Retrofitting Markville:

Transit-Induced Intensification in Markham, Ontario

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Abstract

In recent years, planning practice in North America has promoted sprawl repair to achieve more sustainable development in the suburbs, long seen as car-dependent because of their low densities and dispersed land uses, which make destinations less accessible on foot and limit mobility for residents without cars. Low-rise, single-use districts have been transformed into denser, mixed-use town centres in the hopes of encouraging greater transit use and ensuring that daily needs are within walking distance. In this research, I draw on the local knowledge and professional expertise of interested parties, including planners, councillors, real estate developers, and residents, to understand how they perceive that high-density redevelopment proposals may impact travel behaviour and livability in the Markville community in Markham, Ontario. Through interviews, observations of Council meetings, and analysis of letters to the City Council, I found mixed perspectives on the redevelopment plans. While the planners believe that intensifying near the existing commuter rail station and the planned bus rapid transit corridor will contribute to a more livable community with daily needs within walking distance, the city councillors and residents are less convinced. Residents, especially those who are older or retired, generally regard these plans as exacerbating traffic congestion, since transit is not an alternative to driving for many people. Additionally, community members also raised concerns about the limited capacity of neighbourhood amenities, including schools and parks. Despite the supportive policy context for suburban intensification, many residents believe that there have been few concrete, proactive measures to mitigate these potential impacts.

Keywords: Sprawl repair, transit-oriented development, livability, complete community, suburban intensification

Foreword

This Major Research Paper satisfies one of the requirements for the Master in Environmental Studies (MES) program at York University. My Plan of Study's Area of Concentration, titled "Planning for Equitable Suburban Mobility," focuses on three Components: **Suburbanization**, **transportation planning**, and **urban political economy**. This major research is a culmination of what I have learned over the past two years in the MES program, including key issues and debates that informed my Plan of Study. These include sprawl vs. intensification, car dependency and transit, affordable housing, and the struggle among social actors to shape urban space.

Below are the Learning Objectives that have been fulfilled through this Major Research Paper:

- Learning Objective 1.3: Achieving a solid understanding of the cause and effect of suburban intensification processes;
- Learning Objective 2.1: Gaining an in-depth understanding of transportation systems and how they shape urban regions;
- Learning Objective 2.2: Gaining detailed insight into how access to transportation infrastructure and services affects people's ability to meet their everyday needs;
- Learning Objective 2.3: Obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the program requirements of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute for candidate membership; and
- Learning Objective 3.3: Studying alternative (sub)urban futures prioritizing social and environmental needs over economic growth.

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1.0. Introduction

North American suburbs are characterized by their low-density, spread-out nature, which has required residents to rely on private automobiles to access almost all basic needs (Filion, 2015; Harris & Keil, 2017; Forsyth, 2019). Since the late twentieth century, there has been a growing recognition that continuing to build low-rise single-use subdivisions in the suburbs is no longer sustainable, especially from an environmental perspective, as sprawl is associated with the loss of farmland and increased greenhouse gas emissions from car use (Calthorpe, 1993; Duany et al., 2000).

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to implement sprawl repair to transform suburban areas into denser, mixed-use communities through infill development, especially around transit stations (Tachieva, 2010). The intent is to enable more people to use public transit, walk, or bike rather than drive (Moos et al., 2018b), while also enhancing livability by increasing accessibility to community amenities (Pemberton et al., 2026). However, efforts to retrofit suburbia are frequently challenged by residents who believe the opposite effect would occur (Ruming et al., 2025).

Accordingly, in my major research paper, I examine the Markville neighbourhood in Markham, Ontario, as a case study of suburban intensification around transit stations. Specifically, I focus on community perceptions about high-density redevelopment proposals in the area and whether this change would affect residents' mobility and their neighbourhood's livability.

Previous research has evaluated the application of New Urbanist design principles of diversifying housing types, incorporating ground-floor retail in mixed-use buildings, and creating

a walkable street network in Cornell, a neighbourhood in eastern Markham (e.g., Gordon & Vipond, 2005; Skaburskis, 2006; Grant & Perrott, 2009; Grant & Perrott, 2011). While Cornell's higher density was praised for reducing farmland consumption (Gordon & Vipond, 2005), it was less successful in reducing residents' reliance on cars, and its local retail struggled to remain viable (Grant & Perrott, 2011). Meanwhile, Perrott (2020) examined the development of Markham Centre, the city's emerging downtown, through the perspectives of key actors in the development industry and the municipal government. However, other parts of Markham have not been covered in planning literature. This study aims to bridge this gap by focusing on Markville, an existing commercial and light-industrial district in the city planned for redevelopment, while also being centred on the perceptions and lived experiences of its residents.

My initial interest in Markville stems not only from observing Markham's predominantly low-rise character gradually change over the years as a lifelong resident, but also from my experience working at the City of Markham as a summer student in policy planning. In that role, I witnessed vocal community opposition to intensification throughout the city, including through my observations of Council meetings and interactions with residents at community open houses. When I attended a public meeting at Markham Civic Centre in September 2025 as an interested observer, I noticed that most residents spoke out against the Markville Mall rezoning application, primarily due to traffic congestion concerns. I became interested in further studying whether high-density development around rapid transit will reduce car dependency and enhance livability, as intended by planning theory (Grant, 2024).

Thus, my major research paper explores how residents' perceptions of proposals to build high-rises in Markville around both its commuter rail station and its proposed bus rapid transit stops may affect their travel behaviour and quality of life. I also examine how planners,

councillors, and real estate developers perceive these proposals. Additionally, I provide a comprehensive policy context by reviewing relevant planning documents.

In Chapter Two, I review relevant scholarly literature on sprawl repair, the impact transit-oriented developments have on travel behaviour, and how density affects neighbourhood livability. I then go on to explain my research question and methods in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I present my findings and discuss the main themes by framing them in existing literature. This includes growth management, traffic congestion, changing travel behaviour, employment sprawl, housing affordability, and livability. I conclude with a brief discussion about my policy recommendations, research limitations, and future research directions in Chapter Five.

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. Suburbanization and Sprawl Repair

My research is guided by the idea that high-rise development around transit hubs is a form of "sprawl repair," aiming to modify the low-density suburban landscapes to reduce car dependency (Hodge et al., 2021, p. 285). Sprawl repair, as defined by Tachieva (2010), is a process of "insert[ing] needed elements – buildings, density, public space, additional connections – to complete and diversify the mono-cultural agglomerations of sprawl: residential subdivisions, strip shopping centers, office parks, suburban campuses, malls, and edge cities" (p. 5). Other scholars have used the concept of suburban/sprawl retrofitting or de-sprawling to describe similar processes of transforming suburbs into more urban places (Rice, 2010; Dunham-Jones & Williamson, 2011; Vall-Casas et al., 2011; Talen, 2012; Charney, 2020).

The suburb is a loosely defined term, often seen as a dichotomy of the city. It generally refers to newer, low-density residential communities on the outskirts of the central city (Forsyth,

2019; Nijman & Clery, 2015). Although associated with the American (and Canadian) Dream of a middle-class lifestyle centred on owning a single-family house (Duany et al., 2000; Grant & Scott, 2012), suburbs were never confined to this ideal and were diverse in their built form and demographic makeup (Hayden, 2003). Despite a long history of residential decentralization that predates World War II (Hayden, 2003; Dunham-Jones & Williamson, 2011), the rapid dispersal of the urban population outwards to newly built peripheral communities in the post-war era was facilitated by generous mortgage subsidies and the expansion of the highway system (Duany et al., 2000; Hannigan, 2014; Phelps, 2015).

The development of suburbs has entrenched car dependency in daily life. According to Filion (2015), North American suburbs are characterized by "dispersed suburbanism" due to their low-rise built form and land-use separation, forcing residents to become car-dependent to overcome long travel distances (p. 633). Suburban neighbourhoods are shaped by a "loops and lollipops" road network (Harris, 2015, p. 33), which was kept functionally separate from commercial strips lining arterial roads, thereby reducing people's ability to walk to shop (Leccese & McCormick, 2000; Hess et al., 2023). Consequently, the car became the dominant mode of mobility, subordinating other modes like walking, cycling, and public transit (Urry, 2004).

The term *sprawl* is associated with "development that is low density, occurs in strips along highways, and/or is discontinuous with scattered and leapfrog development patterns leaving aside extensive areas of undeveloped land" (Hess & Sorensen, 2015, p. 132). Sprawl is further aided by regional political fragmentation, as strict growth controls imposed by local governments can prompt developers to build on vacant peripheral lands under less restrictive zoning (Byun & Esparza, 2005). However, Hess & Sorensen (2015) argue that the Greater Toronto Area has experienced little sprawl, given that new residential development at the urban-

rural fringe has largely been carefully planned to be contiguous with the existing built-up area, with relatively higher densities and a mix of uses than in the United States. Nonetheless, the term sprawl has still been used to critique continued suburban expansion, and the resulting loss of distant farmland to residential subdivisions, where inhabitants will, from day one, be forced into car dependency (Lorius & Taylor, 2024).

Given that lower-density, car-oriented environments are associated with higher greenhouse gas emissions (Jones & Kammen, 2014), building denser, walkable communities were seen as the antidote to the environmental impact of suburban sprawl. Moreover, once a symbol of post-World War II prosperity, suburbs have become an obstacle to sustained economic growth due to their spread-out, predominantly low-rise residential character (Phelps, 2015). This necessitates a "post-suburban" transformation of their built form to address inefficient land use and a lack of employment and community infrastructure (Phelps, 2015, p. 47). Therefore, reproducing low-density, single-use, and car-oriented suburban development has been regarded as antithetical to good planning.

Over the past few decades, several planning theories have advanced design solutions to reverse sprawl. For instance, smart growth approaches call for regional planning to constrain outward suburban expansion by creating compact, transit-supportive neighbourhoods (Gondek, 2014). Similarly, both New Urbanism and 15-minute cities seek to create neighbourhoods with a mix of land uses so that residents can ideally live, work, and shop within a short walk, aided by an interconnected street grid (Leccese & McCormick, 2000; Duany et al., 2000; Urrutia-Mosquera et al., 2023).

Although sprawl repair can be implemented in residential subdivisions by introducing duplexes, townhouses, and apartments, most sites targeted for retrofitting are large sites that can

be comprehensively redeveloped into mixed-use town centres (Dunham-Jones & Williamson, 2011). Such examples include large, underused parking lots (Talen, 2012), declining shopping malls (Harris & Keil, 2017), and office parks (Jansen & Ryan, 2019). The process involves identifying deficiencies in the existing built environment (e.g. single-use zones, poor walkability, excessive parking, and minimal open space) and developing a neighbourhood structure and design techniques to address them (Tachieva, 2010). Retrofitting suburbs is an opportunity to create a future where residents can live and work in the same neighbourhood. However, implementation comes with its challenges. Fragmented land ownership can hinder comprehensive change in the suburbs, often resulting in piecemeal site-by-site redevelopment (Harris & Keil, 2017).

Besides reducing land consumption, policymakers have promoted intensification as it contributes to more housing options (Dunham-Jones & Williamson, 2011). This is especially important given that changing demographic trends and rising housing costs have increased demand for multi-unit housing in the suburbs, requiring a shift away from predominantly single-detached houses (Dunham-Jones & Williamson, 2011; Grant & Scott, 2012).

However, some scholars have criticized suburban densification over gentrification concerns. For example, Lanari (2019) states that suburban intensification represents a “clean slate” for capital to reinvest in declining areas, often in the form of luxury housing for middle-class professionals, displacing existing low-income residents (Lanari, 2019, p. 377). Similarly, Keil & Üçoğlu (2021) argue that suburban high-rise condominium projects do not contribute to affordable housing but rather facilitate speculation for developers and other financial actors. Consequently, sprawl repair may paradoxically contribute to further urban decentralization if

low-income residents are priced out of more centrally located, denser, mixed-use areas that only skilled professionals can afford (Hayden, 2003; Desfor et al., 2006; Moos et al., 2018a).

2.2. Transit-Oriented Development and Travel Behaviour

The suburbs are often seen as "transit deserts," lacking adequate public transit service and sidewalks, which hinders the mobility of individuals without a car (Allen, 2017). The curvilinear street network and low-density nature of suburban neighbourhoods hinder the feasibility of providing bus service within walking distance of home (Gordon & Vipond, 2005). Sprawl repair seeks to retrofit these suburban areas with increased densities to ensure more people can live near a transit stop to support, at a minimum, frequent bus service (Tachieva, 2010). It also seeks to reshape travel patterns and regional growth by encouraging development in areas served by rapid transit rather than farmland and natural areas outside the city (Filion, 2018; Yuen, 2011).

The concept of *transit-oriented development*, coined by Calthorpe (1993), describes moderate- to high-density, mixed-use communities within a 10-minute walk of a transit station. Calthorpe (1993) believed that coordinating land-use planning with transit investments would create positive feedback loops, with improved transit access leading to higher ridership and more convenient service. However, the scholarly literature is mixed on whether combining density and transit access necessarily changes travel behaviour, which refers to how people travel between two given locations, including factors such as choice of transportation mode, trip frequency, and trip length (Calthorpe, 1993; Ewing & Cervero, 2010; Fan et al., 2022).

Supporting alternative modes to the car is often used as a planning justification for high-rise development (Moos et al., 2018b). This is supported by many studies finding that high-rise inhabitants are less likely to drive. For example, Zhang et al. (2012) modelled the relationship

between residential density and vehicle miles travelled in Virginia, finding that a 20% increase in density was associated with a 16% decline in per-person vehicle miles travelled (p. 47). Likewise, Moos et al. (2018b) found in a study of Toronto's outer-suburban area that census tracts with high-rise condominiums had between 74 and 80% of commutes made by car, representing a 4 to 10% reduction compared to non-condo areas (p. 22). While most condominium dwellers still drive, they are nonetheless less reliant on cars than their low-rise counterparts.

Meanwhile, in a meta-analysis of previous research, Chi & Lee (2024) found that residents living in transit-oriented developments are between 1.7 and 8.6 times more likely to commute by non-motorized modes than residents in car-oriented neighbourhoods (p. 275). In comparison, a study conducted in Brisbane, Australia, found that areas identified as transit-oriented developments increased the likelihood of someone travelling by public transit by 1.5 times compared to traditional suburban areas (Kamruzzaman et al., 2015, p. 194). Likewise, people residing within 0.5 miles of a rail station had higher transit use than those in other areas in both Washington, D.C. (35.65% vs. 13.49%) and Baltimore, Maryland (22.22% vs. 17.87%) (Nasri & Zhang, 2014, p. 177). These figures indicate that density and proximity to transit are more likely to encourage residents to use public transit.

Additionally, some studies indicate that retrofitting the built environment may affect mode choice if residents have alternatives to driving. For example, in a study of residents living in multi-family suburban housing in Eugene, Oregon, Larco et al. (2013) found that 38.7% of respondents walked or biked to their nearest commercial area (p. 291). The same study also noted that 38.9% of respondents living in less-connected sites would switch to active

transportation modes if the built environment were modified to make it easier and more convenient (Larco et al., 2013, p. 295).

