

Report to Civic Works Committee

To: Chair and Members
Civic Works Committee

From: Kelly Scherr, P. Eng., MBA, FEC
Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Subject: Dundas Place Temporary Traffic Diversion
Monitoring and Consultation

Date: November 2, 2021

Recommendation

That on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure, the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to the construction mitigation traffic diversion on Dundas Place:

- (a) The monitoring and consultation findings **BE RECEIVED**; and,
- (b) the Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to initiate a bylaw amendment to reinstate the current temporary traffic diversion arrangement on Dundas Place in Spring 2022 as a construction mitigation.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The following report supports the 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan through the strategic focus areas of **Building a Sustainable City** and **Leading in Customer Service**. The report describes the effectiveness of a construction mitigation solution to improve safety for cyclists and support businesses during the 2021 construction season.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Civic Works Committee – February 20, 2019 – Downtown OEV East-West Bikeway Corridor Evaluation
- Civic Works Committee – March 2, 2021 – Dundas Place – Temporary Bicycle Lanes and Revised Parking Limits
- Civic Works Committee – March 30, 2021 – Dundas Place – Temporary Bicycle Lanes

1.1 Context

In March 2021, staff brought forward reports to Civic Works Committee seeking direction to create temporary cycling infrastructure on Dundas Place during the construction season to improve safety for cyclists traveling through downtown, while maintaining access to local businesses for people traveling by car.

To prepare for 2021 construction projects, which included significant work on King Street and temporary deflection of traffic to other routes, staff developed a comprehensive traffic management plan to address potential transportation impacts for all modes visiting and travelling through the area. General vehicle traffic and transit that would normally use King Street between Ridout Street and Wellington Street were to be

detoured along York Street and local vehicle traffic and cyclists were to be directed to Dundas Street.

Through previous public engagement, the City heard concerns from the public that Dundas Place did not feel comfortable for cyclists prior to construction starting on King Street. The potential for increased volume of motor vehicles on Dundas Place during construction was a source of additional concern.

Aligned with the 2021 downtown construction traffic management plans, a temporary solution was recommended for Dundas Place that introduced temporary cycling lanes between Ridout Street North and Wellington Street. The proposed solution aimed to provide safe connections for all road users while supporting downtown businesses through the upcoming construction.

Several options were put forward to Civic Works Committee and Council, including:

- Bi-directional bicycle lanes
- Uni-directional bicycle lanes
- Traffic diversion
- Do nothing

Traffic diversion emerged as the preferred alternative by Council in the April 13, 2021 meeting and Civic Administration was directed to implement temporary changes to traffic operations on Dundas Place by installing infrastructure to limit motor vehicle through-traffic. In this arrangement, motor vehicles are restricted from entering Dundas Place at Ridout Street and at Wellington Street. Instead, they have access to Dundas Place from Talbot, Richmond, and Clarence Streets to reach their destination. Vehicles are still able to exit Dundas Place at Ridout and Wellington Streets. Figure 1 depicts the configuration under the current temporary traffic diversion arrangement and Figure 2 shows how it was implemented at Wellington Street.

The bylaw arrangement currently in place for the traffic diversion restrictions expires at the end of the 2021 construction season in December, at which time Dundas Place would resume its previous operating conditions.

The timing of the changes at the Ridout Street end will be coordinated with current planning for a Holiday Market as recommended by the London Community Recovery Network. The market would be located on Dundas Place between Ridout Street and Talbot Street and would potentially involve closing the block to vehicular traffic in both directions to accommodate pop-up retail units in the November / December timeframe.

