

Inquiry by the Chair of TAC

Preamble:

A question was raised by Amanda Stratton, Chair of the Transportation Advisory Committee regarding an interview that I did with CTV News in London on June 30th, 2017.

The following is a transcript of what I said during the interview: “They are going to need to present the [updated BRT] business case to the Ministry again and the Ministry is going to ask [City of London] what’s going on there at Western. Do you [City of London] have that figured out?”

Subsequently, the Chair questioned me online and I asked if this matter can be dealt with at an upcoming TAC meeting since it may be of public interest.

Exchange:

Amanda: Did you do your interview with Daryl Newcombe re: Western and BRT before or after the TAC meeting this week?

Amir: Why do you ask?

Amanda: Because I think it's detrimental to the committee's ability to work with staff if after questioning staff in a committee meeting, you are using that information to give interviews to media that are critical of staff rather than using the in-committee opportunity to work with staff and council.

Amanda: The appearance of it would understandably give staff pause about attending and sharing openly with the committee in the future. But if you gave the interview before the TAC meeting, then it's easy to dispute what appearances suggest.

Amir: TAC is a public meeting. Anyone can attend including the media. Staff have an obligation to be there to answer our questions. Are you saying that if media was present at our meeting that staff wouldn't be present? Or that they would refuse to answer questions? Or how about answering them with detail? I'm having a hard time understanding why you're worried about how transparent a public meeting should be? Whatever appearances an interview gives is highly subjective. Also, our role as a committee is to advise. And advice can be critical of both council and staff.

Amanda: I didn't say any of those things. Our role can absolutely include criticism, and often does, but giving a media interview, in my opinion, can hardly be counted as fulfilling the role of

the committee to advise council. Your response so far seems to suggest you gave the interview after the TAC meeting. Is that correct?

Amanda: And a couple follow-up questions: 1/ were you aware you were going to be giving an interview on that topic when you attended the TAC meeting? 2/ did you initiate the contact with media on that topic, or did a member of the media reach out to you?

Amanda: Appearances can be deceiving, and that's why I'm asking these questions. There are a lot of citizens who would like the opportunity to serve on an advisory committee, and who would like to work to make them more effective. If you're using the information gained in meetings for your personal benefit as a political commentator rather than to advise, I think you're undermining the committee's value. But I'd like to hear your perspective before jumping to that conclusion. That's why I'm asking. If you choose not to answer the questions, that's your prerogative, and I'll address the perceived issue in a different way.

Amir: Are you asking me these questions as the head of your transit lobby group? Or for councillor Helmer? Or for your business? Or for Our London? CJBK? Which hat are you representing right now?

Amanda: I'm asking as the Chair of the Transportation Advisory Committee.

Amir: Excellent. Then I will gladly answer your question at the next TAC meeting in a public forum. I will also ensure that it's part of the agenda including exhibits of concerns you have raised today perhaps under:

VI. DEFERRED MATTERS/ ADDITIONAL BUSINESS. Have a great day.

Amanda: I'll respect your decision. It should go under Items for Discussion, but I'm sure Jerri will get it correctly placed. If you intend to include any of my statements, I'd ask that you include the exchange in full, please. Since there's sufficient time before September, please also ensure it's on the agenda when it goes out so I have time to review your submission of my statements. Thank you.