

Challenges for downtown urban goods movement

# LOADING ZONE

By George Liu

Goods movement presents a unique challenge to business properties along urban streets that lack dedicated loading bays for couriers and delivery trucks. Given limited options and the large size of delivery vehicles, truck drivers are at risk of receiving multiple tickets a day while serving customers in the central business district.

**University of Toronto** Transportation Research Institute researcher **James Lamers** observes that illegal parking by commercial vehicles is concentrated in the core, estimating that 90 per cent of all parking tickets issued to courier vehicles in Canada are issued in downtown Toronto. He argues that the city could manage curb space more effectively by replacing the 700,000 parking tickets issued each year to commercial vehicles in the City of Toronto with a permit that would exempt delivery vehicles from certain parking regulations.

“Most companies choose to park illegally and accept the fines as a cost of doing business,” Lamers told *NRU*. “A courier parking permit costing less than \$500 per vehicle would legitimize the current parking behaviour, reduce enforcement costs for the city and replace the city’s revenue from parking fines.”

University of Toronto professor **Matthew Roorda**, recently appointed as Canada Research Chair in Freight Transportation and Logistics, is leading a research team that is studying goods movement in the urban context. The team is working with courier companies to develop software algorithms that optimizes delivery truck routes to help drivers avoid having to park illegally during rush-hour restrictions.

“We discovered that we didn’t have a good handle on parking supply,” says Roorda. Last summer, his team hired a summer student to travel around the city on rollerblades to identify and photograph every parking spot, loading bay and back alley



Loading zone at Elm and Simcoe

SOURCE: GEORGE LIU FOR *NRU*

within the central business district, assessing them from a commercial vehicle perspective. “We now have a photo inventory of [municipal and private] parking spaces,” he says.

“Then we interviewed delivery drivers to develop a model of parking choice for commercial vehicle operators.”

Last year, Mayor **John Tory** sought to speed up traffic flow by enforcing a zero tolerance policy for rush-hour stops in the core. However, provisions of the city’s noise by-laws mean some businesses do not have the option to shift deliveries to other times of the day.

**Shoppers Drug Mart** transportation director **Scott Oliff**, speaking from the perspective of business, cited existing prohibitions on overnight

deliveries between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. in residential areas as a major challenge for the company’s downtown retail locations located in residential towers.

“Time-of-day delivery restrictions pose operational challenges on retailers that serve perishable products,” Oliff told *NRU*. “Trying to make those deliveries after 7 a.m., for example, is challenging when our customers expect fresh produce to be on the shelves during early breakfast hours.”

In an effort to facilitate goods movement for businesses and couriers, the **City of Toronto** is currently studying the feasibility of expanding courier delivery zones as part of its Downtown Operations Study, operational planning and policy manager **Naz Capano** told *NRU*.

“These are curbside spots, usually a couple of spaces long, where only courier vehicles making a delivery are allowed to park. Currently, the city is monitoring the existing courier delivery zones to see how it is working.”

*George Liu is a freelance transportation reporter on assignment with **NRU**.*