Likewise, in a comparative analysis of three rail stations in San Francisco, California, Renne (2009) found that station areas designed with high densities, sufficient mixed uses, and short street blocks had lower rates of car ownership, which contributes to greater transit mode share. In contrast, station areas surrounded by parking lots and office parks were less successful at lowering car dependency, which were dubbed "transit-adjacent developments" because their car-centric design hindered the neighbourhood's integration with transit access (Renne, 2009). Therefore, by redesigning neighbourhoods within a 10-minute pedestrian shed around a transit stop and by creating a public realm that makes walking and cycling safer, sprawl repair can ensure the car is not the default mode of choice (Taviecha, 2010; Calthorpe, 1993).

Conversely, some studies cast doubt on whether density and proximity to transit affect travel mode. Although there is a correlation between density and transit use, this may be influenced by residential self-selection (Ewing & Cervero, 2010). To clarify, this means that changing the built environment may not change travel behaviour. For example, Langlois et al. (2015) surveyed residents in five transit-oriented developments across North America, finding that half of the respondents reported using non-motorized modes before moving to their current address, indicating a high level of residential self-selection. Thus, any change in mode of transportation is caused by people wanting to take transit and choosing to live in places with better transit access.

Despite efforts to design the built environment to support transit usage, proximity to transit alone does not affect mode choice. Other factors may influence how people choose to travel. In a study of the New York City region, Chen et al. (2008) determined that travel time and

cost had a greater influence on mode choice than density. Reliance on automobiles may not change, especially given that they retain a significant speed advantage to overcome the spread-out nature of suburbs (Lorius & Taylor, 2024; King et al., 2022). Above all, people might not reconsider how they travel in response to changes in the built environment since travel behaviour is influenced by habit (van Wee & Handy, 2016).

While suburban retrofitting aims to reduce car dependency, income and employment constraints can make switching travel modes challenging in practice. Despite low-income residents being more likely to rely on transit (Bardaka & Hersey, 2019; Boarnet et al., 2020), transit-oriented developments tend to attract market-led redevelopment that displaces them to more suburban areas with poor transit access (Kipfer & Sotomayor, 2024; Allen, 2017). Thus, the convenience of close transit access tends to be enjoyed by those who can afford such a lifestyle, not those who must rely on transit because they do not have a car.

Furthermore, even with transit-oriented development, public transit cannot readily serve all jobs, given that employment is dispersed throughout the urban region. The lack of local job opportunities near where workers live results in long commutes to job concentrations, including downtown, office parks, and manufacturing hubs dispersed throughout the urban region (Abbruzzese, 2017). Vermesch et al. (2021) found through a case study in Montreal that low-income workers are forced into car dependency because public transit lines are generally concentrated in the urban core, while their places of employment tend to be dispersed across the region. Because sprawl repair often focuses on nodes along transit corridors (Tachieva, 2010), not all places of employment can realistically be served by public transit. Due to the costs of retrofitting, densification must be implemented in specific areas rather than city-wide (Pemberton et al., 2026). Despite transit-oriented development and sprawl repair promising that

one can live and work near transit, the scholarly literature remains divided over the effectiveness of compact development along transit corridors in influencing mode choice.

2.3. Intensification, Livability, and NIMBY-ism

The North American suburban lifestyle has long been viewed as the ideal way to live. Low-density environments have long been conceptualized as being a refuge from crime, poverty, and social isolation commonly associated with urban living (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Mazelis, 2018). Suburban living is also associated with greater access to green space (Zuniga-Teran et al., 2017) and more living space (Gordon & Richardson, 2000). However, conventional suburban design has been criticized for encouraging a sedentary lifestyle (Harris & Keil, 2017) and lacking civic spaces for the community to gather (Calthorpe, 1993). Hence, retrofitting suburbs to resemble the compact city has been seen as the normative solution to creating more vibrant communities.

Planners often justify intensification, claiming it would provide a better quality of life for residents who can easily access their daily needs without relying on a car, unlike conventional residential subdivisions. Lloyd et al. (2016) describe livability as a relative concept based on an individual's subjective evaluation of their day-to-day experience in an environment. Despite strong societal preferences for low-density living environments (Gordon & Richardson, 2000), it has become a commonly held assumption among planners that higher densities will enhance livability and quality of life (Haarhoff et al., 2016). In contrast, Le Boennec & Lucas (2022) argue that neighbourhood satisfaction is not necessarily tied to residential density but is influenced by accessibility to certain amenities. This was exemplified in a study in Auckland, New Zealand, by Haarhoff et al. (2016), finding that high-rise inhabitants chose to relocate to their current neighbourhood because they valued proximity to amenities that sustain their daily lives, including schools, community centres, transit, and shopping.

Social infrastructure (e.g. educational, recreational, and healthcare facilities) is key to sustaining a healthy and livable community (Hodge et al., 2021). In planning practice, the phrase *complete community* is often used to promote sustainable development with density, mixed uses, transit access, and walkability so that residents can "live, work, and play in their own neighborhoods" (Grant, 2024, p. 216). Sprawl repair seeks to transform suburbs into complete communities where one's daily needs, such as retail, employment, and recreational facilities, are available within walking distance of home, which Tachieva (2010) argues are more livable because they are more "human scale" (p. 4). Hence, mixed-use densification increases accessibility to destinations within walking distance, which in turn reduces car dependency (Hanson, 2017b).

Yet, intensification can pose challenges for improving livability. Talen & Wileden (2025) note that while proponents argue that sprawl repair enhances accessibility to amenities through densification, critics frequently worry that it will have the opposite effect. Residents who engage in the planning process often raise concerns about limited capacity for parks, schools, services, and other infrastructure for high-density development proposals (Ruming et al., 2025). Also, high-density neighbourhoods may be seen by suburbanites as "slum" conditions, owing to the perceived lack of additional open spaces to accommodate new residents (Bolleter et al., 2024, p. 10). Wolff & Haase (2019) argue that higher urban density will increase demand for limited green space, which can result in overcrowding in local parks. Green space is especially important in denser communities because high-rises tend to lack private outdoor space, unlike people in single-detached homes with backyards (Bolleter et al., 2024).

While intensification is preferred because it is less costly to provide infrastructure and services if communities were not so spread out (Tachieva, 2010), the reality is not as simple as

maximizing their use. Although public infrastructure requires density to be provided cost-effectively, it can be overused beyond its designed capacity if population density exceeds an optimal amount (Wolff & Haase, 2019). Lorius & Taylor (2024) argue that intensified environments can quickly become overwhelmed by rapid growth, resulting in reduced capacity for local parks, schools, and recreational facilities, which the municipality cannot easily upgrade and expand due to the high costs. This is especially problematic for schooling, since it may result in students being bused outside their neighbourhood because local schools are already at capacity (Lorius & Taylor, 2024). Hence, intensification may result in shortages of community facilities if local governments are unable to keep services and infrastructure up with population growth.

Nonetheless, some scholars have suggested that suburbanites may be willing to trade off opposition to density in exchange for additional community amenities (Churchman, 1999; Haarhoff et al., 2016; Bolleter et al., 2024). Hodge et al. (2021) stress the importance of local governments coordinating with community service providers to identify and secure sites for schools and other community facilities early in the planning process to avoid the challenges of finding suitable locations once redevelopment has already started. If amenities could be added in advance of intensification, this could make it more politically acceptable to existing residents if they can see that their livability will not be compromised (Allen et al., 2018).

When planners and developers promote sprawl repair in an existing low-rise environment, there is often fierce resistance from residents against altering the existing built form. These opponents often are pejoratively referred to as NIMBYs (short for “not in my backyard”). Dear (1992) defines NIMBY-ism as the “protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighborhood” (p. 288). While opposition to urban development can be motivated by self-serving reasons tied to

maintaining property values and excluding certain demographic groups, it can also be driven by holistic environmental and heritage protection concerns (Hodge et al., 2021). In his seminal article on urban growth machine theory, Molotch (1976) argues that community opposition to development challenges the hegemony of land-based business interests in urban politics, which stand to benefit from higher land values at the cost of infrastructure deficits and environmental degradation that lower residents' quality of life.

Despite Ontario having a policy-led planning system that provides predictability in development decisions (Hess & Sorensen, 2015), most residents participate in the planning process only when specific development applications are submitted, long after the governing policies in city-wide and district-level plans have already been established (Bolleter et al., 2024). This disconnect arises because residents are more likely to react negatively to a high-rise redevelopment proposal near their home than to abstract planning principles at the policy-setting state, such as sprawl repair or smart growth. Although NIMBY attitudes reflect perceived citizen disempowerment in the planning process (Hodge et al., 2021), they are highly localized, with opposition diminishing the further away from one's immediate surroundings (Talen & Wileden, 2025).

In general, changing popular opinions on suburban intensification remains a challenge for planners. Sorensen & Hess (2015) use the term "path dependency" to describe a system that self-reinforces itself due to a powerful coalition of interests actively resisting significant change. Many suburbanites may disagree that their neighbourhoods need to be intensified, preferring the personal freedoms a car brings (Henderson, 2006; Walks, 2015) and the privacy associated with living in a low-density community of single-family houses (Gordon & Richardson, 2000). Furthermore, they may view intensification as a potential disruption to their daily commute,

fearing that additional residents will worsen road traffic (Filion, 2015). Sprawl repair is an opportunity to reverse past patterns that supported car dependency and change the trajectory of urbanization. However, overcoming long-established societal preferences for car-oriented suburban lifestyles remains a challenge for retrofitting suburbia.

3.0. Methods

3.1. Case Study Context

I conducted a case study of Markville, located within Markham, a suburban municipality north of Toronto (see Figure 1), to explore how transit-oriented development may affect travel behaviour and quality of life. Markville, situated between the historic villages of Markham and Unionville (and is a portmanteau of the two names), is at the intersection of two major arterial roads: McCowan Road and Highway 7. Figure 2 shows an aerial photograph of the Markville area, outlined in red.

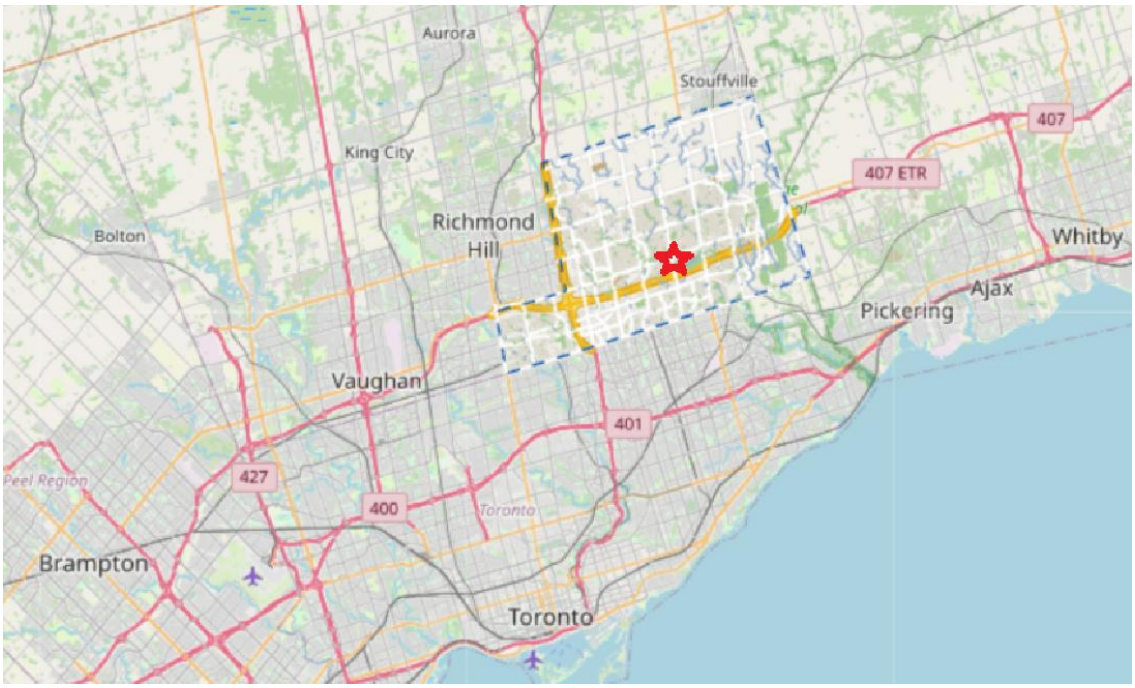


Figure 1: Markville's location within the Greater Toronto Area (Markham, 2026b)



Figure 2: Aerial photograph of Markville (Markham, 2026b)

The area west of McCowan Road generally consists of commercial uses, namely Markville Mall, while the east side is an employment area home to automotive-related businesses (WSP Canada Inc., 2023a, p. 11). Surrounding Markville are low-rise residential neighbourhoods (WSP Canada, 2023a, p. 35).

Although some industrial uses and low-rise neighbourhoods of single-detached houses existed on the east side of McCowan Road before the 1970s (see Figure 3), much of Markville was developed after Markville Mall opened in 1982 (Irish, 1986) (see Figure 4). The other main addition to the community since then was three high-rise condominiums west of Markville Mall, built in the early 1990s (WSP Canada Inc., 2023c, p. 13).



Figure 3: Aerial photograph of Markville in 1978 (York Region, 1978)



Figure 4: Aerial photograph of Markville in 1995 (York Region, 1995)

Since 2022, the City of Markham has been conducting background studies and consulting with interested parties to inform the Markville Secondary Plan, which will provide area-specific land use policies to guide the neighbourhood's future redevelopment (WSP Canada, 2023c; Your Voice Markham, 2025). Figure 5 shows a rendering from a December 2023 report to Markham Council illustrating what the Markville Secondary Plan area could look like under the proposed land use planning permissions. An updated draft was presented in June 2025 (WSP Canada Inc., 2025; Markham, 2025e), but the Secondary Plan itself has yet to be adopted by Markham City Council, pending further study and consultation.



Figure 5: Markville Secondary Plan rendering (WSP Canada Inc., 2023c, p. 67)

There has not been much development activity in Markville in recent years. Figure 6 illustrates development applications in the area. The only one of note is the redevelopment of Markville Mall at the northwest corner of McCowan Road and Highway 7. In May 2025, Markham City Council adopted Official Plan Amendment 272 (OPA 272) to guide a four-phase redevelopment of the mall site, which will accommodate 4,500 residential units in 17 buildings

ranging from 6 to 39 storeys in height (Markham, 2025c; Markham, 2025d; Martelluzzi, 2025, p. 3). The rezoning for the first phase of the project was subsequently approved in December 2025 (Markham, 2025h; Markham, 2025i).

Cadillac Fairview, a commercial and residential developer owned by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Fund (Cadillac Fairview, n.d.), envisions redeveloping the existing parking lots at Markville Mall (officially called CF Markville) into mixed-use high-rise buildings over four phases, as shown in Figure 7. The mall will remain in the long term, as affirmed by OPA 272, stating that "CF Markville will continue to be recognized and maintained as a regional commercial node" (Markham, 2025c, p. 9).

