London, November 29th, 2022

Dear project committee,

On behalf of the Western Active Transportation Society (WATS), we would like to provide input to the Environmental Assessment (EA) of the University Drive bridge.

Our main concern is that one important alternative solution was not seriously studied: namely to transform existing bridge into a bridge for pedestrian and cyclists (as suggested in solution 4B), but not to build a new bridge for vehicular traffic. We believe that this solution would have substantial advantages over all other studied solutions and that it would be most consistent with the stated goals of the University's open space strategy. In short, we do not believe that the EA has presented enough evidence that there is a need to maintain vehicular traffic across a University Drive bridge.

Why do we think this solution is possible?

The "Big Moves" in Western's Open Space Strategy (2018) propose to reduce cut-through traffic across campus, to situate parking at the perimeter (for example by construction of a parking garage on Medway parking lot), and to provide drop-off points for pedestrians to reduce traffic and parking on campus. If the University is still aiming to reach these goals in the foreseeable future, it is not clear that there is a need for maintaining access for private motorized vehicles across the University bridge. Vehicular access to campus and the University hospital is well served by Western Road from the west and Perth Drive from the north. While the drive from, for example, University Drive / Richmond intersection to the Chemistry parking lot would increase by 600m, we believe that the change would lead to more people to choose active transportation alternatives for shorter distances, ultimately removing capacity concerns. The EA has not shown that this would on balance not lead to better transportation outcomes.

A main goal for the University must be to improve public transportation connectivity. The original northbranch of the BRT proposal was not approved, but alternatives for high-frequency bus services to campus remain a priority for the City of London. It has not been clearly demonstrated by the EA that buses must cross the river at the University Drive Bridge to achieve this goal. High-frequency bus services running on Western Road with a branch on Philip Aziz and Perth Road, plus bus service on Richmond Street (with a bus hub on the east side of the University Bridge) would likely be competitive solution in terms of travel times and a substantial improvement on the current situation.

What advantages would this solution have?

The transformation for the existing University Drive Bridge into a structure dedicated to active transportation has substantial advantages from a safety and heritage standpoint, most of which are already pointed out in the EA. Not having to build and maintain a bridge for vehicular traffic would remove the adverse impact on the sensitive ecosystem of the river (apart from having clear financial and health advantages). We estimate that closure of the bridge would lead to a substantial mode shift from cars to active transportation, with the associated reductions in CO2 emissions and substantial health benefits for Western's students and staff. Individual and community net health benefits of a mode shift to active transportation include up to one year longer life expectancy, lower cancer and cardiovascular risks, less days of absence, and better memory. Restricting vehicle access to one of the most iconic and most beautiful parts of our campus will create a livable and safe space that will transform the campus

experience for everyone. We believe these advantages alone warrant a serious consideration of this solution.

Importantly, the University Bridge has been a major safety hazard in the past, with numerous carpedestrian and car-cyclist collisions occurring on the associated intersections (many of which are unreported). The proposed solution 4B has the potential to remedy some of these concerns. However, the blending of vehicular traffic, buses, and active transportation both on the west and east side of the bridge remains unsolved, and we anticipate this to cause safety problems in the future. Removing vehicular traffic across the river would make it much easier to provide a truly safe environment for the campus community.

Conclusion

We agree with the committee that, from the proposed solutions, a "conserve and twin" approach (solution 4B) is the most promising to ensure safe campus access for active transportation users. However, we would request that the EA include a clear consideration of the suggested alternative: not to maintain vehicular traffic across the river. We believe that when planning a structure as impactful and long-lasting as a second bridge, the University needs to provide more clarity on their transportation plan for the next decade. Is the University willing to be more serious about preventing cut-through traffic? Will the University move parking to the perimeter? Is the University committed to encouraging active transportation and environmental sustainability? The construction of a new 2-lane bridge designed for individual motorized traffic appears to maintain the status quo. We urge the University to seriously consider taking the opportunity offered by the end-of-life of the current bridge to accelerate their environmental and transportation vision and to look at more sustainable, future-oriented and sustainable solutions.

On behalf of the Western Active Transportation Society,

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