Figure 1: Temporary Traffic Diversion on Dundas Place

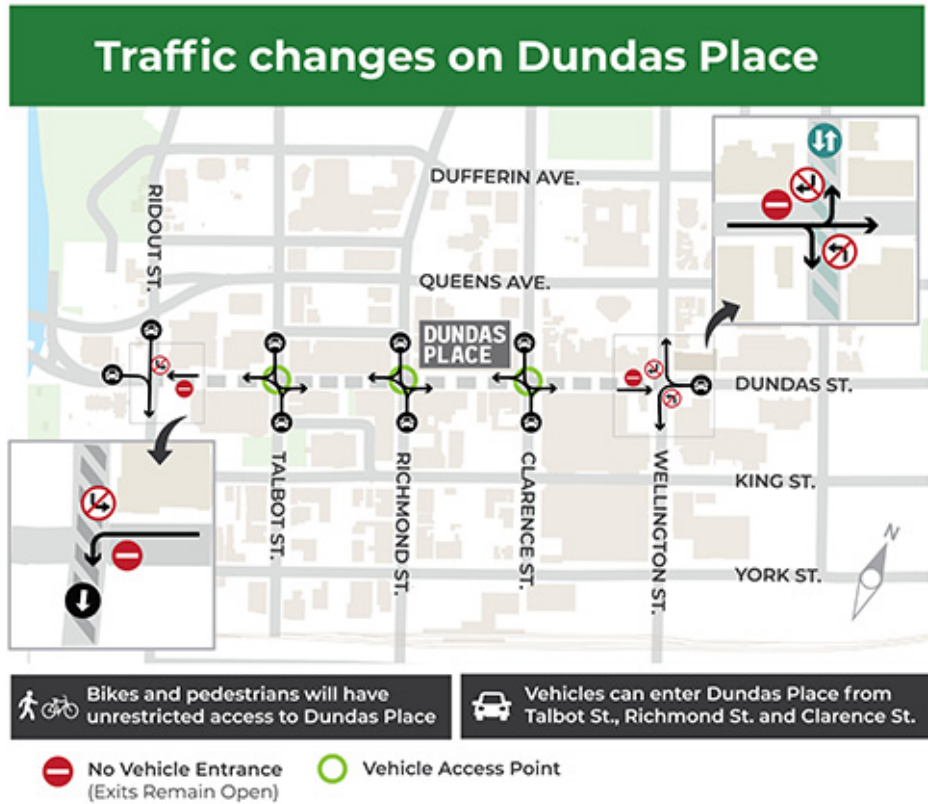


Figure 2: Planter barriers and signage installed to restrict motor vehicles from entering Dundas Place from Wellington Street.



These changes were made in tandem with a suite of complimentary business supports focused on supporting Dundas Place businesses, including:

- Free one-hour parking (without the use of a meter)
- 12 new temporary park and pick-up locations
- Expanded patios
- Opportunities to host sidewalk sales on municipal property in front of businesses
- Programming and activations
- Additional planters to beautify the streetscape

The previous report identified that monitoring and consultation on the outcomes and reception of the temporary traffic arrangement would occur. This report summarizes the findings of monitoring and consultation, with a focus on identifying how operations on Dundas Place should be configured after the 2021 construction season ends.

The options explored through consultation and engagement were:

- Remove the temporary traffic arrangement at the end of this year, once construction has ended
- Keep the current arrangement (continue restricting incoming cars at Ridout and Wellington Streets)
- Keep this arrangement in place, but not during the winter months
- Remove restrictions to inbound motor vehicles at Wellington Street, but keep the restrictions at Ridout Street, where inbound traffic volume is highest
- Other (comments requested)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Looking ahead to 2022 Core Construction

As Civic Administration plans ahead for traffic operations on Dundas Place and overall mobility within the core, both safety for vulnerable road users and supporting access to local businesses remain priorities. Core construction in 2022 includes Phase 2 of the Downtown Loop on Queens Avenue between Wellington Street and Ridout Street, and on Ridout Street between Queens Avenue and King Street. In 2022, the City will also begin construction of Phase 1 of the East London Link on King Street East from Wellington Street to Lyle Street, which will put pressure on eastbound traffic through downtown. Both of these projects once again create the potential for pressure on Dundas Place from increased cut-through motor vehicle traffic.

2.2 Demand for safe cycling connections through downtown

In recent years, the City has improved safety for all modes of transportation and increased transportation options by developing a core cycling network. King Street provided a safe cycling corridor temporarily during Dundas Place construction and Dundas Street was identified as the preferred permanent corridor as part of the Downtown OEV East-West Bikeway Corridor Evaluation. The Colborne cycle tracks form a connecting north-south branch of the core network and provide connectivity to Old North, Woodfield and SoHo neighbourhoods.

Dundas Place is a destination and critical component of the East-West bikeway and core cycling network connecting the cycle tracks west of Ridout Street with the cycle tracks east of Wellington Street. The East-West bikeway connects downtown to the Thames Valley Parkway and to Old East Village. The adjacent cycling facilities are designed to serve all ages and abilities and Dundas Place should include this high regard for cyclist safety.

