

****MEDIA ADVISORY****

King Edward Avenue Task Force Releases Speed Report

Thursday, July 14, 2011

The King Edward Avenue Task Force has just released its long-awaited speed report of King Edward Avenue traffic. In December of 2010, over a dozen residents volunteered to go out and brave the cold on the avenue to collect speed data using a radar gun.

The results were startling. First off, STO buses were found to be going 20km/h or more over the speed limit. This fact was observed early on during the analysis of the speed data results, and it prompted the Task Force to immediately send a letter to the STO regarding the issue in March (see attached). A letter of response was received from the STO in April indicating that it was taking action to remind its employees to drive responsibly (see attached). While the Task Force observed a marked decline in the speed of the transit buses, it appears many are back up above the speed limit.

While not a complete surprise, the results of the speed measurements on cars were also telling. On average the design speed was over 70km/h, which is 40km/h over the posted speed limit on the on and off ramps to the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge and 30km/h over the posted speed on King Edward Avenue.

The Task Force has made several recommendations to the City of Ottawa to deal with the long-standing issue of speeding to alleviate safety concerns and noise.

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Attachments

- Report – Radar Gun Speed Results
- Letter – Marianne Wilkinson, Chair, Transportation Committee
- Letters to/from STO



**King Edward Avenue Task Force /
Groupe de travail de l'avenue King Edward**
205-100 Boteler Street • Ottawa, ON K1N 8Y1

Councillor Wilkinson,
Chair, Transportation Committee,
City of Ottawa,
110 Laurier Avenue West,
Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

Re: Speeding and Noise on King Edward Avenue

Dear Councillor Wilkinson,

The King Edward Avenue Task Force and the Lowertown community have raised the issue of speeding on King Edward Avenue for over twenty years. Over the past half-decade, there have been at least 4 traffic-related deaths and 67 pedestrians injured along the street. Between 2002 and 2007, there were 1,568 traffic accidents. According to a 1997 study of speeding on King Edward Avenue, the 85th percentile of traffic was travelling at 75 km/h in a zone with a posted speed limit of 50 km/h. Compliance with the speed limit was deemed to be 3%. In 2009, city staff revealed that speeds on the on and off ramps of the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge were out of control and provided no reliable solutions to the problem. The issue of speeding only exacerbates an already intolerable quality of life situation along this residential street with its truck route, abandoned buildings, homelessness, and drugs.

In addition, due to the City's absence on this issue, our community has had to tolerate the resulting increase in noise, pollution and vibrations caused by excessive speeding. For example, it was previously determined that the noise levels reach averages of as high as 75 dBa, and 94 dBa for temporary noises from trucks and buses. The municipal and provincial standards for noise along a street, such as King Edward, are 55 dBa. It is unclear whether or not these noise levels are based on the actual or posted speed. If they are based on the posted speed, then the actual noise levels far exceed these numbers and border on ludicrous. We are not even able to have conversations on the street due to the elevated noise levels and the proximity of the traffic to our homes and businesses. We can do better than this as a City.

Over a year ago, the King Edward Avenue Task Force decided it was time to resolve this issue on its own rather than rely on the police or the City's transportation experts. Our first goal was to obtain data; however, after several months and multiple email strings, the City's traffic operations branch had failed to provide the records of speed data counts for intersections along King Edward Avenue. In addition, the Task Force also submitted a request for an Area Traffic Management study in June of 2010. We were later told that this could be delayed for a long time since there is already a backlog of requests. We have also worked very hard to help the City in its attempts to get photo radar from the province through a writing campaign, a petition, and numerous letters.

Exasperated by the lack of cooperation from the City of Ottawa, we invested several hundred dollars in a speed camera. With the help of over a dozen volunteer members of the community, we went out along King Edward Avenue and collected speed data with the radar gun and video camera. It was just as we started this exercise – in the frigid cold and early snow of December 2010 – that we received a package from the City with the speed counts. Unfortunately, the data the City had collected was so poor that it would have required us to collect the data ourselves nonetheless. Media coverage of our work is attached to this letter.

