Richmond Hill Twin Tower's Proposal

A Dangerous Precedent for the Yonge-16th Avenue KDA and the 16th/Carrville MTSA

David Crowley, April 21, 2021

David Crowley, Retired Transport Planner and Richmond Hill Resident Since 1981

- Over 40 years of professional experience in transport planning, included 7 years in senior service planning positions with TTC in 1980s.
- Promoted the Transportation Tomorrow Survey (TTS) concept, as TTC Service Policy Superintendent in 1985 and has undertaken substantial research using 1986-2016 TTS data sets.
- Specialized in travel market research, demand forecasting, transit service planning, transportation policy analysis, and well as parking surveys and related policy studies.
- Over 30 years consulting experience including transportation, parking and/or transit planning and policy studies for Transport Canada, BC Transit, Metro Toronto, GO Transit, TTC, Halifax Regional Municipality, City of Toronto, City of Ottawa, Burlington, Oakville, Hamilton, Mississauga, Whitby, Lethbridge, Saskatoon, Dubai Municipality (U.A.E.), Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Region of York, and Metrolinx.
- Served as a transportation planning/demand forecasting specialist on World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank assignments and undertook international assignments for Toronto Transit Consultants.
- Served as an expert witness for 6 Ontario Municipal Board Hearings dealing with transit planning and parking issues in Richmond Hill, City of Toronto and City of Vaughan.

The Proposed Development

- The proponents are proposing to build two residential towers of 42 and 45 stories plus commercial in a 5 story podium on a small portion of their 10.68 hectare property on the north side of 16th Avenue.
- The site is within convenient walking distance of the 16th/Carrville BRT station stop which provides good service to the TTC subway.
- Their plans also suggest that this site will be adjacent to a future subway station – something that could not happen for decades, even if it made sense.
- They are requesting that the OP and zoning by-laws be amended to more than double the currently proposed density (from 4.0 to 8.78 FSI).
- Consistent with the density increase request, they are asking that they be allowed to build 42 and 45 story buildings, ignoring the staff proposals that heights be limited to 20 stories in this location.
- **History suggests that approval of this project would establish a precedent for other similarly situated sites within the KDA including the redevelopment of the remaining sites within their property.**

Yonge-16th KDA Context

- Currently, the subject KDA has a total of 9 such towers being proposed containing approximately 3200 dwelling units. These include both rental and condominium units offering smaller, one bedroom homes to future RH residents.
- Substantial additional development with more towers and reduced parking is likely within the KDA but transportation considerations will be a limiting factor.
- The earlier April 2018 "Yonge-16th KDA Traffic Study" undertaken by Dillon Consulting for the City suggested that while "…the demonstration plan with a 2.9 FSI can be supported from a traffic perspective…" the higher, "demonstration plan with 3.6 FSI could not be supported."
- **The BA report ignored this warning!**

Related “Urban Transportation Considerations Report” by BA Group

- This report presents a detailed assessment the includes travel demand forecasting and a review of current and future traffic operations in the vicinity of the proposed project.
- The main assumption that should be considered carefully by staff is the idea that already conservative draft parking standards should be reduced substantially (from the current 959 spaces to 857 spaces) because of the “Rationale for a reduced parking supply” that is presented on pages 26 and 27.
- Based on my almost 5 decades of professional experience as a transportation planner I find their rationale less than compelling: **It is based on a number of questionable assumptions about future car ownership and travel behaviour in Richmond Hill.**
- **There are no real short-term concerns about limiting the parking associated with this specific development because of the parking available on the rest of the site, but there should be serious concerns about the transportation impacts of future developments on this site and in the KDA.**