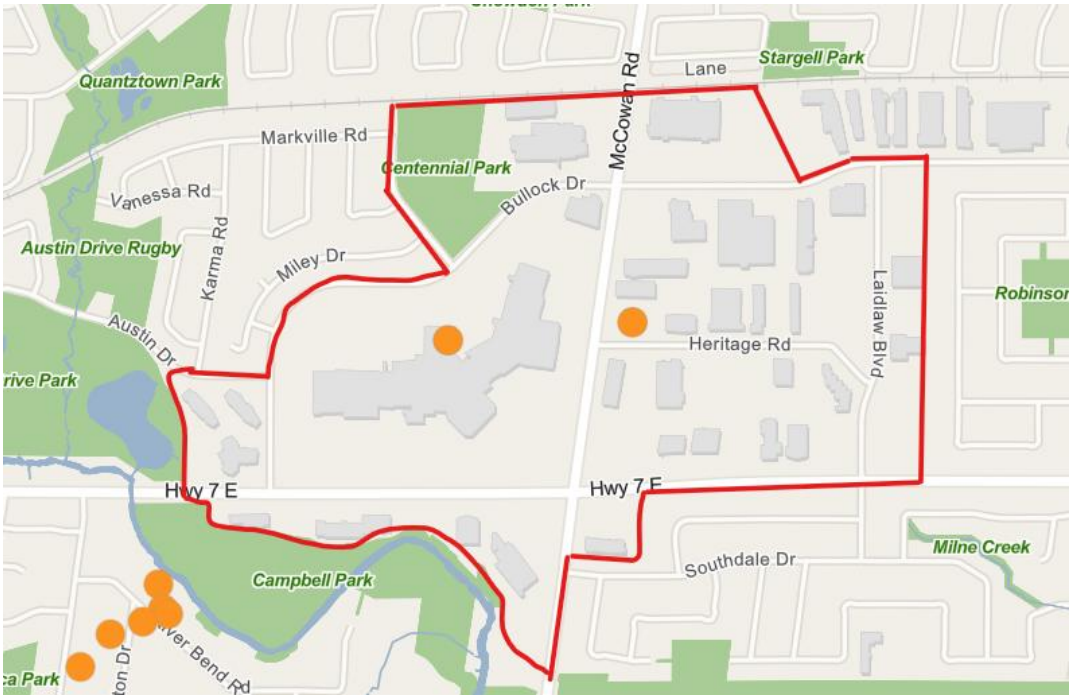


Figure 6: Development applications within Markville as of April 30, 2026 (Markham, 2026a)



Figure 7: A conceptual rendering of the proposed redevelopment of Markville Mall (Urban Strategies, 2022)

To gain a deeper understanding of the area, I visited Markville on the afternoons of Saturday, January 17, 2026, and Monday, March 9, 2026. Photographs of the community were taken to illustrate the neighbourhood's context throughout this paper.

3.2. Research Question and Approach

The research question asks: How do suburban residents perceive proposals for high-rise redevelopment around bus rapid transit and commuter rail stations in Markville, and how might these changes impact their travel behaviour and quality of life?

To answer the question, I relied on an interpretive policy analysis approach, drawing on the local knowledge and expertise of various stakeholders and interested parties to understand this policy issue (Yanow, 2000). The role of a planner is to mediate between diverse interests throughout the planning process (Hodge et al., 2021; Bolleter et al., 2024). Through this

research, I follow the work planners regularly do: to facilitate conversations with people to understand a planning issue (i.e., intensification in Markville) and inform recommendations.

Currently, only a few studies have used a qualitative approach to examine how high-rise developments affected people's transportation mode choices. Most of the research is quantitative, relying on surveys and census data to determine changes in travel behaviour (e.g., Chen et al., 2008; Jun et al., 2013; Larco et al., 2013; Langlois et al., 2015). However, I believe there are more opportunities to explore this issue primarily through qualitative methods to gain rich data on why people travelled the way they do. Meanwhile, studies on how density affects livability and neighbourhood satisfaction have been conducted using either qualitative interviews (e.g., Haarhoof et al., 2016; Allen et al., 2018) or quantitative surveys (e.g., Le Boennec & Lucas, 2022; Bolleter et al., 2024).

Since I am interested in exploring the different perspectives on suburban intensification, a qualitative approach is most appropriate. Qualitative research emphasizes “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 5). Through interviews, I gain deeper insights into transportation and quality-of-life issues from the perspectives of the research participants (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Moreover, this aligns with my interpretive epistemological position, whereby the researcher obtains knowledge by immersing themselves in the perspectives of the people being studied and their understandings of the world through interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

3.3. Research Methods

According to Yanow (2000), local knowledge on a policy issue could be obtained in many ways, including interviews with interested parties, observations of legislative proceedings,

and document analysis of reports, media coverage, and letters. A similar mix of research methods was used by both Sheller (2015) and Charney (2020) in their respective studies on transportation planning in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and suburban intensification in Tysons Corner, Virginia.

The qualitative research methods I relied on include semi-structured interviews, observation notes of recorded City Council meetings, and a document analysis of written submissions to the City from residents and other interested parties. These methods collectively provide robust data on the redevelopment of Markville and its potential impacts on mobility and lifestyle. Additionally, relevant newspaper articles, planning policy documents, City staff reports, and technical studies were used to provide background information to contextualize my findings.

3.3.1. Interviews

Participants for semi-structured interviews were recruited through email correspondence between December 2025 and January 2026. My goal was to gain insights from a diverse range of interested parties involved in Markville, including residents, city councillors, city planners, and planning representatives for developers with planning applications in the area.

Residents were recruited through several community groups, which distributed my interview request to interested members. The groups that I reached out to include the Markville Community Association (MCA), the Milne Dam Conservation Park Ratepayers Association (MDCPRA), the Unionville Residents Association (URA), and the Markham Community Connect Association (MCCA). The non-resident participants were contacted directly via their work email.

I met with the following participants in December 2025 and January 2026 to answer approximately a dozen questions about their thoughts on Markville's redevelopment, from either their personal experience or professional opinion:

- Alex, a Markham city councillor;
- Leslie, a Markham city councillor;
- Molly, a Markville resident;
- Ruby, a Markville resident;
- Louis, a planner working at the City of Markham; and
- Pam, a planner working at the City of Markham.

To protect the participants' confidentiality, they were referred to throughout this paper with a pseudonym.

Given that I was only able to speak with two residents through the community groups, I tried to recruit more residents in March 2026 by posting flyers at Centennial Park, Centennial GO Station, and several bus stops around Markville. Each poster contained a QR code that directed residents to an online form to learn more about the research and provide their contact information if they were interested in participating in the study. Unfortunately, these posters did not result in any additional interviews for this study.

The interviews, each lasting between 30 and 90 minutes, were held either in person at an agreed-upon location or online via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. My research, which involved human participants, received ethics approval from York University on December 9, 2025. I also completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement ethics tutorial. All participants electronically signed an informed consent form beforehand, and the interviews were recorded for transcription with

their permission. Handwritten notes were used where the participant declined to be recorded. The interview notes were then thematically coded to identify common themes.

3.3.2. Recorded Markham Council and Committee Meetings

Due to the low interview response rate in recruiting residents and developers' planners, I also relied on observations of Markham Council and committee proceedings when the Markville Mall redevelopment or the Markville Secondary Plan were on the agenda. Unlike semi-structured interviews, I cannot interact with the speakers at these public meetings or ask any questions to clarify their points. However, watching the Council proceedings does provide a benefit since an individual's statements were based on their genuine thoughts and not prompted or influenced by the researcher in any way.

Although there have been many public meetings to engage the community and other interested parties since at least 2023 (Markham Economist & Sun, 2023a), I will focus on meetings held in 2025. Specifically, I examined the following meetings:

- April 22, 2025: Special Development Services Committee meeting to discuss the Official Plan Amendment (OPA 272) for the Markville Mall redevelopment (Item 6.1);
- May 6, 2025: Special Council meeting to approve OPA 272 (Items 3.1 and 5.1);
- June 10, 2025: Development Services Committee meeting to discuss the Draft Final Study Report for the Markville Secondary Plan (Item 9.1);
- September 9, 2025: Development Services Public Meeting to discuss the Markville Mall Phase 1 Zoning By-Law Amendment (Item 4.1); and
- December 16, 2025: Council meeting to approve the Markville Mall Phase 1 Zoning By-Law Amendment (Items 5.1 and 7.1.1).

I relied on the video recording of the meeting proceedings on the City's website to prepare notes summarizing the comments made by councillors, City staff, developers' representatives, and residents on the relevant agenda item.

In total, there were 39 deputations (i.e., verbal comments) from 33 members of the public, as some individuals spoke on multiple occasions. Like the interview transcripts, the public meeting notes were also thematically coded. While there are no ethical considerations associated with using Council meetings, as they are in a public setting, I provided pseudonyms to keep individual identities confidential.

3.3.3. Written Submissions to Markham Council

I also reviewed the written submissions sent to Markham's City Clerk's Office when the Markville Mall redevelopment or the Markville Secondary Plan was on the Council meeting agenda. I analyzed 19 letters submitted and made available on the City's website that dealt with the mall application or the Secondary Plan. These written submissions from residents, community groups, and landowners provide comments on the agenda items from three of the five Council meetings involving Markville in 2025. Those meetings were:

- April 22, 2025: Special Development Services Committee meeting (Item 4.1);
- June 10, 2025: Development Services Committee meeting (Item 6.1); and
- December 16, 2025: Council meeting (Item 6.1).

These letters were thematically coded. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of these individuals.

4.0. Findings and Discussion: Community Sentiment Towards Suburban Intensification in Markville

4.1. "I Don't Like the Amount of Intensification in Markville": Community Perceptions vs. Planning Policy

Markville is being planned as a high-density community because of its proximity to major transit infrastructure, including commuter rail and bus rapid transit. Markham's City Planning staff and their consultants presented the draft Markville Secondary Plan to City Council in June 2025, which sets out a proposed land use plan to guide the community's future growth (WSP Canada Inc., 2025; Markham, 2025e). Although it has not been finalized yet, the tallest buildings, ranging from 20 to 40 storeys, are proposed to be concentrated in three key intersections due to their proximity to existing and planned rapid transit, as shown in Figure 8: McCowan Road and Highway 7, McCowan Road and Bullock Drive, and Highway 7 and Bullock Drive (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 52). In total, the proposed Secondary Plan anticipates that at full buildout, Markville will be home to 26,500 residents and 14,923 jobs, resulting in a combined population and employment density of 400 residents and jobs per hectare (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 79).



Figure 8: Proposed heights within the Markville Secondary Plan area (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 52)

However, the proposed scale of redevelopment has received vehement community opposition. Both residents I interviewed are against the current plans for high-density redevelopment in their neighbourhood. Molly, a retired resident living in Markville, argued that some amount of redevelopment is appropriate in Markville because of its abundance of amenities around the existing shopping, but would prefer it in a mid-rise format, arguing that "it's good to intensify, but not with so many people together." Meanwhile, Ruby, a middle-aged Markville resident, told me that she is upset that the City wants to put over 20,000 new residents in an area she described as a "village."

Likewise, based on my analysis of the recorded public meetings and written submissions to the City, there was near-unanimous community opposition to intensification in Markville. For

example, eight written submissions were sent to the City by residents and community groups commenting on the draft Markville Secondary Plan, all objecting to the proposed density of 400 residents and jobs per hectare, which they believe is excessive (Markham, 2025f, Part 1, p. 1; Markham, 2025f, Part 2, pp. 1, 3, 8, 23, 26, 27, 30). One letter from Vic questions whether the intent was to turn Markville into Downtown Toronto and affect the neighbourhood's "family-friendly character" (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, pp. 1). Hence, redevelopment is seen as an erosion of their suburban dream of living away from the city in a low-density living environment (Gordon & Richardson, 2000).

Strong opposition to high-rise development in Markville was also evident at the City Council meetings during the debate on the Markville Mall application. For example, Barbara, one of the attendees, commented at a May 2025 Council meeting that concentrating population growth around Markville Mall would take away from the low-rise residential community that residents bought into when they moved here. She said:

> We need housing. Well, we have so much room. Why not develop somewhere else and add more infrastructure, add more shopping malls, add more beautiful things to grow the community instead of taking one itty bitty place and just jamming everything into it. I mean, we do not want Downtown Toronto. We moved up here because we want rural living. We want to be able to say hi to our neighbours. We don't want skyscrapers (Markham, 2025d, 39:22).

As mentioned in Barbara's speech, people who chose to move to a suburb like Markham wanted to live in a quiet community and not next to high-rises. Her comments imply a preference for low-density development on vacant farmland on the outskirts of Markham, rather than pursuing densification. The rejection of an urban built form stems from a desire to protect the promise of suburbia, including a sense of community, affluence, and spacious living environments (Hayden, 2003), while escaping the busy city and its associated problems of crime and poverty (Allen, 2017; Kozaryn & Mazelis, 2018).

On the contrary, based on an analysis of the Council meetings and written submissions, only one resident expressed explicit support for intensification. Brick, a college student in his twenties, advocated for the approval of the Markville Mall development application because he believes it will help increase housing supply for younger generations struggling to find affordable housing. At a public meeting in September 2025, he said that:

> If there's more people, not enough houses, then prices go up. That's just basic economics ... Can more improvements be made? I'm not going to deny that, but the thing is, we're facing a problem here, and we can't just delay it further and further and further because then housing prices get worse, and there's people like in my generation are just going to be screwed. And really, some development or any development is better than no development .... The location Markville, it wasn't chosen at random ... If we just build houses in the middle of nowhere, that would just create more urban sprawl. It's underutilized land, in an area where there is GO service that is going to be expanded, BRT service, and a mall ... That is pretty prime land you would want to utilize, especially during a housing crisis (Markham, 2025g, 1:33:12).

Brick's comments differ from those of most participants at the public meetings, who tended to be middle-aged and older individuals opposed to redevelopment, a demographic typically overrepresented (Runing et al., 2025). Moreover, his comments represent a YIMBY (short for "yes in my backyard") discourse that views increasing market housing supply as the solution to rising housing unaffordability (Kipfer & Sotomayor, 2024). Brick also evokes an anti-sprawl narrative by stating his preference for building more housing on an underused mall parking lot near transit (see Figure 9), which would meet the housing demands of younger adults who value transit access, as they are less likely to have a car (Moos, 2016).



Figure 9: Markville Mall parking lot (Photograph by author)

The two city councillors I interviewed argue that they are caught in a difficult position choosing between sprawl and intensification. Leslie argued, “I don't like the amount of intensification at Markville, although I know that there needs to be some intensification,” stating that it was preferable to building low-rise housing in northern Markham. Similarly, Alex, another fellow city councillor, stated Markville is an ideal place to intensify because of its proximity to the mall and transit lines, and that they do not support “building low-rise out on farmland.” Both councillors interviewed are somewhat supportive of transforming Markville into a mixed-use community since the alternative would be to continue building new residential subdivisions on farmland, where future residents are forced into car dependency. Therefore, the councillors express support for infill development on underutilized sites to counter environmental concerns

about an ever-expanding urban region and the associated loss of farmland and natural areas outside the city's urban boundary (Calthorpe, 1993; Gondek, 2014).

Even if most community members opposed high-density redevelopment, these plans were not arbitrary. In Ontario, the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990*, governs land use planning by setting out a policy-led planning system (Ontario, 2025). The policies of several planning documents, each applying to a specific geographic scale, collectively mandate that a place like Markville be intensified. According to Hess & Sorensen (2015), urban development is tightly controlled by a "robust provincially led, fully hierarchical planning system" (p. 130), composed of the Provincial Planning Statement, official plans, zoning by-laws, subdivision plans, and site plans, all of which must be consistent with one another (Harrington & Skinner, 2025). Thus, planning has been institutionalized as a top-down, layered process that informs Markville's redevelopment, including through the Secondary Plan.