We recently finalized the results of our speed survey and have developed the attached report and summary statistics. We have also uploaded some of the video evidence online. There were several surprising findings. The first alarming discovery was that transit buses from the Société de transport de l'Outaouais (STO) were speeding an average of 20 km/h over the posted speed limit. We saw this issue early on in our compilation of the data and sent a letter to the STO indicating the situation in March. The STO followed up with an exemplary customer service letter and assured the Task Force that the issue would be raised with drivers. While we did see a temporary reduction in the speed of buses, we have observed that the drivers have since returned to their old habit of speeding. It is unacceptable for municipal employees of a public transportation agency to be speeding while driving publicly funded transit buses.

Another startling discovery was the speed of trucks on the off-ramp of the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge. While buses and cars were driving over the speed limit, the trucks using the off-ramp were more or less compliant with the posted speed. This is a significant finding, because it demonstrates that the previous concerns with speeding trucks at this location appear to have been resolved by the introduction of a lower speed limit on the ramp in 2009. This issue is directly related to the community's desire to have a crosswalk installed at the intersection of King Edward Avenue and Cathcart Street. The main reason for not recommending the crosswalk was that there was a concern that trucks did not have enough stopping distance at the curve in the off-ramp; however, this was based on the idea that the trucks were speeding. Our statistics and observations have revealed that this issue appears to have been resolved and warrants a second look.

Finally, but not least, according to the data, cars were regularly travelling over the speed limit at all locations where measurements were taken. Generally speaking, 85% of the vehicles were travelling at an average of 70 km/h in both directions. This means that the remaining 15% of vehicles were travelling over 70km/h, which is approaching or reaching double the posted speed limit depending on the location. The worst spot for speeding was northbound at Cathcart Street where the design speed was found to be 76km/h in a zone where the posted speed is 40km/h. In addition, one of the highest speeds recorded was 103km/h. This is unacceptable to Lowertown and it begs the question: why is this acceptable to the Ottawa Police and the City of Ottawa? Some of the regular speeds on King Edward could result in vehicle impoundments, licenses revoked, and heavy fines. Yet this does not happen.

This issue of speeding could have been resolved many years ago. The City of Ottawa has been fully aware of speeding problems on King Edward Avenue since at least 1997. This is a very long time to allow a dangerous traffic safety situation to continue unchecked. The City would be disingenuous if it were to state that there was no problem with speeding and the associated safety and noise problems. However, its actions have spoken loud and clear.

In 2002, despite being aware of traffic safety concerns, and red flags from the community and at least one councillor, City Council authorized the flawed redesign of King Edward Avenue based on the findings of an environmental assessment. This design included rebuilding the on and off ramps to the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge in such a way that they would allow for even greater speeding above the posted limit. In addition, no concrete traffic calming measures were incorporated into the redesign of King Edward Avenue to mitigate speeding. This is despite the fact that the first set of consultations of this environmental assessment determined that traffic speeding and safety were the top concerns of residents. After spending over \$50 million dollars on King Edward Avenue, what exactly has changed? What have we done about the speeding and noise issues?

This is a serious matter and we wish to make it clear in this letter that the City of Ottawa has a responsibility to ensure the safety and quality of life of its residents. In fact, there is a very real concern that the City of Ottawa has put itself into a position where it could be held liable for any future major accidents along this corridor. Knowing of on-going speeding without appropriate remediation, ineffective or non-existent traffic controls, and a flawed corridor redesign, are all potential evidence for a major lawsuit if anyone should ever be seriously injured as a result of speeding along this urban residential street. This liability ultimately lies with City Council.

Given the seriousness of this matter, and the new evidence gathered, the King Edward Avenue Task Force recommends the following:

- Accelerate the area traffic management study for King Edward Avenue;
- Conduct a comprehensive speed survey that samples all off-peak and peak hours and delineates between cars, trucks and buses;
- Consider a comprehensive program of traffic calming using humps, raised crosswalks, and raised intersections;
- Immediately pilot the use of speed humps on the on and off ramps and approaches to the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge;
- Install permanent variable message signs indicating speeds;
- Revisit the feasibility of installing an at-grade Cathcart crosswalk in light of recent evidence and the new posted speed limits on the bridge, ramps, and the corridor;
- Write a letter to the STO indicating the on-going issue with employees speeding on King Edward Avenue and the responsibility their employees have to drive responsible while using publicly funded transit vehicles; and,
- Write a letter to the Ottawa Police indicating the on-going issue of speeding and lack of enforcement on King Edward Avenue.