Transportation Considerations, continued

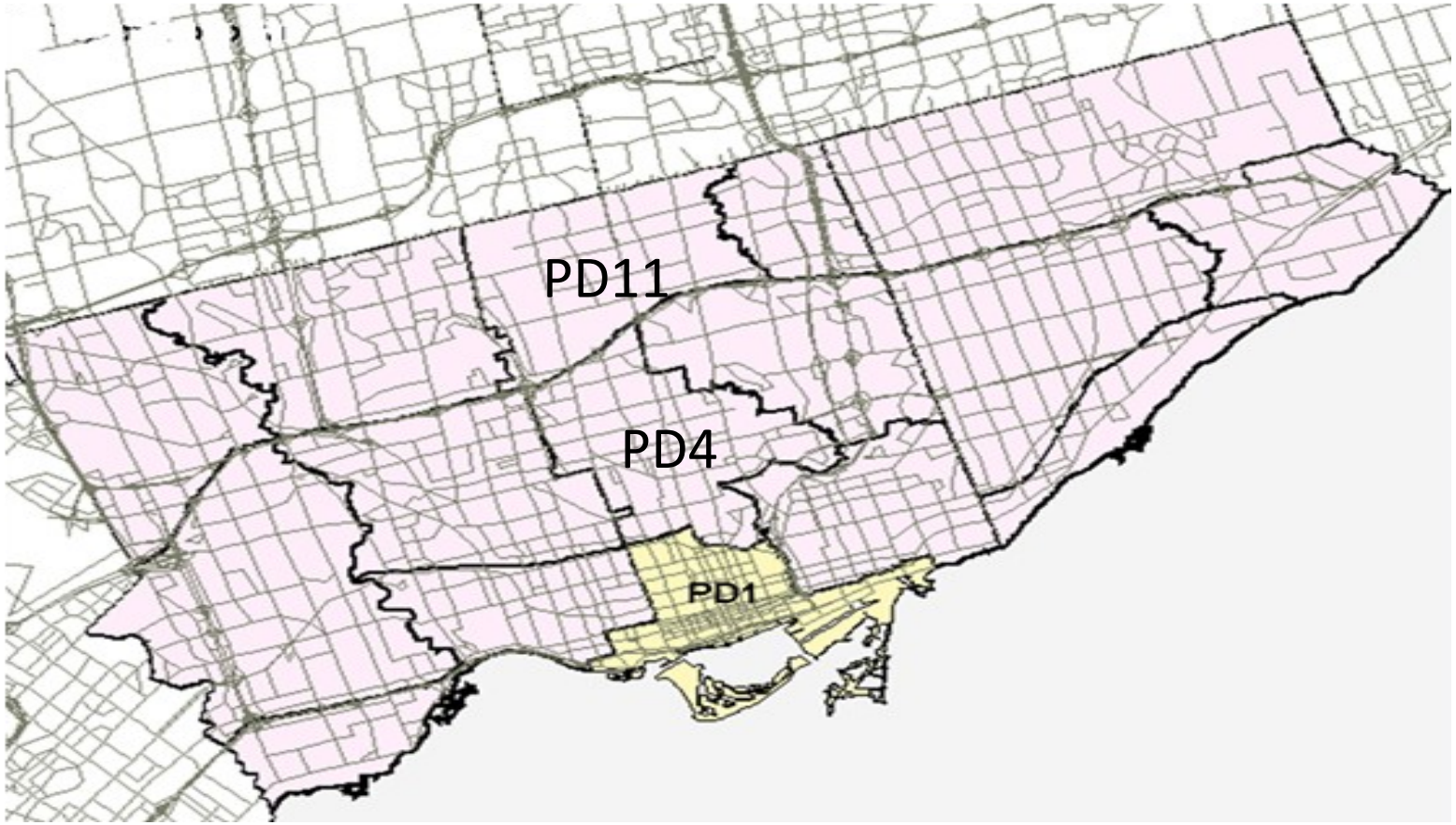
- As the area develops and new residential towers are added, as per known plans for the KDA, travel demands will grow substantially and, as shown in the current travel habits of Richmond Hill residents and the long term trends, most of these trips will continue to be made by personal vehicles.
- The only current residents who rely on transit are commuting to Downtown Toronto and the Yonge Corridor These transit users account for 65% of the total peak transit use by Richmond Hill residents, and the only folks who choose transit, rather than driving.
- The vast majority of the remaining 35% of local transit users are students and passenger-captive transit users who cannot drive.
- Note that only 4% of Richmond Hill households in 2016 did not own or lease a personal vehicle today – down from 6% in 1986.
- Recent council decisions regarding the Yonge Bernard KDA have supported the idea that future parking ratios for high-density residential and town houses should be reduced, despite the fact that council has had to address the need for additional parking in existing residential areas.
- **The BA assumptions may well apply to similar developments within the City of Toronto, but they do not apply to Richmond Hill and are not likely to apply in the foreseeable future (based on 30 years of data collected as part of the Transportation Tomorrow Survey (1986 to 2016).**