The 2024 Provincial Planning Statement, a province-wide planning document that sets the Ontario government's land use planning priorities, emphasizes that development should occur in Major Transit Station Areas (MTSA) around "higher-order transit," defined as a 500- to 800-m radius around a subway, bus rapid transit, light rail, or commuter rail station (Ontario, 2024, p. 10). Bob, the planner assisting Cadillac Fairview on the redevelopment of Markville Mall, referenced provincial policy to justify the application. He told City Council and community members in attendance that, in addition to the site being within an MTSA, "provincial policy now, ... they specifically identify these types of areas, which are the parking lots within malls, as underutilized areas and prime for redevelopment" (Markham, 2025a, 1:10:44).

Next in the planning policy hierarchy is the 2022 York Region Official Plan, a regional planning document that applies to Markham, a local municipality within York Region. The Region's growth management strategy seeks to minimize urban sprawl through residential densification in designated areas, including Regional Centres and Regional Corridors, to achieve 50% of future growth within the built-up area until 2041, and 55% from 2041 to 2051 (York Region, 2024, p. 78). Figure 10 depicts Markville's location along a designated Regional Corridor on Highway 7. The goal of Regional Corridors is to serve as "urban mainstreets [*sic*] that have a compact, mixed-use, well-designed, pedestrian-friendly and transit supportive built form" (York Region, 2024, p. 85).

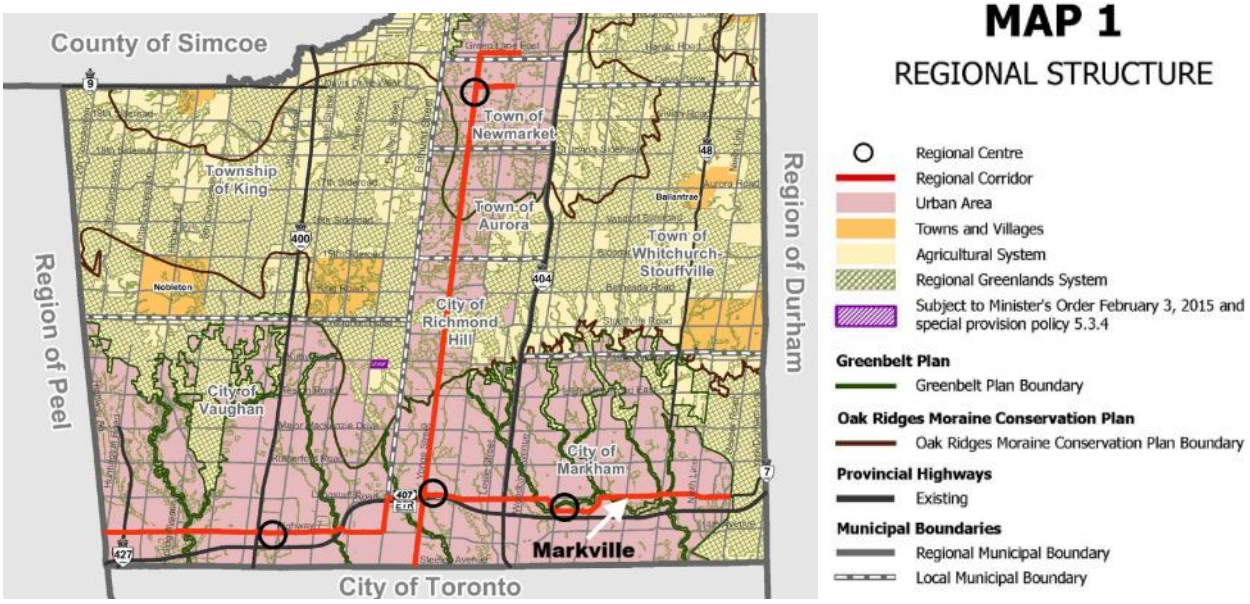


Figure 10: York Region Regional Structure Map (York Region, 2024, Map 1)

York Region also identifies Markville as part of the McCowan BRT Protected Major Transit Station Area (PMTSA) (see Figure 11), with a density target of 200 people and jobs per hectare (York Region, 2024, Appendix 2). The Regional Official Plan directs local municipalities, like Markham, to plan for the appropriate land uses to "achieve the **minimum**

density target in each major transit station area based on local contexts and conditions" (York Region, 2024, p. 86; emphasis added).

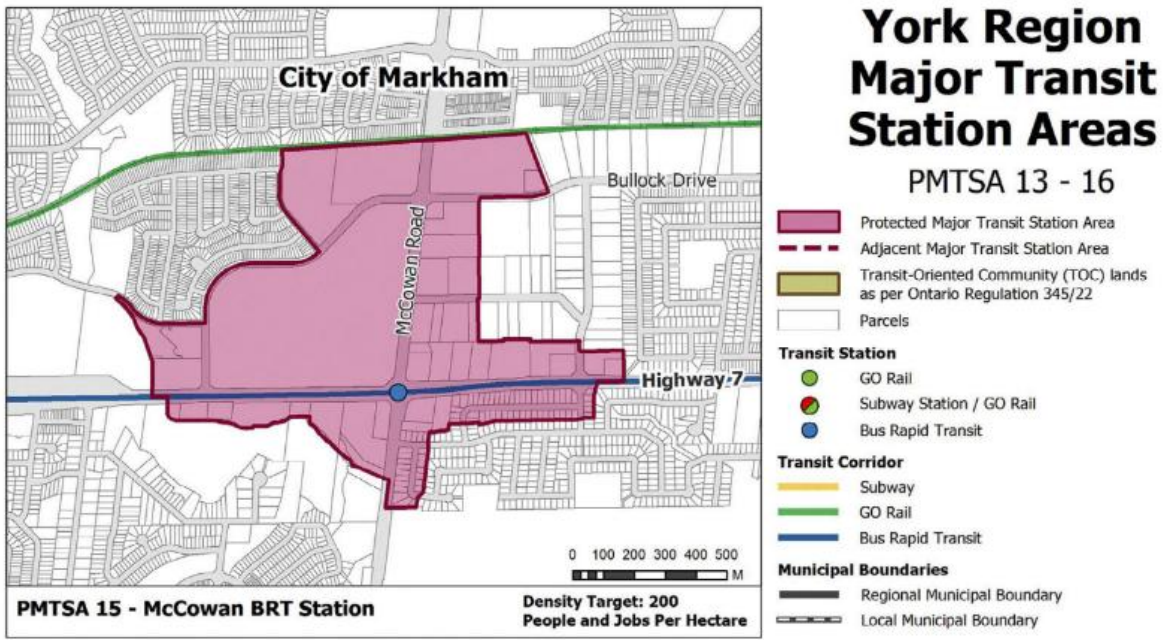


Figure 11: McCowan BRT Protected Major Transit Station Area (York Region, 2024, Appendix 2)

However, there is considerable confusion about why the City would recommend doubling the minimum density that York Region requires them to accommodate. In the written submissions to Markham Council included in my dataset, the Unionville Residents Association argued that the proposed Secondary Plan density should not exceed 200 people and jobs per hectare as set out in the York Region Official Plan, given that "the planned density is close to 400 people + jobs/hectare ... For comparison, downtown Toronto is at about 416 people/hectare" (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, p. 27). On the other hand, Pam, a policy planner at the City of Markham, insisted that the proposed densities are "on par with what we're seeing in other Secondary Plan areas" in Markham and that densities prescribed in the policy framework are meant to be "a minimum." While some people in the community are adamant about a density cap, the planning policy intentionally sets minimums to encourage market-led development

(Charney, 2020) and to maximize the number of people living and working near transit, thereby increasing potential ridership (Perrott, 2020). However, what is proposed in Markville surpasses the mid-rise vision set out by early theorists in transit-oriented development and New Urbanism (Calthorpe, 1993; Duany et al., 2000).

Lastly in the policy hierarchy, the 2014 Markham Official Plan is the city-wide planning document that guides strategic development across Markham, building upon both provincial and regional policies. It establishes an objective of achieving "compact, mixed-use, well-designed, pedestrian-friendly and transit oriented built form" along Regional Corridors, including Key Development Areas (Markham, 2024, p. 2–15). The local Official Plan identifies Markville as a Key Development Area due to its location on the Highway 7 Regional Rapid Transit Corridor (shown in magenta) and its proximity to the Stouffville GO Line (shown in light brown), as shown in Figure 12.

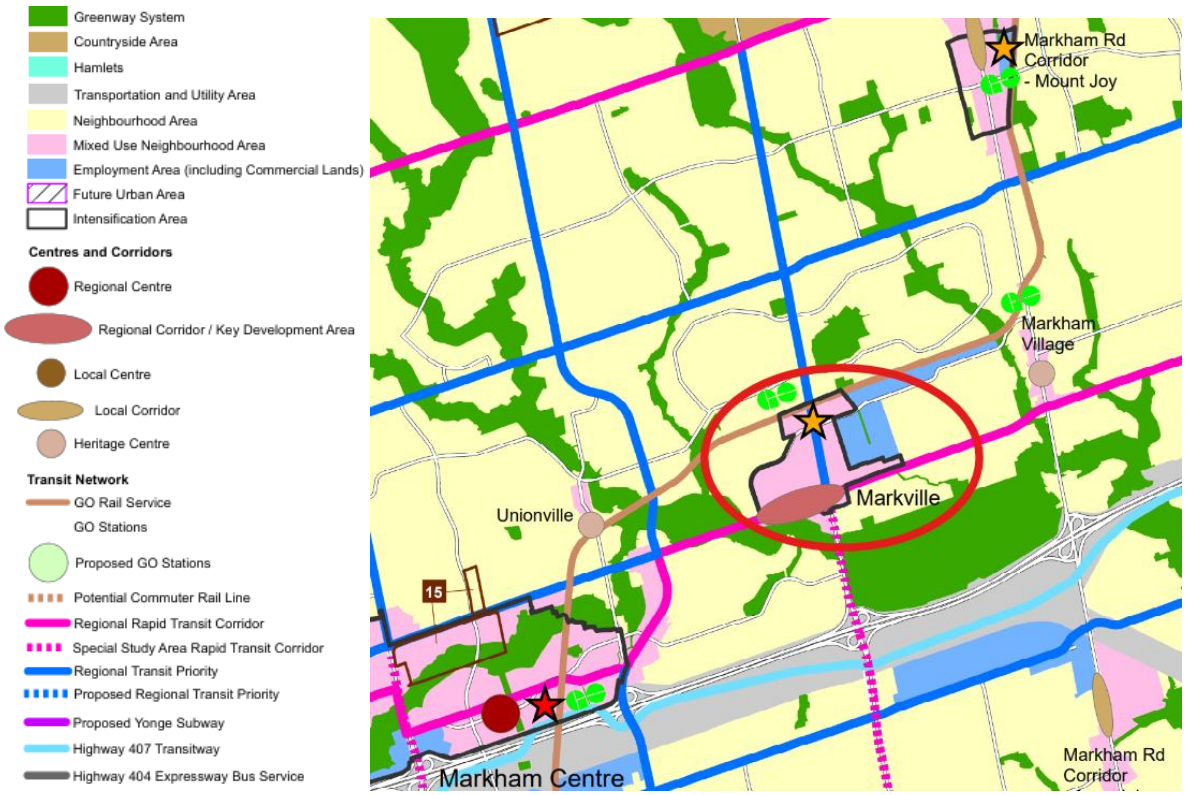


Figure 12: The Markville Key Development Area (Markham, 2024, Map 1)

Markham's Official Plan designates much of Markville as Mixed Use Mid Rise (see Appendix A), which is intended for buildings 3 to 8 storeys tall to "create[e] neighbourhoods where people can shop, live and work within close proximity, relying on active transportation to get around" (Markham, 2024, p. 8–24). As mentioned previously, the vision for Markville in its proposed Secondary Plan contemplates far greater density and height than the 2014 Official Plan anticipated. However, recent changes to provincial and regional planning policies have emphasized greater density near transit since Markham's Official Plan was adopted in 2014, which is currently being updated to align with the new policy regime, according to City planner Pam.

The policy framework applicable to Markville aligns with the discussion by Desfor et al. (2006), who argue that the re-urbanization strategy promoted in Toronto's Official Plan frames

urban intensification as a tool to control development pressure on the rural fringes. Similarly, the Provincial Planning Statement, York Region, and Markham Official Plans collectively identify Markville as a site for compact development to support transit use and discourage urban growth outside the built-up area. Promoting density near transit stems from the smart growth planning paradigm, which has become hegemonic in the Greater Toronto Area in the early twenty-first century (Hess & Sorensen, 2015; Hodge et al., 2021). While intensification aims to curb urban sprawl into the countryside, skyscrapers can be seen as "vertical sprawl," creating clusters of high-rises that do not fit in with the surrounding low-rise communities (Nethercote, 2019, p. 3395).

Both the Markville Secondary Plan and Cadillac Fairview's proposal for Markville Mall represent a significant change to the area's low-rise character. Still, the redevelopment has garnered fierce local opposition, which opponents believe far exceeds the minimum requirements set out in the policies. As outlined in the following sections, many residents are concerned that a significant influx of high-rise buildings will exacerbate existing long commute times and reduce overall quality of life.

4.2. "The Traffic ... Is Already Crazy at the Moment": Adjusting Travel Behaviour and Fixing Gridlock

A major concern about the redevelopment of Markville is that high-density intensification will worsen existing traffic congestion. The McCowan Road and Highway 7 intersection that criss-crosses the community, shown in Figure 13, currently operates at 99.4% capacity, according to the City of Markham's Engineering staff (Liu, 2026b, para. 7). Molly, one resident interviewed, worries that Markville will not be able to absorb the planned population growth and states that "Highway 7 and McCowan is one of the most dangerous and busiest

intersections in Markham, or York Region, even. And the traffic, as it is, is already crazy at the moment.” Thus, the existing heavy traffic volumes raise questions about whether the roads can accommodate extra traffic, given that they are already at capacity.



Figure 13: McCowan Road, looking south of Highway 7 (Photograph by author)

According to Filion (2015), the typical suburbanite has a fully car-oriented lifestyle that makes it difficult to tolerate disruptions to their drive to work and errands within a 15- to 20-minute trip from home. Proposals for high-density developments in suburbs often generate community opposition over perceived traffic impacts from an influx of additional residents (Harris & Keil, 2017). This sentiment was shared by 22 of the 39 speakers at Markham Council (Markham, 2025a; Markham, 2025d; Markham, 2025e; Markham, 2025g) and in 11 of the 19

written correspondences submitted to the City from residents and community groups, expressing concern that intensification will worsen the already-congested road conditions (Markham, 2025b; Markham, 2025f; Markham, 2025j).

A preliminary transportation study for the Markville Secondary Plan noted that the McCowan Road and Highway 7 intersection had a level of service grade of "D" during the weekday AM and PM peak periods in May 2022, equating to about 45-50 seconds per vehicle (WSP Canada Inc., 2023b, p. 77). However, these figures were from a few years ago, when the pandemic may have reduced traffic volumes due to fewer commuters. According to Pam, a City planner working on the Markville Secondary Plan, City staff and its consulting team will be revising these projections, with an updated report to be released at a future sub-committee meeting. Yet, the lack of a comprehensive transportation study now means that applications, like at Markville Mall, are being approved in isolation from a broader analysis of traffic impacts across the entire neighbourhood, as argued by the Unionville Residents Association in their written submission to City Council (Markham, 2025j, p. 1).