We would expect that you will take this matter seriously and hopefully implement our recommendations.

Respectfully yours,



Marc Aubin,
Chair,
King Edward Avenue Task Force



Nathan Davis,
Executive Member (Traffic Safety),
King Edward Avenue Task Force

cc. Transportation Committee Members
Mayor Watson

Attachments:

- Report – Radar Gun Speed Results
- Letters to/from STO
- Media Clips

Video References:

Speed Board: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B6o08d7gus&feature=related>

Radar Gun: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoq63CaMfVY&feature=related>

Radar Gun 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ogy4EVI3xg&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL

Report - Radar Gun Speed Results



King Edward Avenue Task Force

July 2011

Background

King Edward Avenue has two (2) peak traffic times, once in the morning when the majority of the traffic is Southbound into Ottawa, and again in the evening when the majority of the traffic is Northbound into Gatineau. The two (2) peak times last for approximately 2.5 to 3 hours each, leaving King Edward Avenue remarkably traffic-free for 18 to 19 hours or 75% to 80% of the day. The product of a roadway being clear and traffic-free is well studied, and it is understood that this pattern unintentionally and unconsciously promotes speeding. Drivers on open roads feel safe and more comfortable to drive faster than they would on a more congested road. This is the case on King Edward Avenue where, 75 to 80 percent of the time, speeds are well above posted limits and what is safe for a residential community. Furthermore, the increased speeds raise noise, vibration, and pollution in the neighbourhood. Lowertown should not have to tolerate any further complacency from police or city officials regarding speeding on King Edward Avenue. Further procrastination in solving traffic safety issues could be viewed as negligent if another accident occurs.

It is critical to determine the design speed of King Edward Avenue because the design speed represents what 85 percent of vehicles travel at or below and conversely 15% of vehicles are travelling at or above this speed. Civil engineers attempt to design roads so that the posted speed limits match the design speed. If the design speed matches the posted speed limit, the road has been designed correctly to yield the appropriate vehicle velocities. The fact that vehicles typically speed on King Edward highlights a design flaw. The avenue has more characteristics in common with a highway than a residential street. The fact that King Edward is connected to Highway 5 further fuels the high speeds on the avenue. Speed enforcement is also negligible; commuters have been conditioned to understand speeding will go un-checked on King Edward and the MacDonald-Cartier Bridge. From a traffic management perspective, speeding on King Edward Avenue maintains traffic volume and helps prevent congestion. From a commuter perspective King Edward allows drivers to get home 2 minutes earlier; but this “positive” is a safety issue. The convenience for a commuter cannot trump the safety of residents, pedestrians, cyclists, and even other drivers. Safety must not be sacrificed for the sake of minutes of commute time. In contrast, the negatives generated by speeding vehicles on Lowertown are continuous and harassing. As the city grows, congestion will no doubt build in other parts of the City. Will speeding be permitted in other locations to reduce congestion?

Task Force and Lowertown Action

The community was rallied by the Task Force and a group of volunteers spent hours standing on King Edward Avenue measuring the speeds. Data was measured using a Bushnell Speedster III radar gun, which was purchased because the city was uncooperative in supplying data.

Speeds have been tested and recorded at three (3) locations:

- St. Andrew Street;
- Cathcart Street; and
- King Edward Avenue next to DFAIT.