Transportation Considerations, continued

- We are told that **the new residents won't need cars – they will use the Subway (or take Uber Taxis according to the recent OP Update presentation).** **Does this make sense?**
- The subway, with or without the Richmond Hill extension, serves Downtown Toronto (PD1) and other Yonge Corridor destinations in Planning Districts 4 (York Mills, Eglinton and St. Clair stations) and 11 (Finch, North York Centre and Sheppard Stations).
- In 2016, 10% of Richmond Hill residents commuted to PD1, and an additional 5% commuted to PDs 11 and 4.
- These locations accounted for 65% of all peak period transit use by RH residents.
- 85% of RH residents travel to dispersed locations that are not served by competitive transit.
- Travel by transit to non-downtown destinations typically takes 2 to 3 times longer than the same trip by personal vehicle (and is much less convenient and comfortable).
- **Anyone with a smart phone can calculate the comparable auto and transit travel times. Check it out!**

Downtown Toronto (Planning District 1) and Yonge Corridor Planning Districts 4 and 11

Location with City of Toronto



Transportation Considerations, continued

- Almost ¾ of Richmond Hill based downtown commuters are already using transit, with most choosing the faster, more comfortable GO trains that serve the Downtown Core (2016 TTS special tabulations).
- 40% of RH residents commuting to PD4 chose transit whereas only 9% of local residents chose transit for travel to destinations in PD11.
- Whereas there is some potential for modal shifts from auto to transit for trips to PD4 and 11, the is very little potential for further modal shifts to transit for Downtown destined travel!
- The Yonge subway was already operating at maximum capacity, prior to Covid, south from Sheppard Station.
- **GO Rail parking lots are empty because of downtown offices are empty and it is unclear how many current downtown workers will actually return to their commutes now that they can work from home.**

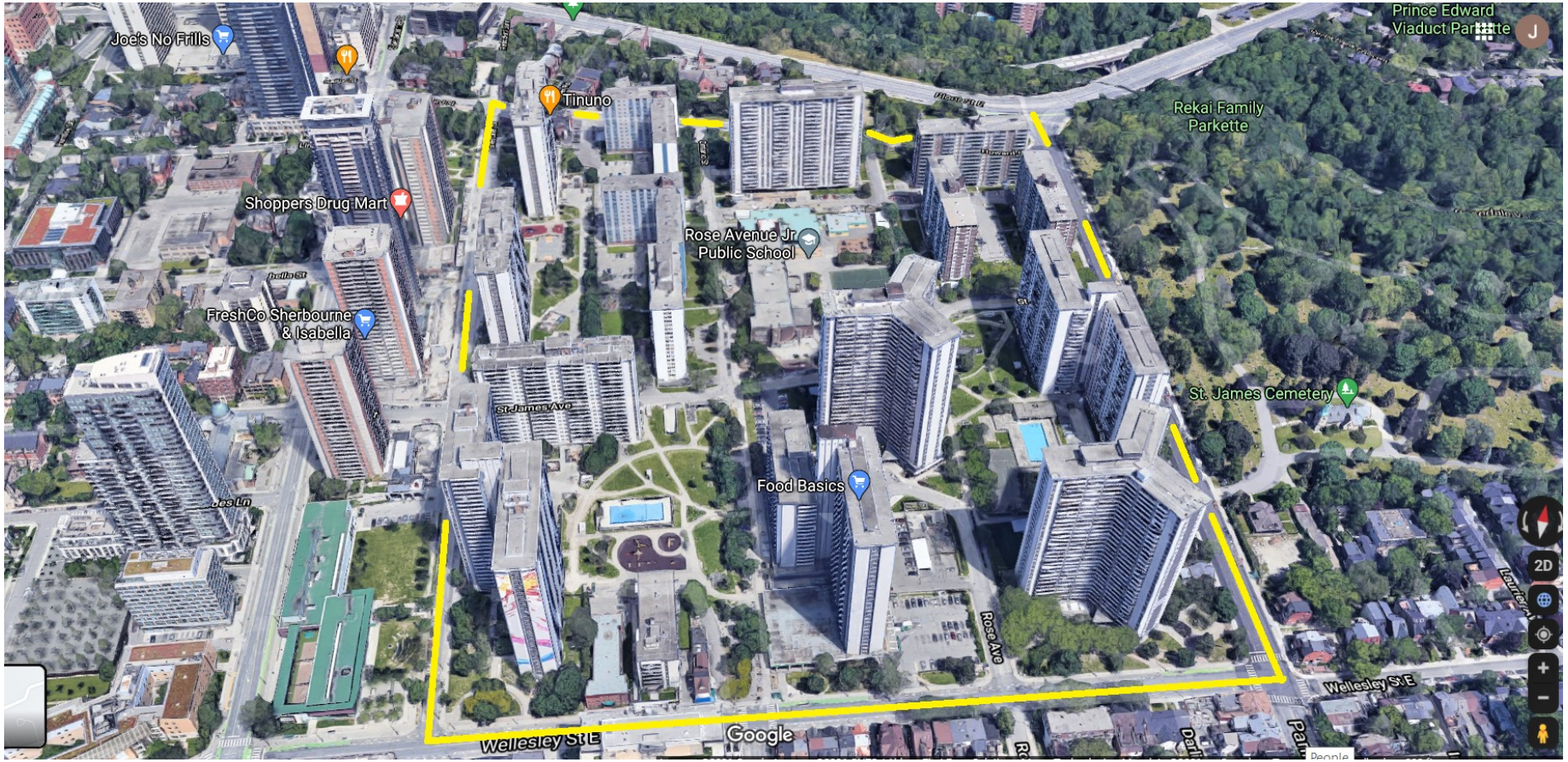
How does this proposal compare to similar developments elsewhere in the GTA?