Although there has not been an updated transportation study yet, the slide deck appendices for the draft Secondary Plan presented to Markham Council in June 2025 admittedly predicted that the McCowan Road and Highway 7 intersection will have a level of service rating of "F" during morning peak periods in 2051, corresponding to at least an 80-second delay per vehicle (WSP Canada Inc. et al., 2025, p. 55). Thus, absent any drastic changes to road capacity or how people travel, commuting time is expected to increase in the future. This contrasts with Cadillac Fairview's Transportation Considerations Report for its Markville Mall application, which found that the intersection would operate "acceptably under busy conditions" at a "D" level of service in the future (BA Consulting Group Ltd., 2024, pp. 75-76).

The existing level of traffic congestion already prompts some residents to adjust their travel behaviour to avoid delays. For example, Ruby, a Markville resident who works in Downtown Toronto, shared that she usually drives to Centennial GO Station early in the morning to catch the 7:04 AM train because she risks not finding parking if she takes a later train. The limited parking prompted Ruby to wake up earlier to avoid morning rush-hour traffic to ensure she gets a parking spot. Ruby does her shopping at night at the T&T Supermarket up north when fewer people are driving. This strategy of waking up early to go to work and running errands at night reflects the desire to save time spent stuck in traffic.

However, not everyone has the luxury of reorienting their schedule to avoid traffic. At a Council meeting in May 2025, Calvin, a father, shared about the stress of trying to run multiple errands while driving on congested roads. He says that:

> Driving around the communities surrounding CF Markville Mall, it's like driving in a puzzle, especially when you have back-to-back appointments or arrangements, which is very normal to people like us … We try to work hard to feed the family, and try to squeeze a little bit of time spent with our littles and try to fulfill appointments, like doctor's appointments. So, we try to find shortcuts or adjustments in our route [in] real time to avoid traffic, which can easily mess up our daily plan (Markham, 2025d, 32:00).

Despite the personal flexibility the car provides, automobility "constrain[s] car 'users' to live their lives in spatially stretched and time-compressed ways" (Urry, 2004, p. 28). Given the long distances people may need to drive for work or errands, they may find it psychologically challenging to contend with slow travel times on the roads. Therefore, taking shortcuts is one strategy residents use to cope with traffic delays by driving on less congested streets, even if it is not the most direct route.

The two councillors interviewed both believe congestion will worsen in Markville but have different thoughts on how current residents may respond. Leslie predicts that some people

will change their route choices by taking shortcuts through residential neighbourhoods, based on complaints they are already receiving from constituents. They said:

> The biggest issue I get now ... It's not the congestion. It's people speeding down local roads. Residents are impatient. They want to get from point A to point B in the quickest time. So, if the congestion is worse at Highway 7 and McCowan, I think residents will take an alternative route and start infiltrating neighbourhoods to get to where they need to.

While increased traffic congestion may lead some motorists to adjust where and when they travel, it may also prompt people to reconsider driving altogether. Alex believes congestion in the long term might lead to more trips on public transit, especially if more people perceive driving to be slower. They said:

> To be really frank, congestion on the roads, to some degree, drives people onto transit 'cause they don't want to be stuck in their car for an hour when they can … again, if we can get good transit, frequent transit, if you can go somewhere in 45 minutes on the bus, why would you take an hour in your car? So, very slowly, that will begin to happen.

Gridlock can motivate someone to switch to transit when driving becomes too inconvenient and frustrating. However, it is unlikely that all residents will switch to a carless lifestyle, even if congestion becomes more unbearable. For example, Ruby says that she will continue to drive because she already owns a car. Thus, existing residents may not consider other modes because they have already become accustomed to a car-oriented lifestyle (van Wee & Handy, 2016).

The City's plan to address traffic issues in Markville relies on an ad hoc approach to controlling the travel behaviour of future residents in the proposed high-rise buildings. These measures range from trying to change their mode choice to expanding road capacity. Currently, "no physical transportation or infrastructure improvements" are contemplated in the short term for the Markville Mall project (Liu, 2026b, para. 6). However, the City placed a holding provision in the Zoning By-Law to permit 700 out of the planned 1,857 units to be built for the first phase of the mall redevelopment until a traffic study can justify additional development

(Markham, 2025h, p. 5; Martelluzzi, 2025, p. 3). Speaking at the December 2025 Council meeting, City transportation engineer Bart said that the focus will be on redesigning the mall's internal streets and adjusting signal timing to improve traffic flow, with road widenings planned for future phases (Markham, 2025i, 1:25:00). However, he acknowledged that although "adding one extra second" of green time for one direction could improve traffic movement, gridlock is expected during peak times for travel (Markham, 2025i, 1:25:00).

Another strategy being used is reducing parking provision. Louis, a development review planner at the City, says he works with developers to negotiate less vehicular parking in new developments to encourage more people to take public transportation instead. That way, it breaks the cycle of generous parking supply by encouraging more vehicle ownership among new residents (Galiano et al., 2021). Bob, the planning consultant representing the development proponent, he said at a public meeting in September 2025 that Markville Mall currently has "an oversupply of retail parking" that will be "rightsized" to discourage trips being made by car (Markham, 2025g, 37:44). The Zoning By-Law Amendment for the first phase of the Markville Mall redevelopment, approved by Markham Council in December 2025, will set a maximum residential parking ratio of 0.8 parking spaces per dwelling unit (Markham, 2025h, p. 2), which is higher than the 0.4 parking spaces per unit target set in the draft Markville Secondary Plan (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 70). Still, not every household living in the future high-rise buildings will have access to a parking spot.

In their written submission to Markham Council, the Unionville Residents Association expressed concerns that the parking provisions for the first 700 units at Markville Mall were still too high, stating it would contribute to 560 extra cars at the McCowan Road and Highway 7 intersection, "that already operates at 'Fail' or close to 'Fail'" (Markham, 2025j, p. 2). However,

Louis defended the higher parking rate, stating that while developers often want to avoid building expensive underground parking structures, they still need to provide some parking to meet market demand and sell the units. Hence, there is a delicate balance between discouraging future residents from driving and acknowledging the current lack of alternative transportation options. Yet, the reduced parking aims to change the travel behaviour of new residents in the proposed high-rises. Existing Markville residents living in low-rise housing will likely continue driving because they have ample parking in their driveways and garages (Filion, 2018).

Despite striving to reimagine and retrofit Markville into a less car-centric community, McCowan Road is planned to be widened to mitigate anticipated future congestion in the area (Martelluzzi, 2025). Drew, one of the attendees at a public meeting in September 2025, requested that the City of Markham work with York Region to expedite the planned widening of McCowan Road from four to six lanes and suggested the same for Highway 7 in the future as well to alleviate the congestion caused by the residential developments at Markville Mall (Markham, 2025g, 51:50). Drew's advocacy for widening Highway 7 to increase its current four-lane configuration differs from York Region's plan to widen the street only to add the dedicated bus lanes (BA Consulting Group Ltd., 2024). In a study of Markham Centre, Perrott (2020) described the Highway 7 bus transitway as a "compromise between urbanism and suburbanism" by simultaneously accommodating both car traffic and public transit (p. 395). Yet, calls for wider streets to facilitate faster traffic speeds reinforce car dependency (Calthorpe, 1993). Thus, densification and transit infrastructure are difficult to make politically palatable without also catering to the needs of drivers.

Similarly, on two separate occasions in 2025, Elliot, a Markham councillor, floated the idea of separating the grades at McCowan Road and Highway 7, believing it to be "the only

solution" to congestion if the traffic light was removed to provide continuous traffic flow (Markham, 2025e, 1:41:39; Markham, 2025i, 1:42:47). Although the suggestion was not seriously entertained by City staff and other councillors, a grade separation of the intersection would also undermine the point of sprawl repair, which is to shift away from car-centric road designs to enable more people to take transit and walk.

The two residents I interviewed were split over road widening. Ruby supports adding more lanes to speed up traffic. However, she worries that the condos will not be set back far enough from the street to ensure sufficient space for extra lanes. On the contrary, Molly opposes adding extra travel lanes since it will worsen traffic in the long term. She says that:

> The more wider you make the road, the more traffic is coming. Just look at L.A., right? One of the biggest highways they have, like, I don't know, 12 or even more lanes. But the traffic has become actually worse than when before they were widened.

While road widening is touted as a solution to existing traffic conditions by expanding capacity, it often encourages more people to drive more often, negating any potential time savings (Duany et al., 2000). Building high-rise residences in traditionally low-rise suburban environments is justified in part by the need to encourage more people to use more sustainable transportation modes. However, adding extra lanes may undermine the City's long-term goal of a multi-modal community since it prioritizes continued car dependency at the expense of other modes of travel.

To conclude, the imperative to approve more development to facilitate housing construction means the City's focus is on tinkering with the road network to mitigate traffic impacts. This includes adjusting parking supply and changing signal timing. These interventions are mostly intended to influence incoming residents to rely more on public transit and active transportation rather than cars. At the same time, the City is also aiming to increase road capacity, which reinforces and reproduces car dependence for existing residents. Although most

current residents will probably continue driving because they already have cars, some may adjust when and where they travel to avoid traffic congestion.

4.3. "Providing More Choice": Incentivizing More People to Take Transit, Walk, and Bike

The planning framework proposes intensification in Markville because of its prime location near existing and planned rapid transit. However, most people rely on cars because the area was designed to be car-oriented. The two planners with the City of Markham interviewed believe that offering more transportation options will hopefully reduce car dependency. This follows recent shifts in transport policy prioritizing "demand reduction strategies" that promote alternative modes rather than adding road capacity and increasing car-based travel (Urry, 2004, p. 35).

However, changing people's travel mode choices will take time to realize (van Wee & Handy, 2016). City planner Louis says that public transit is a "chicken and egg" situation because density is needed to ensure sufficient potential ridership to justify investments for a more robust transit system that people would use. Public transit agencies typically face challenges serving the suburbs cost-effectively because of fewer riders in less dense areas (Young & Keil, 2009; Lorius & Taylor, 2024). Similarly, a study by Mohammed et al. (2006) in Mississauga, Ontario, found that higher route frequencies correlated with corridors with higher population density and thus ridership demand. Therefore, without enough people living near transit stops, it would not be financially feasible for transit agencies to provide extensive service that people can rely on at all times of the day.

City planner Pam described the goal of the Markville Secondary Plan as aligning land use plans with transportation considerations to promote alternative modes of travel beyond the car. She said:

> A greater mix of land uses encourages shorter trips or combining trips, also supports walkability, cycling, smaller blocks, or local streets also makes it easier for people … to maybe walk into a store, or cycle to a store, as opposed to having to get into a car. So, I think providing more choice in terms of a mix of uses and how to get around will hopefully encourage people to think about how they travel through the area.

Hence, Pam believes that better design of the built environment will facilitate walkability, cyclability, and public transit service so that residents are less reliant on the car to get around. Generally, sufficient density and a mix of uses near a transit station are required to generate transit ridership (Fan et al., 2022). Thus, smaller street blocks, greater density, and a mix of uses are intended to bring destinations closer together, enabling shorter trips without a car (Duany et al., 2000; Fan et al., 2022; Urrutia-Mosquera et al., 2023).

Table 1 shows the transportation mode share in 2016 from the Transportation Tomorrow household travel survey in the Markville area compared to the City's target for 2051 (WSP Canada Inc. et al., 2025, p. 25). The Markville Secondary Plan report presented to Council in June 2025 suggests that auto trips will drop from 74% to 58.1%, which includes both drivers and passengers (WSP Canada Inc. et al., 2025, p. 25). Meanwhile, transit usage would rise from 17.7% to 32.2%, while active transportation would rise slightly from 8.3% to 9.7% (WSP Canada Inc. et al., 2025, p. 25).

	2016	2051 Target
Auto Drivers	61.8%	33.4%
Auto Passengers	12.2%	24.7%
Public Transit	17.7%	32.2%
Active Transportation (e.g., walking and cycling)	8.3%	9.7%
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**

Table 1: AM Peak mode shares in Markville in 2016 and the 2051 target (WSP Canada Inc. et al., 2025, p. 25)

The redevelopment of Markville is justified by the City's planning staff and the developers due to its proximity to the VIVA Purple bus rapid transit line on Highway 7, with stops at McCowan Road and Bullock Drive, and the Centennial GO Station (see Figure 14). However, the question is whether the City's planners and development proponents were placing too much faith in the idea that residents would choose transit or active transportation if given the choice.



Figure 14: Transit routes within Markville (York Region Transit, 2026)

The two residents I interviewed believe the plan to redevelop Markville Mall and the surrounding area does not reflect the lived experiences of the existing community. For instance, Ruby is frustrated that neither the City nor developers have provided any concrete transportation study to justify the proposed densities in Markville, stating that they are "just relying on hope" that traffic congestion would sort itself out if more people took transit in the future. She commented that even with improved public transit service, she would still drive because walking to Centennial GO Station would take 20 minutes, which is especially uncomfortable during the

winter. The lack of accessibility to the GO station induces commuters like Ruby to drive to the station. Alshalalfah & Shalaby (2012) suggest that flex-route on-demand transit could be a feasible alternative, expanding its reach to more riders than a conventional fixed-bus route while serving commuters who otherwise would struggle to find parking at the station. Without reliable alternatives to overcome the spread-out nature of the suburbs, the car will still be the mode of choice because of its significant speed advantage over transit and walking, which is necessary for long-distance trips (Filion, 2015).

Moreover, the alternative transportation modes are currently perceived as inadequate. Molly believes that the City is "dreaming if they think people are going to take the transit" because Markham does not have a comprehensive transit system where "you don't need a schedule" to know when the next bus will come. The lack of frequent transit service means trips must align with the bus schedule, which is an inconvenience. Effective transit services must provide "users freedom of choice, and to decide when to travel" by offering enough flexibility so people can go where they want when they want (Allen, 2017, p. 38). Gaps in transit availability in low-density suburban areas can create "transit deserts," which are especially problematic for low-income communities of colour who lack access to a car (Allen, 2017, p. 3).

Pam concedes that public transit may not be reliable today, but she emphasized that this would change in the future. She acknowledged that "right now there is transit, but maybe it's not available at the times people need it or at the level of service. But … the more options we can provide to help people get around, then we'll start, hopefully, [to see a] change in behaviour as well." Thus, the thinking is that promoting and providing a variety of mobility options should rebalance the distribution of transportation modes used, with a greater share of non-motorized travel (López-Lambas et al., 2013).

Molly shared that when the weather is good, she often bikes to the local grocery store or Markville Mall, but rides on the narrow sidewalks because there are no protected bike lanes (see Figure 15). The lack of adequate barriers to protect cyclists from motorists poses safety concerns, which discourages people from biking. Conversely, reallocating more road space for active transportation can provide safer infrastructure to make walking and biking more attractive, while "reducing road space for motorized traffic would make driving less attractive, further encouraging a shift to sustainable modes" (Ballo et al., 2023, p. 3).