Each location was tested at four (4) different times of the day:

- 6:00 to 6:30 AM (off-peak time)
- 7:45 to 8:15 AM (peak time)
- 4:00 to 4:30 PM (peak time)
- 7:30 to 8:00 PM (off-peak time)

The speed testing times were chosen to include two (2) off-peak times and two (2) peak times. The four (4) sampling times allow for comparison between traffic speeds during on and off-peak times. In order to determine the design speed, a vehicle necessarily has to be travelling in a “free-flow” pattern. A “free-flow” pattern means that a vehicle is travelling at a speed which is not influenced by other traffic i.e. traffic in front, behind, or beside. It follows that “non-free-flow” traffic or NFF, as noted in the tables, implies that traffic is dense enough that vehicle speeds are influenced by other commuter traffic. As a general rule of thumb, if there are four (4) seconds of time between two vehicles, the second vehicle is considered to be travelling in a free-flow state, uninfluenced by surrounding vehicles. All speed testing was recorded in this method.

The tables below indicate the design speeds (85th percentile), the posted speed limit, and the percentage over the posted limit that traffic was travelling. The percentage over the posted speed limit was determined by dividing the design speed by the posted speed limit.

Cathcart Street			
Northbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
0600-0630	73	40	82.5
0745-0815	72	40	80
1600-1630	62	40	55
1930-2000	76	40	90

Cathcart Street			
Southbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
0600-0630	NFF	40	N/A
0745-0815	NFF	40	N/A
1600-1630	61	40	52.5
1930-2000	67	40	67.5

DFAIT and King Edward Curve			
Northbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
0600-0630	NO DATA	30	NO DATA
0745-0815	72	30	140
1600-1630	NFF	30	N/A
1930-2000	67	30	123

DFAIT and King Edward Curve			
Southbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
0600-0630	NO DATA	30	NO DATA
0745-0815	55	30	83
1600-1630	65	30	117
1930-2000	69	30	130

St. Andrew Street			
Northbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
0600-0630	62	40	55
0745-0815	50	40	25
1600-1630	NFF	40	N/A
1930-2000	72	40	80

St. Andrew Street			
Southbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
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0745-0815	NFF	40	N/A
1600-1630	56	40	40
1930-2000	64	40	60

Conclusions

Two (2) different directions, three (3) different locations, and four (4) different times of day have been tested to illustrate King Edward Avenue's daily speed trends. At no speed target location did traffic travel at the posted speed limit (except when congested). In the Northbound direction, vehicle speeds averaged 81% over the posted speed limits. In the Southbound direction, vehicle speeds averaged 78.6% over the posted speed limits. The chronic speeding on King Edward Avenue is damaging the community and sustains a safety problem. As long as vehicles are speeding, unacceptable safety levels will endure. The King Edward Avenue Task Force calls upon the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police to impart lasting traffic calming measures to break the daily speeding cycle. The radar testing has verified and validated Lowertown's speeding complaints and the speed testing will continue until the situation improves.

Video References:

Speed Board: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B6o08d7gus&feature=related>

Radar Gun: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zog63CaMfVY&feature=related>

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M. Martin,

In the fall, the King Edward Avenue Task Force launched a campaign to bring awareness to the speeding problem on King Edward Avenue. To accomplish this, preliminary speed testing was completed in December using a radar gun. The data has been analyzed and will soon be publicly released. Where and when possible, data collectors were instructed to mark a "B" beside every speed recorded for an STO bus. As data was being collected, it was noted that STO buses were consistently speeding on King Edward Avenue.

Below is the limited data gathered which illustrates consistent speeding of STO Buses:

King Edward & Carthcart North Bound (December 7th)

6:00AM

Speed Limit 40km/h

Recorded bus speeds (km/h): 59, 67, 77, 61, 59, 67, 58, 54, 67, 71, 69, 57, 65, 62, 56, 57, 59, 67, 47, 62

King Edward & Cathcart South Bound (December 7th)

7:45AM

Speed Limit 40 km/h

Recorded bus speeds (km/h): 58, 57, 57, 71, 66, 61, 66, 70, 61, 71,

MacDonald Cartier Bridge & King Edward South Bound (December 9th)

4:30PM

Speed Limit 30km/h

Recorded bus speeds (km/h): 53, 57, 51, 57, 65

King Edward & St. Andrew South Bound (December 14th)

4:20PM

Speed Limit 40km/h

Recorded bus speeds (km/h): 46, 45, 42, 56, 49, 46, 44, 50, 45, 45, 50, 56

King Edward & St. Andrew North Bound (December 14th)

