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Union Station transit gateway makeover unveiled

Proposal would create a European-style boulevard in front of Union Station

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Patty Winsa
Urban Affairs Reporter

As urban planning consultant Harold Madi points out, the streets around Union Station are the "front door to the city." And it's a door that really needs a new coat of paint.

The city of Toronto and Madi's firm, The Planning Partnership, unveiled exactly how they plan to refresh that portal at a public meeting Monday.

The vision would turn the station's busy section of Front St., between York and Bay Sts., into a European-style boulevard that facilitates the flow of pedestrians to and from Union Station.

"Currently, a lot of pedestrians cross (Front St.) on an ad hoc basis, and we want to see if we can improve conditions for pedestrians and ensure their safety," said John Mende, director of transportation, infrastructure and management for the city.



How the intersection of Front and Bay might look in a few years, with wider pedestrian walkways and distinctive paving.

UNION STATION DISTRICT PLAN, CITY OF TORONTO

The proposed design reduces traffic from two lanes in each direction to one, wide enough to accommodate cyclists, with patterned and textured pavement so drivers sense a change and slow down. Lighting would be enhanced and sidewalks almost doubled in width.

The intersection of Front and Bay Sts. would also

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become a more elegant civic space, with wider sidewalks and crosswalks and patterned pavement.

The cabs that usually clog the street would be relegated to lay-bys, curb indentations convenient for pick-ups and drop-offs.

Pedestrians would be permitted to cross anywhere on the block. The current median, which blocks pedestrians from crossing because of its huge planters, would be replaced with a tree-lined island marked off from the rest of the street by bollards.

During rush hour, foot traffic around Union Station outnumbers vehicles 10 to 1 and the number of passengers who use the station — 200,000 daily — is expected to double in the next 10 to 15 years as GO Transit service expands.

The street enhancements are part of a long-range Union Station revitalization program first approved by city council in 2004 and expanded to include improvements of the surroundings in 2006, said Mende.

The design proposals presented Monday are part of an environmental assessment that will ultimately decide how and what improvements will be made. Mende says his department will report their findings on the redesign, with costs, to council next spring. The plan would then have to be approved by council.

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- Extreme heat
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