Figure 15: South side of Highway 7, west of McCowan Road (Photograph by author)

A key element of suburban retrofitting is to ensure short, walkable city blocks (Dunham-Jones & Williamson, 2011). Markville currently has several "large irregular blocks designed for auto-oriented uses," but the City aims to leverage future infill development to support active

transportation with new streets to improve connectivity and an animated streetscape (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 19). Figure 16 shows the draft Secondary Plan's proposed transportation improvements, which include new cycle tracks (depicted in blue) and mid-block connections (depicted in dashed green). These interventions aim to reduce barriers that have previously hindered alternative modes because the infrastructure for them was not adequately provided.

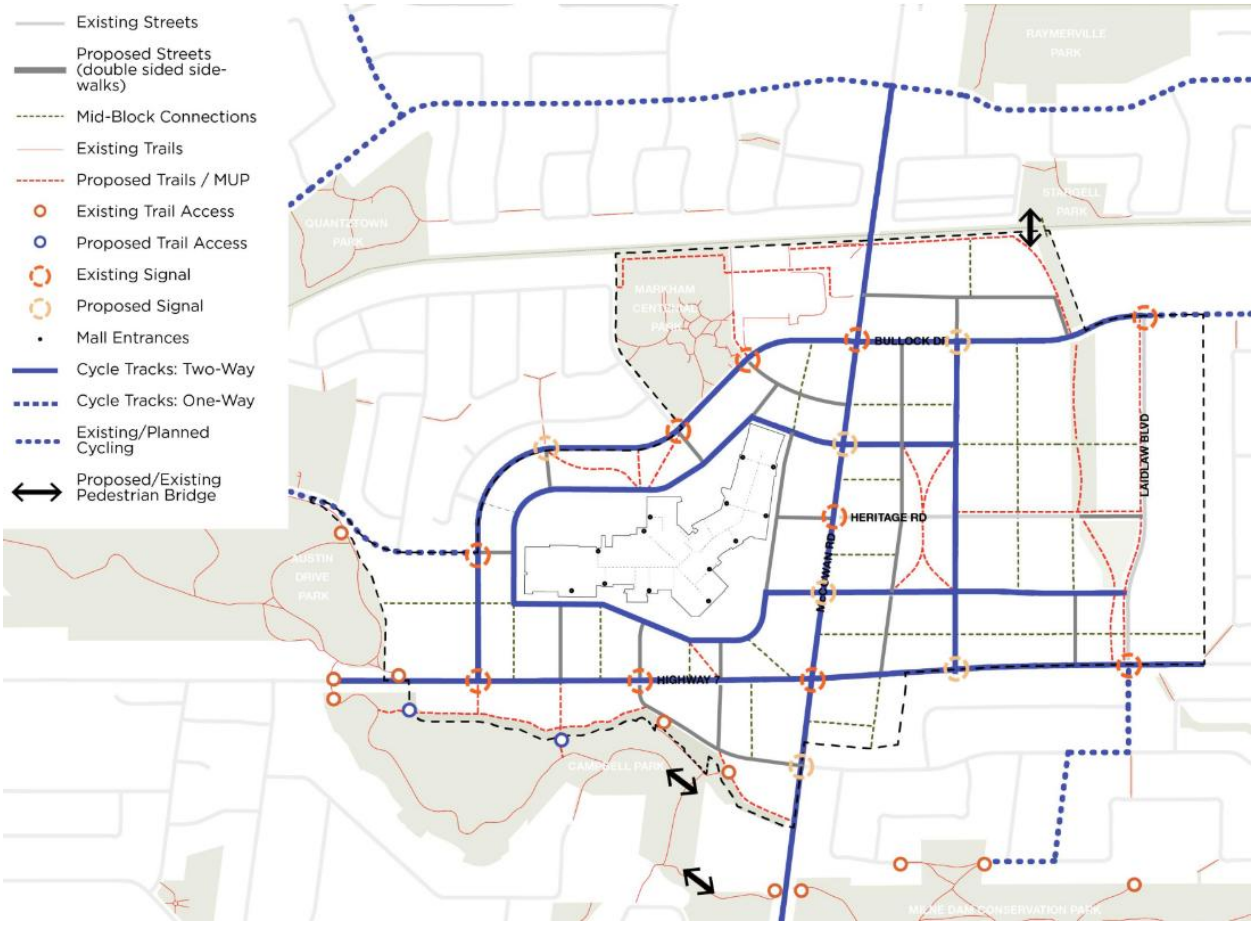


Figure 16: Proposed active transportation improvements in the Markville Secondary Plan area (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 64)

However, some residents have raised concerns about the active transportation plans in written submissions from June 2025. For example, Marjorie wrote to the City stating that while improving walkability and cycling are important, the mobility needs of the growing population

of older adults, who are more likely to rely on transit and vehicles, are not considered (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, p. 8). Meanwhile, the Markville Community Association's written submission argued that the proposed three additional signalized intersections along McCowan Road "will further slow down the traffic and make the traffic congestion even worse" (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, p. 25).

As shown earlier in Figure 16, the proposed additional traffic signals on McCowan Road are meant to facilitate connectivity and provide safer crossings for pedestrians. However, lukewarm support for promoting alternative modes stems from the fact that many residents who see the "urban environment through the windshield of [their] car" and cannot picture any other mode as an option in a dispersed suburban setting (Filion, 2015, p. 637). This all goes to show that while the community may not be outright opposed to active transportation, they are primarily concerned with ensuring that it does not negatively affect vehicular mobility.

Despite Markville's designation for intensification as a Major Transit Station Area (York Region, 2024, Appendix 2), frequent rapid transit is not currently available, and funding has not been secured to support its implementation. High-density redevelopment in Markville is premised on three specific transit projects, mentioned in both the draft Secondary Plan and the reports on the Markville Mall application (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 56; Marteluzzi, 2025, p. 6; Malone Given Parsons Ltd., 2024, p. 6; BA Consulting Group Ltd., 2024, pp. 14-21):

- Two-way, 15-minute GO Train service at Centennial Station;
- An extension of the Highway 7 Rapidway (i.e. dedicated bus-only lanes) from its current terminus at Markham Centre to Cornell for the east/west VIVA Purple bus rapid transit service, which currently operates in mixed traffic through this segment; and
- A proposed north/south bus rapid transit route on McCowan Road.

The Markville Secondary Plan proposes a phasing strategy that ties redevelopment to the delivery of the transit improvements (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, pp. 56-57). Figure 17 depicts York Region's rapid transit plan, which visually maps where these planned improvements fit within the broader context.

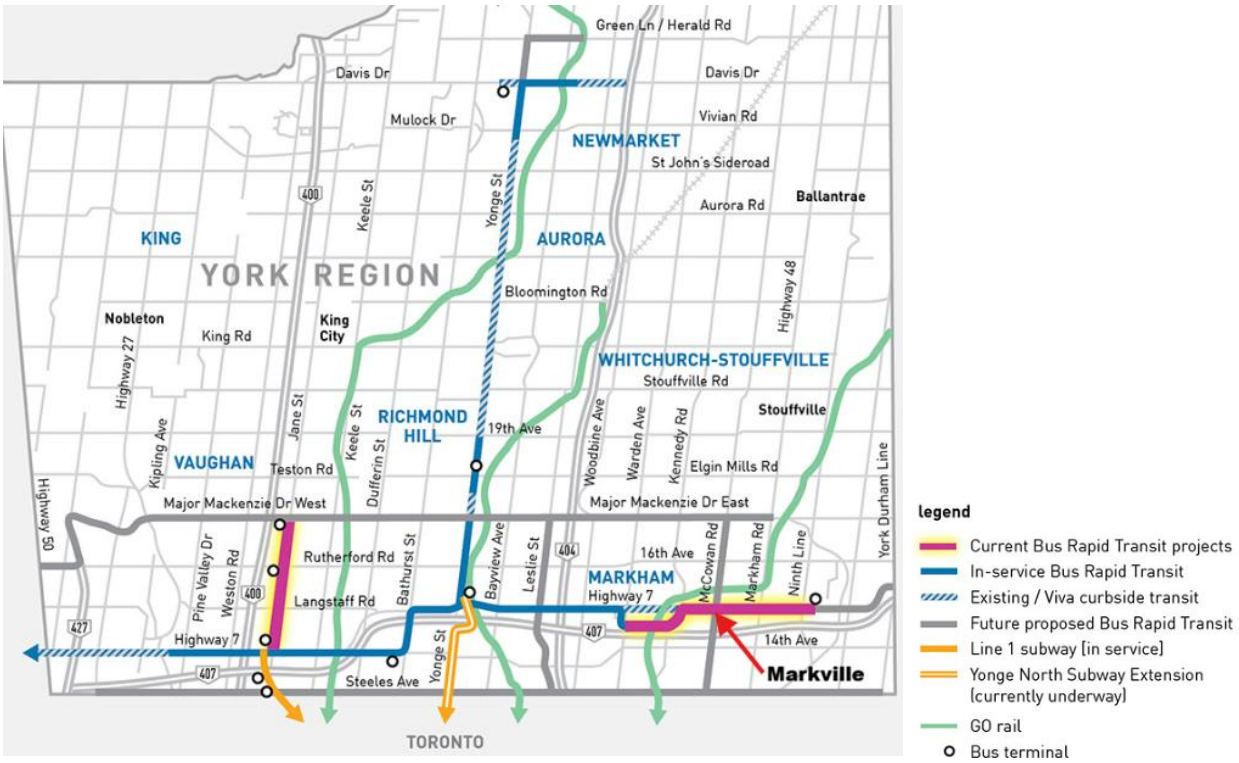


Figure 17: York Region rapid transit plan (York Region Rapid Transit Corporation, 2026)

Yet, none of these improvements are likely to be achieved in the short- to medium-term, raising questions about whether it is appropriate to intensify without the rapid transit already in place. For example, bus rapid transit requires a separate right-of-way to enable transit vehicles to operate at higher speeds than conventional buses in mixed traffic (Schweitzer, 2017). However, at a public meeting in September 2025, Markham's Mayor told attendees that while the Highway 7 bus rapid transit extension is a priority for the City, securing funding from both the federal and provincial governments has been a challenge to getting it built (Markham, 2025g, 54:55).

However, Councillor Leslie hopes that the Highway 7 Rapidway will be built over the next few years, given that the City is also proposing to accommodate 40,000 new residents in Cornell Centre at the eastern end of Markham, based on premise of future transit improvements.

Meanwhile, Councillor Alex expressed concerns that the growth assumptions made by City staff are unrealistic because frequent GO Transit service north of Unionville Station is almost impossible from an engineering perspective, given the need to twin the tracks and separate the grades at all the level crossings throughout Markham to make frequent, two-way service a reality (see Appendix B for a map of the Stouffville GO Line). Grade separations are especially important to ensure that road traffic is not impeded every time a train crosses (see Figure 18). This would require significant commitment from Metrolinx, the operator of GO Transit, to upgrade the rail infrastructure from its current single-track state to enable two-way service. However, Alex is unconvinced that this can happen in the next few decades, given how slowly the tracks south of Unionville Station on the Stouffville Line have been twinned and grade-separated so far.



Figure 18: Railway crossing at McCowan Road (Photograph by author)

While planning for intensification is contingent on future transit improvements, the lack of urgency to provide the necessary transit improvements may hinder residents' ability to switch away from driving. City planner Pam argued that while there may be a desire to intensify only after the transit infrastructure is improved, she states that "the approach that we take in Ontario is that land use supports ... investments in transit … Not the other way, where transit comes first, and then land use after." Building the transit first would be counterintuitive since it would be underused without the density available to support it. However, putting transit years after the housing comes in would be a missed opportunity, as new residents likely will rely on the car in the interim, making it harder to switch later.

Therefore, the transformation of Markville aims to leverage future transit improvements to create a built form that encourages more people to walk, bike, and take transit rather than rely on a car. Successful sprawl repair in Markville is premised on a belief among planners that more individuals would decide not to drive if the other options became more attractive. However, the residents interviewed are unconvinced that a significant number of people will switch from driving because they see active transportation and public transit as inadequate right now.

4.4. The City "Cannot Make Definitive Predictions on People's Preferences and Decisions": Employment and Affordable Housing Constraints

According to the City, Markville is being reimagined as "a mixed-use key development area comprising employment and residential development in single use and mixed use settings, providing for office, retail, service, entertainment and recreational uses, and a variety of higher density housing types" (Your Voice Markham, 2025). While the Markville Secondary Plan envisions a future where residents can live without a car and work locally, the reality is that the lack of local employment and affordable housing makes this unfeasible for most people.

For example, Katie, a resident who spoke at a Council meeting in April 2025, said that most people rely on cars because employment opportunities are not readily available in Markham. She said:

> Public transit is just not a practical choice for us … With limited local employment opportunities, most residents have no choice but to drive south to work … Talking about the GO Train, all we have is a single-track line between Unionville and Stouffville operating at its max capacity ... and it doesn't work for everyone if you don't work Downtown. The reality is we have to drive (Markham, 2025a, 2:09:58).

Thus, Katie believes developers and the City's planning staff have made flawed assumptions that new residents in high-rises proposed at Markville Mall will take public transit because the current residents do not have that option. The lack of local work opportunities forces residents to

commute to places outside Markville for employment. This is also hindered by the fact that urban regions are no longer monocentric, resulting in employment being scattered throughout the suburbs as well (Jansen & Ryan, 2019; Vermesch et al., 2021). To incentivize car users to use transit, both their origins and destinations must be transit-supportive, which is challenging to realize because suburban retrofitting tends to involve localized interventions (Filion & McSpurren, 2007).

With few employment opportunities in Markville, the City hopes that future mixed-use developments can resolve this issue. City planner Louis believes that redeveloping Markville Mall will enable more residents to work locally, as increased density will attract more businesses to the area. According to Frank (2000), an appropriate balance of housing and jobs in a community can reduce the need to commute if more residents can work locally. In fact, Matt, a consultant assisting with the preparation of the Secondary Plan, stated at a June 2025 Council meeting that Markville will eventually accommodate about 14,000 new jobs, mostly office and retail jobs within the base of future high-rise towers (Markham, 2025e, 1:55:40). Hence, attracting more office jobs can help ensure that Markville will not become a bedroom community.

However, this may be hindered if developers only focus on building housing. For instance, one developer suggested in a written submission that the Secondary Plan should permit "residential-only development" even if a site is supposed to be mixed-use (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, p. 15). In a sense, having high-rises without a retail or office component runs counter to a mixed-use community where people can walk to meet their daily needs. It would replicate the logic of building sprawling residential subdivisions, albeit in a high-rise form (Keil & Üçoğlu, 2021).

While addressing job creation has focused on new mixed-use developments, there is less emphasis on protecting existing businesses so that they have a long-term future as well. Jack, a small business owner in the Employment Area on the east side of McCowan Road, expressed concern in a letter to the City about being displaced by the intensification process, noting his "precarious position," as commercial tenants have no say on the timing of redevelopment (Markham, 2025f, Part 1, p. 2).

The Bullock Drive Employment Area is designated as Service Employment in the Markham Official Plan (see Appendix A), which accommodates service, retail, warehousing, light industrial, and small office uses (Markham, 2024, p. 8–44). The uses in this district are primarily auto repair shops and car dealerships (see Figures 19 and 20). Both the York Region and Markham Official Plans have policies that restrict converting Employment Areas to other uses to preserve them in the long term and accommodate a variety of employment types (York Region, 2024, p. 74; Markham, 2024, p. 8–38).



