument 3: The reduction of lanes will encourage Gatineau commuters to use the transit system available as well as other alternatives. These will also contribute to a reduction in pollution.

Counter-argument 4: The addition of a large number of trees will also offset the costs of cooling residences along the street. Trees provide shade and have been proven to reduce heat in inner cities.

3) Wait for the bridge to be built and for other traffic measures

Counter-argument 1: Although the environmental assessment is currently underway for inter-provincial crossings, there is no guarantee that a bridge will be built in the immediate future. Lowertown residents have been patiently waiting since the 1970's for a solution to this issue. It's time to move ahead.

Counter-argument 2: Car traffic may increase by the time a new bridge is built. The same arguments will be used to dismiss the idea of reducing lanes on King Edward Avenue in future.

Counter-argument 3: Transportation studies have proven that if additional capacity is added to a roadway that there is a net increase in traffic. It has also been determined that a decrease in lanes will lead to a net total reduction in traffic. This also applies to King Edward Avenue.

Counter-argument 4: If there was a serious interest in this recommendation, then it would have been included in both the city's official plan and transportation master plan. Since 2002, it has not been included in either of these visioning documents. This seems to imply unwillingness somewhere in the planning process to give this option serious consideration.

Counter-argument 5: This argument can easily be turned around and applied to commuters. Instead of asking the community of Lowertown to wait for a bridge and other traffic measures, then this statement can be put to motorists. In fact, reducing the street to 4 lanes would be a reasonable compromise between the traffic that some commuters will encounter and the terrible living conditions on and around King Edward Avenue.

4) The 4-lane option was already studied

Counter-argument 1: In 2002, after reviewing the King Edward renewal recommendations from Delcan, the Transportation Committee directed city staff to study the 4-lane option further. This was never done.

Counter-argument 2: The 4-lane option was studied in 2002 by Delcan Corporation. That study was based on transportation modeling, but was not tested in the real world. The avenue is currently 4 lanes, and the option can now be tested in practice.

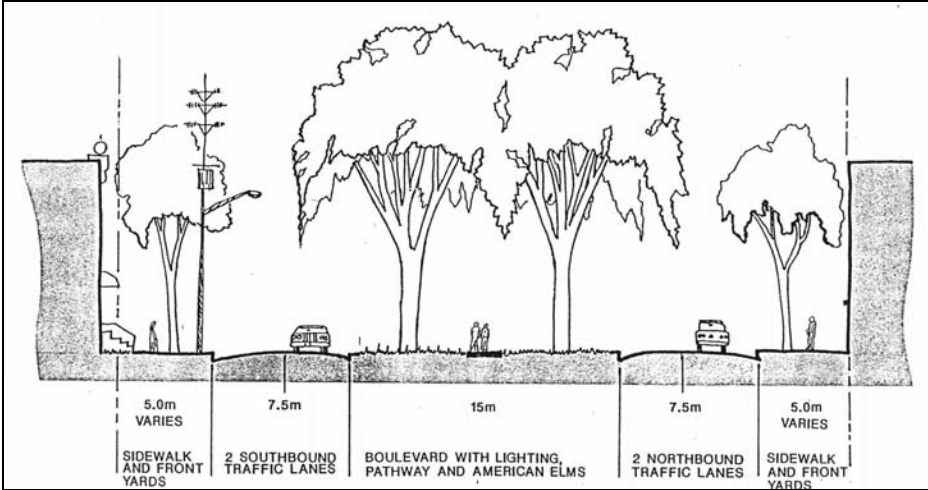
Counter-argument 3: Delcan's 2002 assessment of the 4-lane option excluded some important factors. It did not take the additional bus capacity available between Gatineau & Ottawa as well as other alternatives into consideration. In addition, the impact of noise, vibrations, and air quality were not included in the assessment. The analysis was also premised on the idea that accommodating traffic must take priority over any other considerations including the benefits to the community.

Counter-argument 4: In 2002, Delcan argued that the renewal project was not an improvement project, but a replacement of the road infrastructure. This indicates that its primary goal was not the improvement of living conditions on the avenue or in the community, but the replacement of the current road infrastructure.

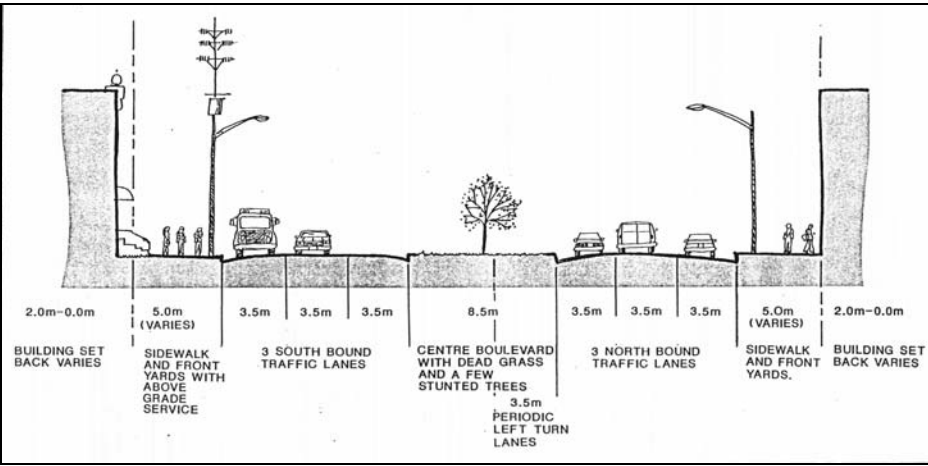
5) Commerce will stop

Counter-argument: The majority of the trucks that use King Edward pass during non-commuting hours, and thus avoid any hold-ups. It is incorrect to say that commerce will be considerably affected.

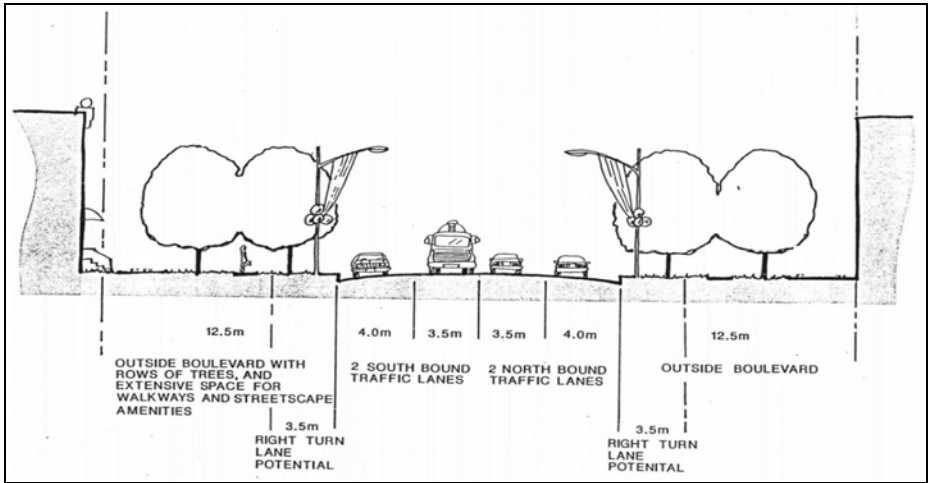
Cross Sections of King Edward Avenue



The original layout of King Edward Avenue.



The present and planned layout of King Edward Avenue.



The proposed 4-lane layout of King Edward Avenue.

Thank you for your time councillors, and for reviewing this message.

Respectfully yours,

Marc Aubin,
Lowertown Resident