- The current development proposals for the Yonge-16th KDA and the Yonge-Bernard KDA and Richmond Hill Regional Centre are comparable in terms of density to a major residential development in the City of Toronto that was built in the 1960's -- St. James Town.
- They might also be compared to North York Centre, the high density suburban City Centre developed on Yonge Street in North York between Highway 401 and Finch starting in the 1970's

St. James Town – “A World Within a Block”

- The proposed density for this RH project is substantially higher than was achieved by the **St. James Town** development built during the 1960s south of Rosedale (Bloor-Parliament-Wellesley-Sherbourne).
- That development consisted of 19 high rise towers (14 to 32 stories) and 4 low rise buildings and the overall FSI was 4.375, if memory serves.
- This area has a population of about 17,000 today.
- St. James Town was conceived to house young middle class downtown workers and empty nesters. Once the first generation of tenants moved on the area quickly attracted lower income tenants and four buildings were constructed later by Ontario Housing to provide public housing.

St. James Town – a comparable community?



Richmond Hill versus St. James Town..

- Richmond Hill is a suburban community where only 4% of households do not own a car and 63% own 2 or more cars.
  - Average peak period transit use by Richmond Hill residents accounts for about 13% of AM peak travel demand but only for 4% of travel within Richmond Hill.
- St. James Town is an area where 45% of households do not own a vehicle and more than 60% work downtown.
  - 40% walk or bike to work and 33% take transit (they are served by 3 subway stations).
  - Only 23% travel by car in the peak periods.

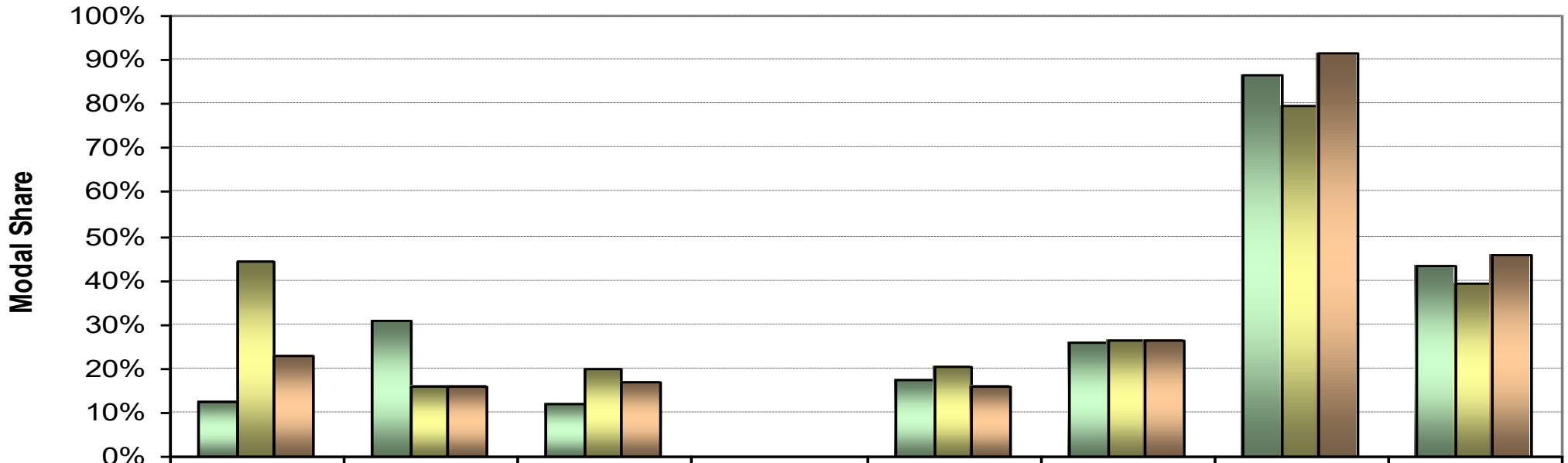
North York (City) Centre – the GTA's first Suburban City Centre -- -the model for transit-oriented development in the Greater Toronto area.