Figure 19: Auto repair shops on Bullock Drive (Photograph by author)



Figure 20: Car dealerships on Highway 7 (Photograph by author)

Unfortunately, the provincial government has made it easier to convert Employment Areas for residential developments. In the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement, the definition of Employment Areas has been narrowed to only include "manufacturing, warehousing … [and] **associated** retail and office" (Ontario, 2024, p. 42; emphasis added). Since the existing car dealerships and auto-repair shops are not directly related to manufacturing or warehousing uses on site, they are no longer protected by planning policy from potential conversion to non-industrial uses. A similar outcome was corroborated by a study of 14 American cities by Leigh & Hoelzel (2012), finding that mixed-use intensification, as envisioned by smart growth planning goals, is associated with the loss of productive industrial land through rezoning for mixed-use development. Intensification will create opportunities to accommodate new jobs, mostly white-collar office employment. However, the existing blue-collar employment could be threatened.

Besides a lack of local employment opportunities, affordable housing near transit is another key constraint on whether residents can live without a car. Pam says that as a City planner, she wants Markville to be "inclusive to a variety of demographics. So, individuals, couples, families, seniors." While there is significant community opposition to the Markville Mall redevelopment, the *Markham Economist & Sun* highlighted that some people online supported the project, pointing out that in Markham, "the average home costs about $1.3 million amid a housing crisis" (Yan, 2023b, para 5). Thus, supporters of the Markville Mall redevelopment see it as a solution to rising housing costs by adding more supply in a well-located part of Markham.

Yet, the new units at the mall redevelopment will likely be unaffordable for most low-income households. Although Cadillac Fairview, in its Planning Opinion Report, claims that "the nature of high-density development provides for inherently more affordable units" (Malone

Given Parsons Ltd., 2024, p. 40), it will not provide any affordable housing in the short to medium term. Specifically, its Official Plan Amendment (OPA 272) states that "redevelopment within Phases 1 and 2 ... **shall not require** the provision of affordable housing" (Markham, 2025c, p. 10; emphasis added). However, Bob, the planner representing Cadillac Fairview, committed to incorporating purpose-built rental housing instead of selling all the units as condominiums to provide their parent company, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Fund, with "residual income" (Markham, 2025d, 1:04:02). Purpose-built rentals will help diversify housing options, given that most housing around Markville is single-detached homes. However, as a pension fund, they are motivated solely by maximizing investment returns for retirees, with a consistent revenue stream to extract rents (August & Walks, 2018).

Previous scholarly research on intensification near transit stations has found that they tend to lack affordable housing. For example, Charney (2020) argues that private-led intensified developments are often marketed to middle-class professionals seeking the convenience of a mixed-use community. Moreover, Jones (2023) found that intensification around transit stations in Coquitlam, British Columbia, resulted in the displacement of low-income residents as purpose-built rental apartments are redeveloped. However, the areas planned for intensification in Markville are primarily commercial and employment uses, so the risk of residential displacement is low. Nonetheless, this "new-build gentrification" (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009, p. 142) will likely be unaffordable to low- and moderate-income groups, despite the virtues of mixed-use communities being touted as a solution for affordable housing (Calthorpe, 1993).

The two residents interviewed lamented Markville Mall as a missed opportunity to create affordable housing. For instance, Molly argued that there should be housing for older adults so they can downsize and live without a car. Meanwhile, Ruby argued that there should have been

more mid-rise residences, believing it would be the most effective way to quickly and cost-effectively increase housing supply, instead of high-rise condominiums that only young professionals could afford.

The draft Secondary Plan seeks to establish policies across the Markville area to facilitate a mix and range of housing options. It includes a proposed policy to use inclusionary zoning, which would require developers to provide a certain percentage of affordable units (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 81). However, Pam says the provincial government has temporarily paused inclusionary zoning to provide relief to the development industry due to the condo market collapse. Other policies proposed to address housing needs include that "a range of housing tenures should be **encouraged**" in addition to "**recommend[ing]** that a minimum of 25% of the dwelling units be required to be larger units containing two or more bedrooms" (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 81; emphasis added).

Louis says that as a planner working on development review, the City can only encourage, not dictate, what developers build, resulting in negotiations to include larger unit sizes. Yet, he acknowledges that larger units often fall outside the price range for most potential condo buyers. Councillor Alex states that smaller units can be problematic since they tend to be bought up by investors, which contributes to higher unaffordability. This shows the limitations of planning policies in promoting a community that is inclusive of all income groups.

Although the draft Secondary Plan mentions partnerships with non-profit housing providers (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 81), the City is relying primarily on private landowners to provide the mix of housing types that would contribute to housing affordability. Policies promoting a mix of housing options to cater to all social groups, including inclusionary zoning, "provid[e] a license for gentrification," supporting market housing expansion rather than tackling

the cause of housing unaffordability, rooted in shelter being treated as a vehicle for wealth generation and land speculation (Kipfer & Sotomayor, 2024, p. 51). People, especially those without a car, will be forced to pay a premium to enjoy the benefits of living in a well-located neighbourhood with transit access (Jones, 2023). As such, affordable housing must be available within existing neighbourhoods to prevent further urban sprawl and meet the housing needs of a growing population (Hayden, 2003).

City planner Louis acknowledges that "City staff only work with hard data but cannot make definitive predictions on people's decisions and preferences," admitting that there is no certainty that residents in the future high-rises would take transit and work locally. In the end, it is left to the market to ensure that the right people choose to live in Markville who want to walk or take transit to work (Ewing & Cervero, 2010). Despite that, employment and housing market constraints may hinder people's ability to reside in Markville without a car.

4.5. The Quality of Life in the Future Looks "Bleak": Community Concerns Over Overcrowded Schools and Small Parks

Across various layers of planning policies, there is an emphasis on intensification as a means of fostering a *complete community*. The 2014 Markham Official Plan is guided by a vision of balancing environmental, social, and economic needs through "compact *complete communities*" (Markham, 2024, p. 2–3; emphasis added). Likewise, the Provincial Planning Statement states that municipalities "support the achievement of *complete communities*" in strategic growth areas by not just providing a mix of land uses, housing, and transportation options, but also ensuring there are "focal areas for education, commercial, recreational, and cultural uses" (Ontario, 2024, p. 9; emphasis added).

The planners at the City of Markham similarly expressed a desire to make Markville a more *complete community*. For example, Louis defined the term as "a neighbourhood where people can live, work, and play without a car" because it includes mixed-use developments, is walkable, and has abundant green space and employment opportunities. Similarly, Pam says that, from her perspective, a *complete community* is "where residents, workers, [and] visitors can find the things they need to meet their daily needs," including grocery stores, employment, restaurants, parks, community centres, and recreational facilities. The planners' definitions align with the findings from Grant (2024), who described *complete communities* as a flexible concept for promoting sustainable and livable neighbourhoods through increased density. Thus, the term has been leveraged to justify interventions in car-centric low-rise areas labelled "less complete" for their insufficient mix of uses to sustain a healthy and vibrant neighbourhood.

While intensification presents an opportunity to improve livability, many residents do not see it that way. Ruby predicts that future quality of life will be "bleak," saying that she may consider moving out of Markville because of the traffic congestion and overcrowded community facilities due to the influx of new residents. Likewise, Nick, a resident who spoke at an April 2025 Council meeting, called the intensification plans a "neighbourhood tax," believing that current residents should not bear the burden of solving the housing crisis through reduced access to community amenities as density increases (Markham, 2025a, 3:02:58). Thus, the rhetoric of a housing crisis and the need to densify has contributed to concern that the livability in Markville will be compromised to accommodate population growth. According to Hanson (2017a), suburban politics is generally governed by an adversarial conflict between development interests and citizens seeking to protect their neighbourhood from adverse effects relating to growth.

However, Cadillac Fairview's planning consultants disagree that the mall redevelopment would decrease livability. In their Community Services and Facilities Report, despite acknowledging existing deficits in parkland provision and capacity in public schools, they conclude that the "proposed development of the Subject Lands **will not have a negative impact** on the existing community services and facilities" (Malone Given Parsons Ltd., 2023, p. 56; emphasis added). To address some of these constraints, the developer proposes to include a mix of new public parks and private outdoor space in the redevelopment (Malone Given Parsons Ltd., 2023), while leaving the identification of any new school sites to the City of Markham through its ongoing Markville Secondary Plan process (Malone Given Parsons Ltd., 2024, p. 41).

Nonetheless, in the aftermath of a December 2023 public meeting, when the Markville Mall application was initially presented, a *Markham Review* article described it as focusing on "how to maximise investment in the property, but little about anything else" (Fletcher, 2023, para. 6). This was because Cadillac Fairview did not proactively incorporate school sites within their initial plans despite its size, only promising to work with the school boards to determine educational needs their development would generate as they refine their proposal (Fletcher, 2023). Although Hodge et al. (2021) suggest that secondary plans should determine the location of school sites in advance of individual development proposals, the fact that the Markville Mall application was reviewed concurrently with the preparation of the Markville Secondary Plan may result in a mismatch between population growth and school provision.

Similarly, news articles about the Markville redevelopment highlight residents' concerns about reduced access to community services and amenities. For instance, one resident quoted in the *Markham Economist & Sun* said that "this development proposal doesn't show any plan to build new schools …which will result in an overloaded school system" (Markham Economist &

Sun, 2024a, para. 8). Another person was quoted in a news article stating that, “it’s going to have a big impact on the school system ... Kids at Markville High School are sharing lockers. How long will it be before they have shift classes?” (Yan, 2023a, para. 8). Thus, adding population in Markville is viewed as a burden that will hinder access to already-stretched community services, especially to the local schools, without any corresponding investments to boost their capacity. According to a study by Ruming et al. (2025), opponents of densification often challenge development over “perceived negative impacts on amenity, [and] access to services and infrastructure (including transport and open space)” (p. 884).

Based on school enrolment figures for the local feeder schools within Markville from 2020-2021, 5 of the 7 public schools are operating over capacity, while only 1 out of 6 catholic schools is above capacity (WSP Canada Inc., 2023a, pp. 117-119; see Appendix C). However, many residents are concerned that the school boards will resort to adding more portable classrooms to address overcrowding. Out of the 39 individuals who spoke at Council meetings in 2025 about Markville, 10 expressed concerns about limited school capacity and argued that students should not be forced to learn in portables (Markham, 2025a; Markham, 2025d). Of the 19 written submissions, seven letters critiqued the perceived lack of new schools being proposed to address the planned population growth (Markham, 2025b; Markham, 2025f).

Riley, a mother, spoke at a Council meeting about the dilemma her family faces regarding whether her son would receive a quality education at Markville Secondary School despite it being over capacity. She said:

> I initially wanted him to go there so he could enjoy the experience of walking or biking to school. However, with the developments we are talking about tonight, I’m no longer sure it’s the right choice. I don’t want him spending his high school years in portables. It looks like I may need to consider a different school for him, even if it means having to drive

> him instead. Does that mean I would add more pressure to the local traffic challenges? (Markham, 2025a, 4:03:32).

Schools are a vital component of any neighbourhood, providing educational opportunities to children. If densification is meant to enable residents to walk to their daily needs, schools are one place to start. That way, students can independently go to school without relying on their parents to chauffeur them and become car-dependent.

Portable classrooms are meant to be a temporary solution to address school capacity when a neighbourhood's composition changes with an increase in its population of families with young children. However, they should not be relied upon to address population growth driven by new housing development. That would require additional permanent school capacity. As of March 2026, 10 portables were present at Markville Secondary School (see Appendix D), which is located outside the Secondary Plan area. However, a new wing is being constructed in the school, which would increase its capacity from 1,092 to 1,601 by September 2027 (WSP Canada Inc., 2023a, p. 117; York Region District School Board, n.d.; see Appendix E).

To address future school capacity, the draft Markville Secondary Plan proposes two school sites to accommodate population growth (see Figure 21). One of them is on the Markville Mall lands, which have already been secured in the Council-approved Official Plan Amendment 272, which designates a "school priority area" in the second phase of the redevelopment, providing a school to be incorporated within the base of a mixed-use building if school boards determine one would be needed (Markham, 2025c, p. 10).

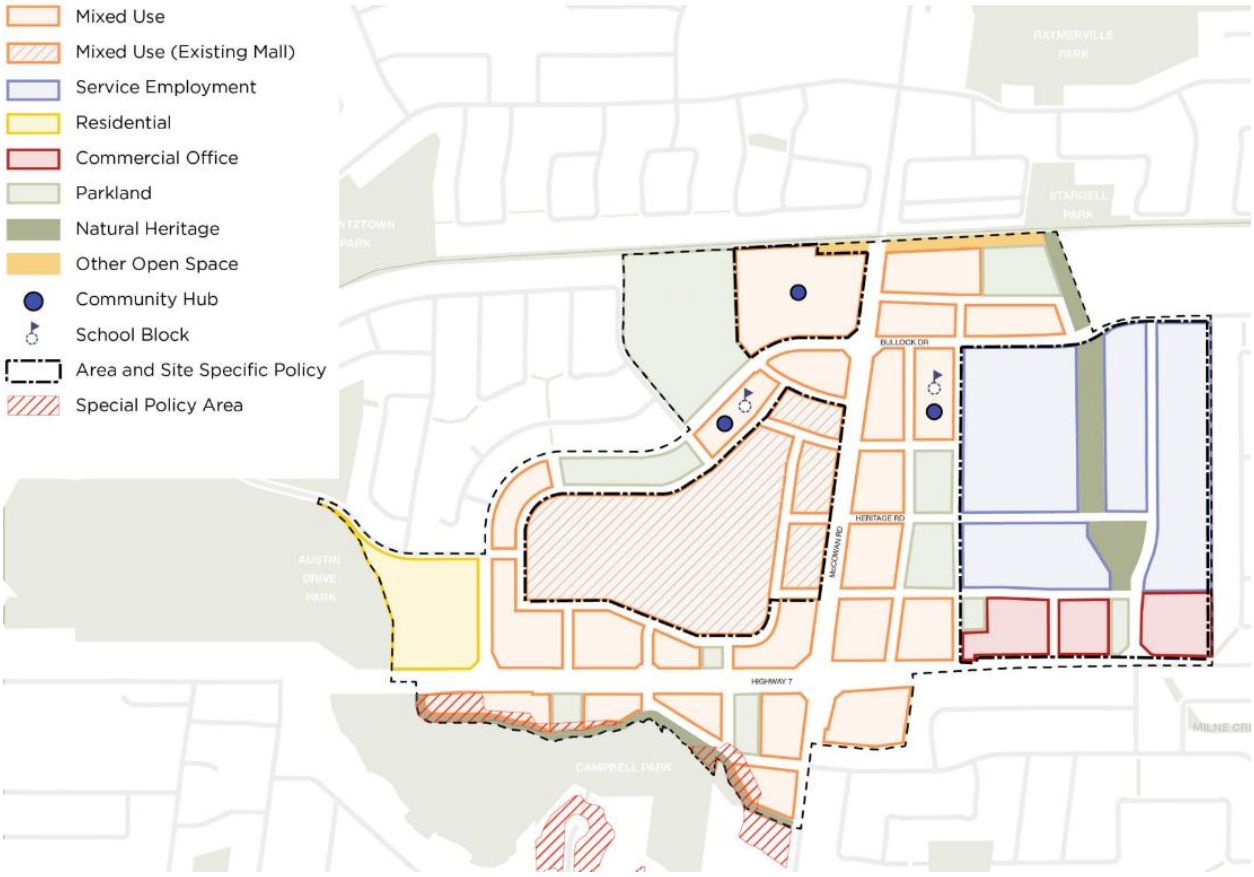


Figure 21: Proposed land use map for the Markville Secondary Plan (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 50)

However, there is concern in the community that the two additional schools will be insufficient to mitigate the impacts of intensification, despite Brian, Markham's chief planner, trying to reassure attendees at a Council meeting in April 2025 that school boards only requested two school sites (Markham, 2025a, 2:23:07). For instance, Sophie's email to the City suggested that four additional schools were needed because the proposed two schools underestimated educational needs, since more "families with kids will live in the high-density buildings in the area" (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, p. 26).