2.3 Car-free activations and programming

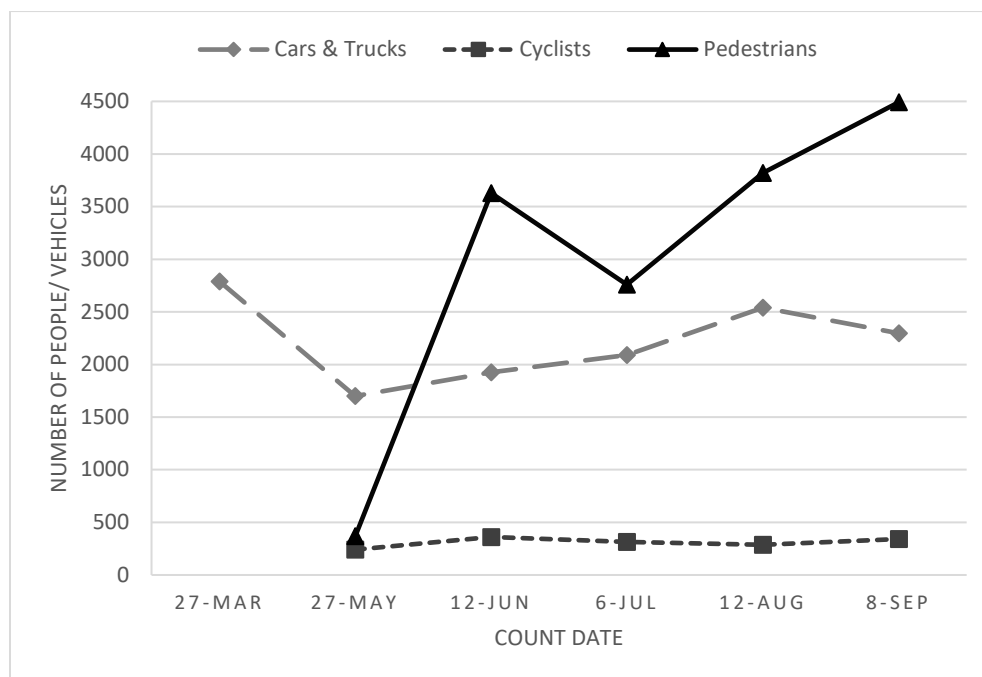
Dundas Place activation planning continues to be impacted by pandemic restrictions. However, beginning in early August, sections of Dundas Place, from Ridout to Wellington Streets, were closed completely to vehicle traffic during set times, with the flex street remaining open as a pedestrian and cycling shared space, to accommodate programming and outdoor activities and performances. As more people visit the area and demand for expanded patios continues, these full-street activations are expected to continue.

3.0 Monitoring and Consultation

3.1 Monitoring

While pandemic restrictions and construction caused high variability in traffic patterns, numerous studies were conducted since the traffic diversions were implemented in early May to count pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. See Figure 3 below for daytime activity counts (7:00 am – 11:00 pm).

Figure 3: People and vehicle counts: Dundas between Richmond and Clarence



The 2021 construction mitigation traffic diversions appear to have reduced the total number of vehicles from a pre-implementation average of 2,790 to a post-implementation average of 2,096 despite a full road closure of the adjacent King Street.

The data highlights a significant number of people walking and cycling on Dundas Place. The latest count in September showed approximately 4,490 people walking, 340 people biking and 2,300 people driving (63%, 5%, 32% respectively). Although the traffic diversion is not the only factor that has contributed to this outcome, the results are positive and align with the vision of Dundas Place providing a welcoming experience for people walking, bicycling or driving.

From a cycling design perspective, appropriate design can range from shared spaces to fully separated and protected facilities. There are two key metrics that determine the effectiveness of the infrastructure design for the actual and perceived safety for people on bikes: vehicle speed and the number of vehicles. The below table summarizes these two metrics and provides two indications of speed, the usual speed of vehicles (median) and the less common speed of the fastest 5% of vehicles (95th percentile). The latter speed represents a worst-case condition that could be experienced by someone bicycling.

Table 1: Measured Traffic Volume and Speed Data by Block

Block	Ridout to Talbot	Talbot to Richmond	Richmond to Clarence	Clarence to Wellington
Vehicles (daily total)	449	1413	2021	2121
Median vehicle speed (km/h)	30	27	27	29
95th percentile speed (km/h)	46	39	44	43

The above measurements were taken in late August 2021. A comparison to March 2021 measurements in the Richmond-Clarence block identifies a reduction in the average speed of 3 km/h along with the lower traffic volumes after the implementation of the traffic diversion.

