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'Grand civic avenue' seen for Front St.



The preliminary preferred alternative for Front Street changes include a reduction of traffic lanes from four to two, and the widening of sidewalks to better accommodate the growing number of commuters and tourists who enter the city via Front. Drawing courtesy of The Planning Partnership

Ashley Csanady July 6, 2010 – 7:00 am

Front Street may lose two lanes as part of a facelift to the area in front of Union Station to complement interior renovations.

In the first of a series of meetings to solicit feedback on the proposal, the City of Toronto revealed the preliminary preferred alternative, selected by the city and the private firms in charge of the project, as well as a variety of other options for the downtown hub. The preferred option features a reduction in street traffic to two lanes; a median to assist pedestrian crossing; lay-by parking for cabs and drop-offs; and the creation of a central plaza directly in front of Union Station. Other proposed changes aim to improve the pedestrian experience in the space, its aesthetic and its environment for bikers.

"We do want to bring back the old glory of Union Station, but it also has to function," said Uwe Mader, Front St. at Union Station project manager for transportation services with the City of Toronto. He oversaw the environmental assessments that were conducted prior to yesterday's public meeting. These assessments determined priority areas, such as pedestrian traffic, and eliminated others, such as eastbound taxi lanes.

"There's only so much space on the streets and there are more pedestrians than vehicles [during rush hour in front of Union

Station]," said Harold Madi, partner and urban designer with The Planning Partnership, who is working with LEA Consulting on the designs for Front St. "This isn't about through-traffic; it's about a destination.

"This is a great opportunity to turn [Front St.] into a grand civic avenue," said Mr. Madi. "We also want to make this a destination space. [Union Station] is not an attraction itself, but it will be."

The plans describe a "European-style" square in the Beaux Arts style of architecture that not only describes Union Station, but the Royal York Hotel and the Dominion Public Building. The design would be contemporary, but aims to enhance and reflect the artistry of the surrounding buildings. Features like patterned pavement and extended sidewalks will play to the Old World style.

The study goes to city council in the spring of 2011. The cost and the funding of the proposed facelift will not be discussed until then.

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