6:00AM

Speed Limit 40 km/h

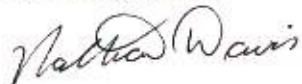
Recorded bus speeds (km/h): 54, 51, 51, 56, 53, 47

A public institution, such as the STO, has a duty to ensure that its drivers are following speed limits. In fact, STO drivers should exemplify the best driving habits for the rest of the driving public. The harsh impacts on our community due to speeding buses are ten-fold that of speeding cars. The speeding buses make King Edward Avenue inhospitable and uninviting. Flagrant speeding in close proximity to homes, pedestrians, and cyclists demonstrates an unparalleled ignorance and blatant disrespect for the community of Lowertown by STO drivers. Buses pose a greater safety hazard for pedestrians and cyclists than any bus driving at the speed limit. The chronic speeding of STO buses is unacceptable and in places is approaching careless driving speeds as defined by the Highway Traffic Act, Ontario Regulation 339/94.

As a result of the findings, the King Edward Avenue Task Force and the Lowertown community will be increasing STO bus speed monitoring. Furthermore, in early spring, speed display boards will be installed to highlight and record vehicle traffic on King Edward. These boards will further draw attention to the STO speeding, with no doubt STO will have to account for how speeding is being handled.

As the representative organization for King Edward Avenue, we would like to know how the STO intends to bring bus speeds under control.

Respectfully yours,



Nathaniel Davis,
Executive Member, King Edward Avenue Task Force
www.kingedwardavenue.com

cc. Marc Aubin, Chair, King Edward Avenue Task Force
Councillor Mathieu Fleury, Ward 12, Rideau-Vanier, City of Ottawa
Councillor Diane Deans, Chair, Ottawa Transit Commission

Below are the speeding results of all vehicle traffic on King Edward Avenue, and the resulting 85th percentile speed. STO buses contributed to this data.

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Northbound			
Time	Design Speed (km/h)	Posted Speed (Km/h)	% Over Speed Limit
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PAR COURRIEL

Gatineau, le 15 avril 2011

Monsieur Nathaniel Davis
Executive Member, King Edward Avenue Task Force
306-100, rue Boteler
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 8Y1
nathaniel.davis@forces.gc.ca

Objet : Autobus STO – excès de vitesse – avenue King Edward

Monsieur,

En réponse à votre courriel du 30 mars dernier concernant les excès de vitesse sur l'avenue King Edward en ce qui a trait aux autobus de la STO, nous tenons à vous assurer que nos services suivent de près la situation. À cet effet, j'aimerais vous faire part des actions posées (ou des mesures mises en place) au cours des derniers mois, à savoir :

- émission de bulletins à l'égard des chauffeurs afin de leur rappeler les limites de vitesse;
- surveillance occasionnelle par nos inspecteurs avec radar;
- rencontres avec les fautifs.

Au cours des prochaines semaines, nous allons accentuer les gestes suivants :

- surveillance hebdomadaire par radar, rencontre avec les fautifs et mesures disciplinaires;
- nouvelle émission de bulletins à l'égard des chauffeurs;
- avis d'intervention policière advenant le non-respect des limites de vitesse.

De plus, nous sommes convaincus que l'ajout d'un panneau tableau indiquant la vitesse réelle contribuera grandement à une prise de conscience de cette problématique, autant pour les chauffeurs d'autobus que pour la population en général. En effet, vos tableaux démontrent clairement que cette problématique est concentrée dans les zones où la limite indique un maximum de 30 km/h et de 40 km/h.

Soyez assuré que le respect du Code de la sécurité routière par nos chauffeurs est une priorité et que nous suivons cette situation de très près.

Veuillez recevoir, Monsieur, l'expression de nos meilleurs sentiments.

Le président,



Patrice Martin

P.-S. – Available in English upon request.

- c. c. M. Marc Aubin, président, King Edward Avenue Task Force
Mme Diane Deans, présidente, Ottawa Transit Commission
M. Mathieu Fleury, conseiller, Ville d'Ottawa
M. Michel Brissette, directeur général, STO
M. Claude Renaud, directeur des opérations, STO