To achieve an all ages and ability design for cyclists, shared environments like Dundas Place must have low vehicle volumes and low vehicle speeds. The thresholds to achieve this as specified by the Ontario Traffic Manual are approximately 2,000 vehicles/day and a 30 km/h speed limit or by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) are 1,500 vehicles/ day and a 40 km/h 95th percentile speed. The current arrangement with traffic diversion meets the Ontario standard and is close to meeting the NACTO standard for an all ages and abilities facility.

Additional public life studies were undertaken over the course of the summer to collect qualitative information about the functionality and challenges of the temporary arrangement.

- The patio and pedestrian experience was improved by lower car traffic volume, and higher numbers of pedestrians and cyclists using the flex street.
- A diverse range of people from a wide range of ages were seen visiting and traveling through the space as pedestrians and cyclists.
- Parking behaviours remain a challenge, with many parking in non-designated areas, impinging on the non-roadway space or making dangerous movements to reach a desired parking location.
- The aesthetic appeal of the flex street was improved by expanded patios, activations and programming, and more pedestrians, as well as the use of large planters to define the traffic restriction areas.
- Each block is unique, based on its location on the street and the types of businesses it has. Challenges or benefits experienced by one block may not pertain to others.
- Some cyclists ride very close to the roadway edge in the door zone of parked vehicles.

3.2 Consultation

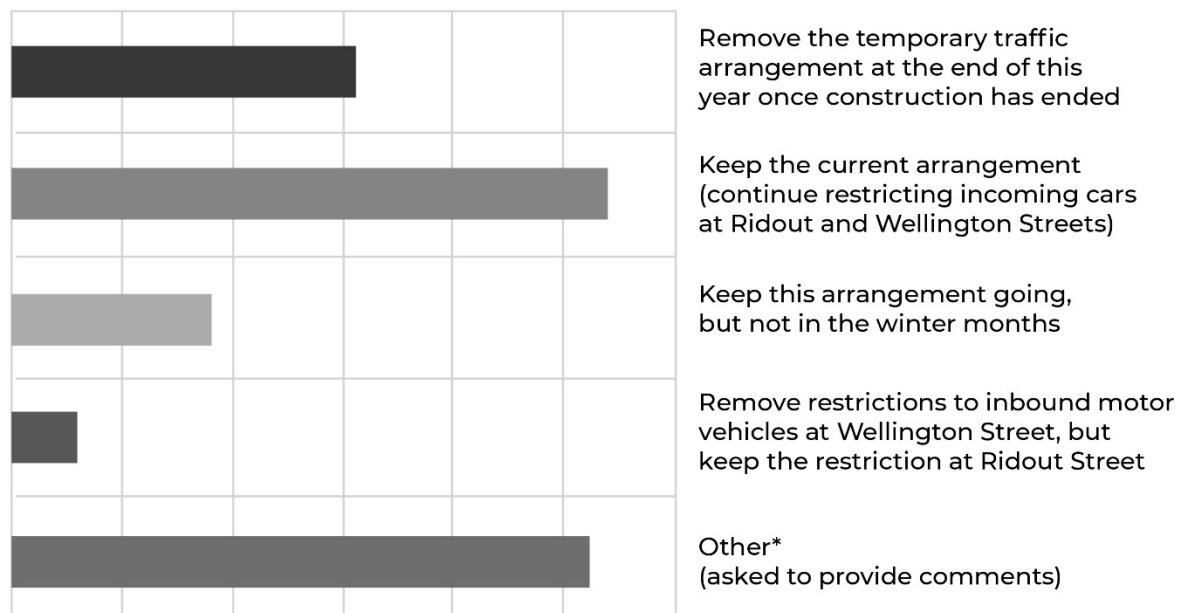
Using the City’s Get Involved public engagement platform, Civic Administration published a webpage with background information on the Dundas Place traffic changes as well as a feedback form for sharing experiences and preferences with respect to the traffic arrangement on the flex street.

The consultation opportunity was promoted through social media, direct emails, door-to-door outreach along Dundas Place, engagement with the Transportation, Cycling and Accessibility Advisory Committees, and mailed flyers. Promotional efforts targeted Dundas Place businesses, people who bike, visitors to Dundas Place business owner/operators, as well as Dundas Place residents and people who work on the street. The survey received 148 responses.

3.2.1 Traffic arrangement preferences

When asked to indicate the preferred traffic arrangement for Dundas Place going forward most respondents were supportive of maintaining some restrictions to motor vehicles. A graphical summary of the 148 survey responses is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Traffic arrangement preferences from all respondents



*Most comments submitted by respondents who selected “Other” were calls for further pedestrianization, as well as several calls for strengthened cycling facilities.