- NYC was planned assuming that increased densities, in conjunction with rapid transit (3 subway stations) would create substantial modal shifts to transit by both local residents and persons who worked in the area but commuted in from elsewhere to local jobs.
- The modal split target (within 20 years) was a 60% transit market share during peak demand periods – equal to a 50% increase in the observed 1986/87 transit modal splits (market shares).

- Did the Expected Modal Shift to Transit happen? **The short answer is "NO".**
  - Demand forecasts prepared in the 1980s and 90s suggested that the transit market shares for employees and residents would increase from approximately 40% in 1986 to 60% within 20 years. This did not happen for North York City Centre residents in the period 1986 and 2006 and there is no evidence that things have changed since.
  - Travel by mode for NYC residents has not shown any clear trend toward the 60% target that was the basis for the planned North York Centre densities (maximum 5.2 FSI).
- **Increases in density do not guarantee modal shifts to transit (except possibly for travel to Downtown Toronto) as shown on page 15.**
- **This has not stopped planners and developers from asking for much higher densities, especially given recent Provincial policy changes presented in "A Place to Grow" August 20, 2020 (See Section 2.2.4 Transit Corridors and Station Areas).**

NYC Origin Trips (Transportation Tomorrow Surveys)

Transit Modal Share of Work Trips from NYC to Key Destinations
(AM Peak Period)



	Richmond Hill	Markham	Vaughan	Other York	Total York	Other TO	Midtown + DT	All Desti.
1986	12.2%	30.7%	11.8%	0.0%	17.4%	25.6%	86.5%	43.1%
1996	44.3%	15.9%	20.0%	0.0%	20.3%	26.4%	79.6%	39.2%
2006	22.7%	16.1%	16.8%	0.0%	15.8%	26.1%	91.5%	45.6%

Suburban and Inner City Parking ratio comparisons…

- In 2006, the average car ownership in condominium apartments in suburban centres (North York and Scarborough) was 1.11 cars per unit, substantially higher than for the RH project.*
- The average for all City of Toronto condominium apartments was 1.08 and this does not include parking for commercial activities while the average for rent controlled market rental apartments was .73.
- Parking ratios have been reduced in inner city locations where more residents work downtown and transit and walking accounts for a much higher share of peak travel.
- This potential for reduced parking ratios is discussed in a 2019 RCCAO study"** but it applies much less in areas that are more distant from downtown and where most travel demands have dispersed suburban origins and destinations.

- Source: "Parking Standards Review – Phase Two Apartment Building/Multi-Unit Block Developments Component, New Zoning By-Law Project", 2007 Report by Cansult Limited for City of Toronto (Project Manager, David Crowley).

** "How Parking Regulations Need to Evolve for High-Rise Buildings", June 2019, Ryerson Urban Analytics Institute.

Richmond Hill residents have high car ownership for a reason:

- 85% of Richmond Hill residents are destined for other mostly suburban locations in York, Peel and Toronto that are not well served by transit.
- The average peak period transit modal splits for Richmond Hill residents is 13%. The average peak transit splits to destinations in York and Peel is 5% (and only 4% of trips to RH involve transit).
- Residents who have to depend on transit and don't work downtown typically spend 2 and 3 times the door to door travel time by car.
- **Given the changes in working from home and commuting behavior since Covid-19, there will be fewer people in the future moving to RH high rises and commuting by transit (and most would be riding the GO Trains in any case).**