3.2.2 Business feedback

There are approximately 74 businesses on Dundas Place. City staff reached out proactively and directly to individual Dundas Place businesses to collect completed feedback forms and specific preferences from this group. Business outreach was via in-person visits and conversations, emails, Downtown London communication, delivery of print copies and postcard flyers. 32 responses were received from businesses. These results are included in Figure 4 and are also separately categorized here. The results were divided between those in favour of restricting motor vehicle traffic, and those in favour of removing the restrictions:

- Supportive or not bothered by the current arrangement: 41%
- Not supportive: 47%
- Unsure: 12%

Comments and suggestions for improvements to the arrangement included:

- Negative feedback was predominantly focussed on the added navigation complication for visitors driving to Dundas Place
- Positive comments expressed appreciation that downtown is feeling more “alive”, and that mode share balance with traffic diversion is an improvement
- Provide a more consistent schedule for full-street closures to motor vehicles
- Apply greater police presence and parking enforcement
- Improve signage to indicate parking areas more clearly
- Prevent U-turns and illegal entry at Ridout Street and Wellington Street

3.2.3 Cycling feedback

Cyclist feedback overall characterized the temporary traffic diversion on Dundas Place as positive and effective, citing the reduction of through traffic and vehicle speed. The feedback expressed a desire to enhance cyclists' comfort and safety by adding protected bike lanes or by further reducing vehicle volumes and speeds.

Some cyclist comments expressed that the absence of road markings or designated areas for bikes on the roadway is confusing. Suggestions were made to add signage to encourage drivers to yield the right-of-way to people on bikes and to emphasize the street's importance in the cycling network.

3.2.4 Accessibility feedback

There were minimal concerns about accessibility impacts from traffic diversion. Instead, comments about accessibility on Dundas Place focused on the challenges by parking:

- Parts of the non-roadway pedestrian area feel “pinched” from parked cars infringing on non-roadway space, as well as some of the expanded patios
- Vehicles doing U-turns at Wellington and Dundas often use the non-roadway surface (due to the lack of curb)
- Recommendation to ensure the blockades allow for adequate access for mobility devices to pass through

3.2.5 General public feedback

Other themes from the feedback form comments collected included:

- Calls for a more consistent schedule for full closures to motor vehicles for activations and programming, as the 2021 summer schedule was confusing
- Parking improvements are appreciated but awareness of them remains too low
- Continued complaints about social issues on the street

Subject to Council direction, staff will engage with the community once again to share the consultation results and what is planned for traffic operations on Dundas Place.

Conclusion

The feedback on the Dundas Place 2021 temporary construction mitigation traffic diversion is predominantly positive. The survey feedback identifies broad popularity, particularly amongst those who visit Dundas Place. Given the current pandemic-related pressures and the importance of Dundas Place businesses, business owner/operator feedback was intentionally sought and was mixed between those that supported or are ambivalent and those that preferred removal. While motor vehicle traffic volumes were reduced by around a quarter, Dundas Place visitors increased significantly through the year, particularly higher numbers of people walking and bicycling, totalling close to double the number of vehicles. It is hard to correlate the street activity to road changes given the short history of Dundas Place and the overwhelming influence of the pandemic restrictions; however, this and other data sources will form a baseline to measure future Dundas Place success.

With respect to transportation and mobility considerations, the influence of the traffic diversion creates a more suitable connection between newly constructed cycle tracks on both ends of Dundas Place. The unique design of Dundas Place supplemented by the traffic calming influence of the traffic diversion creates a street environment that is more conducive to all ages and abilities cycling and walking and completes this component of the East-West Bikeway.

Core area construction in 2022 creates a similar potential for increased cut-through traffic on Dundas Place. Therefore, it is recommended to reinstate the traffic diversion arrangement for the 2022 construction season. This implementation will include some minor modifications such as the removal of the few westbound parking spots near Wellington Street to avoid U-turning vehicles. The return to previous conditions in the intervening winter months will acknowledge the feedback of those business owners and operators who responded and did not express support, some of whom are currently under pandemic-related pressure and having to rely more on pickup and delivery models especially as patios close for the winter.

Upon the completion of the 2022 construction season, future use of the traffic diversion model can be considered as a flex street tool with consideration of Dundas Place activations and operations and the status of pandemic restrictions.

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