Besides schools, parks and recreational facilities are also key to sustaining a sense of community. The draft Markville Secondary Plan's land use map, shown in Figure 21, identifies

three blocks that would accommodate other community uses, such as parks and “Community Hubs” for community centres, recreational facilities, libraries, and possibly additional schools (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 81). Community facilities are vital to enhancing the quality of life for community members. Having these amenities in proximity to where people live allows them to easily access spaces to meet, relax, exercise, and engage in leisure.

Similarly to school capacity, there is concern that the proposed recreational spaces will still be insufficient. For example, Amy said at a public meeting in September 2025 that the 0.44 hectares of parkland proposed at Markville Mall is insufficient, requesting more green space than “three meagre parkettes” (Markham, 2025g, 1:11:23). Similarly, Beverly spoke to Council in April 2025 about the difficulty that she and other parents face having to wake up before 6:30 AM to register online for recreational programs provided by the City to argue that the local Centennial Community Centre is already at capacity (Markham, 2025a, 2:20:43). One resident I interviewed, Ruby, said that while community uses like community centres and libraries will be incorporated into the condo buildings on the mall site, she still thinks they will be “small.” While redevelopment will be an opportunity to add more parks and community facilities, residents are unconvinced it will be enough to meet the needs of the future population. In fact, they think they will have less access to these public facilities because of the added competition with future residents for limited space.

Furthermore, the Secondary Plan’s Draft Final Study Report acknowledges that some of the required recreational amenities to support future population growth may need to be provided outside Markville “due to land constraints” (WSP Canada Inc., 2025, p. 59). If some amenities are delivered elsewhere, it may hinder the local community’s access to them unless they drive. Such a scenario unfortunately would run counter to the ideals of a walkable community.

Intensification can create challenges in ensuring sufficient infrastructure to support growth. The high-rise condominium boom in Toronto over the past 20 years has created pressures on parkland, recreational facilities, and limited school capacity (Lorius & Taylor, 2024). Addressing these infrastructural deficits can be challenging for municipalities because upgrading infrastructure and building new facilities can be expensive when land is scarce (Lorius & Taylor, 2024). In Markville, the City has identified suitable sites for new public facilities to meet the demands of an increased population. However, developers are reluctant to accommodate them on their land.

According to City planner Pam, the challenge with providing adequate community facilities to support growth is that landowners and developers are often hesitant to provide them on their land. Private landowners are often keen on securing the "highest and best use" of their land to maximize revenue from redevelopment (Nethercote, 2019, p. 3398). When a draft of the Secondary Plan concept was released in June 2025, six landowners submitted letters to the City, some of whom objected to their lands being identified for future parks, schools, and Community Hubs because it would reduce their development potential (Markham, 2025f, Part 2, pp. 18-19; Markham, 2025f, Part 3, p. 121).

This pushback from developers is in line with urban growth machine theory, which finds that local land-based elites collectively lobby governments to support development initiatives so they can capitalize on the resulting increase in their property values, despite this often hindering the quality of life for everyone if infrastructure cannot manage an increased population (Molotch, 1976; Hannigan, 2014). Thus, community uses may become an afterthought for developers if they continue acting in their self-interest and seek to minimize their obligations to provide the facilities needed to support a livable community.

Importantly, provincial legislative changes to incentivize housing construction have also not helped to guarantee adequate community uses. While there may be demand for more green spaces, provincial constraints have capped the maximum amount of parkland developers may convey to municipalities. In 2023, the *Planning Act* was amended to reduce parkland dedication from 1 hectare per 300 residential units to 1 hectare per 600 units (Harrington & Skinner, 2025, p. 138). To describe the impact of this regulatory change, Markham's Mayor, at a public meeting in September 2025, stated that a "two-tower condominium project with 2,000 people gets the size of a tennis court as their park" (Markham, 2025g, 1:19:03).

The goal of intensification and complete communities is to provide improved access to all the facilities needed to sustain a healthy lifestyle. However, Markville may not become a truly complete and livable neighbourhood if people end up needing to drive to access their community and social facilities because it becomes a sea of high-rises with minimal schools, parks, and recreational facilities. While comprehensive planning, such as through secondary plans, is intended to ensure community facilities are adequately provided in line with projected population growth, opponents of intensification are unconvinced that this will happen. The imperative to increase housing supply may come at the expense of community facilities and infrastructure.

4.6. "We Only Got One Chance to Get It Right": Understanding the Future Plans for Markville

As already demonstrated, the overwhelming consensus amongst the residents interviewed, and community members who attended the Council meetings or sent written submissions, is that the proposed intensification is excessive and that there is no adequate plan to address traffic or deficiencies in community infrastructure. City councillor Alex argues that "we only got one chance to get it right" when it comes to intensifying Markville because once the

high-rises are built, it will be virtually impossible to reverse course. Intensification represents a critical opportunity to change the course of Markham's car-dependent, low-rise suburban reality. Yet, achieving the desired outcomes of more transit use and walkability must be carefully planned out to ensure successful implementation.

Based on my interviews with residents and councillors, there was a sense that Markville should have fewer high-rises than are being proposed, despite constraints already set by the layers of planning policies. For example, Ruby said she would have preferred that Cadillac Fairview not "deviate" from the mid-rise permissions as set out in Markham's Official Plan. Likewise, Molly argued that she thinks Markville will not be a "livable community" because people will lose a sense of connection to the street and with neighbours if they are in towers. A similar sentiment is shared by Alex, who said:

> Beyond about 10 storeys, that's not a healthy way to live … [because it is] too far from street level. It's too easy to just drive into ... the parking lot underground, get in the elevator, [and] go up to your unit."

Likewise, Leslie commented that they would have preferred more mid-rises since they could not imagine living in a 40-storey building. Thus, most of my interviewees believe that the future intensification in Markville is not being planned well and would have preferred a more modest redevelopment plan with more appropriate heights and densities.

Despite eight ratepayers and community groups in an April 2025 joint letter to City Council requesting that the Markville Mall application be deferred until a "**community-supported vision** of the Secondary Plan" was finalized (Markham, 2025b, Part 2, p. 2; emphasis added), Markham's Planning staff recommended approval believing it was "appropriate and represents good planning" (Martelluzzi, 2025, p. 2). This is because Ontario's top-down planning system promotes such forms of development near transit (Ontario, 2024). The *Planning Act*

constrains municipal decision-making authority by establishing a "land use planning system led by provincial policy" (Ontario, 2025). In other words, a development is expected to be approved if it satisfies the goals of provincial and municipal policy. Otherwise, a developer can refer applications to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT), a provincially appointed quasi-judicial body specializing in land use planning disputes, which will decide in the municipality's place.

Under the *Planning Act*, developers can appeal to the OLT if the municipality refuses their development or fails to decide within 120 days of receiving an Official Plan Amendment application (Harrington & Skinner, 2025). The development approvals process can be long because it involves intense bargaining between developers and the municipality over any necessary modifications to the project plan to secure the city planner's endorsement (Hodge et al., 2021). Bob, the planner for Cadillac Fairview, stated at an April 2025 Council meeting that his client wants to see their mall redevelopment approved now that it has been recommended by City staff and cautioned against further delays. He said:

> We've been at this for ... just under two years. So, CF first made their application back in June 2023 … I think Cadillac [Fairview] has been a very open and patient corporate citizen throughout this process … I think they are also eager to see an end to this process as well (Markham, 2025a, 1:12:52).

While Bob did not publicly threaten to go to the OLT in his remarks, he indicated that continued delay was against the developer's private interests since the 120-day period had long passed.

Both councillors interviewed felt they had no choice but to approve the Markville Mall application to prevent an appeal. Leslie states that despite its flaws, the mall redevelopment had to proceed so it could be built on the City's terms. They said:

> If we say no to Markville [Mall], Cadillac Fairview came in and said that they would go to the Ontario Land Tribunal, and the Ontario Land Tribunal will probably give them more density and more height. And we would have no say.

The OLT conducts “de novo” hearings, meaning it hears development applications from scratch, which gives the adjudicator broad power to consider whether the proposal reflects good planning, even if it means ignoring and overturning local decisions (Krushelnicki et al., 2023, p. 12). For example, Leslie referenced a recent OLT appeal in the western part of the city, where a developer was permitted to submit a revised proposal for a high-rise with twice the density initially applied for because the hearings are de novo (Liu, 2026a).

Meanwhile, Alex argues that the City has little room to maneuver when an application comes in, since they have a weak negotiating position with developers who can always resort to the OLT to make the ultimate decision. They state:

> We’re making decisions because of what our best guess is how the OLT will react, not because we think it’s good planning. And particularly given the pressure from the provincial government to just build, build, build, the OLT has been given its marching orders, right? ... So, you’ve got to come up with a pretty darn strong argument to win ... Developers these days are winning over 95% of the appeals to the OLT. So, what chance does the City have in saying that’s not good planning?

The sentiment is corroborated by a comprehensive analysis of development appeals by Hovius (2025), finding that the OLT sided with developers 95% of the time between 2021 and 2024 for privately initiated development appeals in the Greater Toronto Area, which is similar to the 91% approval rate from 2014 and 2017 under its predecessor, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) (p. 44). When cases resulting in a settlement were excluded, developers won 84% of contested hearings at the OLT in 2021-2024, compared to 74% in 2014-2017 (Hovius, 2025, p. 44). From a councillor’s perspective, they must balance market pressure for greater densities with their constituents’ desires to protect neighbourhood character (Hanson, 2017a). Given the odds against the City at the OLT, the councillors hope that approving the application would have prevented a worse outcome had the developer filed an appeal.

Although the OLT and its predecessors have long been criticized for being pro-development, Krushelnicki et al. (2023) state that its role is to ensure municipalities make planning decisions based on established policies rather than to appease local opposition. However, it is the residents who must live with the consequences of planning decisions being made in their community (Hodge et al., 2021). Overall, the Markville case study demonstrates the impact of the Progressive Conservative government's return to "developer-friendly OMB rules" at the OLT (Keil & Üçoğlu, 2021, p. 102) and its rewriting of the planning rules to open more land for market housing expansion (Kipfer & Sotomayor, 2024). The result is that plans for suburban intensification are being imposed on communities despite limited public support.

Although the councillors and residents interviewed have expressed doubts over the appropriateness of the proposed scale of the redevelopment due to transportation and livability concerns, the planners I spoke with held a more optimistic outlook for Markville's future. For example, Pam predicts that "20 years from now, Markville will be a vibrant community" with more housing, a mix of uses, and easier access without a car. She emphasized that the Markville Secondary Plan only sets the policy framework, but that the renderings shown at previous public meetings (see Figure 5) only represent "one permutation of what could happen in Markville. It could look very different in the future." Similarly, Louis commented that contrary to community misconceptions, Markville Mall will not be redeveloped all at once. He believes it will likely take at least 50 years to realize, given the recent drop in the condo market. Depending on the state of the housing market over the next few years, these massive redevelopment plans could fall apart or be drastically scaled down. Uncertainty remains over how all of this will play out.

5.0. Conclusion

In conclusion, my major research paper highlights the sentiments and perspectives of various interested parties on how high-rise redevelopment in Markville would affect travel behaviour and livability. Interviews and the public meeting record reveal that most residents perceived the proposed high-rises negatively, believing traffic congestion would worsen because they do not see other modes of transportation as true alternatives to driving due to limited local employment and poor transit availability. This differs from established planning theory, which links higher-density neighbourhoods with greater transit use (Tacheiva, 2010). Moreover, residents believe the quality of life will worsen because they are concerned that community infrastructure, such as schools, parks, and community centres, will not keep pace with population growth. Although one resident supported densification because it would provide more housing options for young people, low-income households will likely be unable to afford to live in the new high-rises since the redevelopment is market-led (Kipfer & Sotomayor, 2024).

Meanwhile, the councillors I spoke with sympathized with the community's concerns but argued the provincial government has limited the City's ability to push back against developers and convince them to scale down their redevelopment plans, since they can appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal to get their proposals approved anyway. Conversely, the two planners interviewed believe that Markville will be a complete community in the future, citing planning policies that promote mixed uses and density near transit hubs. Ultimately, whether Markville emerges as a successful example of sprawl repair, as predicted by the planners, will become apparent over time when redevelopment progresses, and its impacts are realized.

5.1. Lessons from Markville for Planning Practice

While the proposed intensification in Markville is premised on its proximity to transit stations, it cannot simply be assumed that adding more density alone will facilitate a massive mode shift in favour of transit. A limitation of transit-oriented development is that it tends to be a localized intervention (Filion & McSpurren, 2007), rather than a broader regional one, as alluded to by the residents interviewed and those who spoke at the Council meetings, who argue that the public transit system is not comprehensive enough to connect them with their destinations. This is especially true because of regional employment dispersal, which prevents transit from effectively connecting commuters to all jobs (Lorius & Taylor, 2024).

Moreover, while the planners interviewed want Markville to be home to diverse demographics, greater emphasis should be placed on securing a wide range of affordable housing, including non-market options (Moos et al., 2018a). This is essential to counteracting gentrification pressures common near transit stations and ensuring that all income groups can live near transit (Kipfer & Sotomayor, 2024).

The Markville case study also highlights the importance of comprehensive and proactive planning in high-growth areas to ensure livability and facilitate the transition from car dependency envisioned by suburban retrofitting (Hodge et al., 2021; Grant, 2024). Although Markham's Official Plan emphasizes the need "to manage growth and development through monitoring, phasing and the concurrent delivery of public infrastructure and community services" (Markham, 2024, p. 2–10), many residents perceive that planning is being done in a piecemeal and fragmented manner because the Markville Mall redevelopment was approved in the absence of a secondary plan. Effective cooperation and coordination among local governments, developers, and other public bodies are essential to securing space and funding for

supportive infrastructure to keep pace with future growth (Pemberton et al., 2026). This includes investments in rapid transit improvements, cycling infrastructure, new schools, parks, community centres, affordable housing, and a diverse range of local employment opportunities needed for a complete community (Allen et al., 2018; Hodge et al., 2021; Grant, 2024).

Although community resistance to land-use change is likely to persist (Ruming et al., 2025), planners and policymakers should strengthen public communication regarding the constraints and objectives established by planning policies early on, while clearly demonstrating how community concerns are being considered (Dear, 1992). Doing so may help prevent perceptions that redevelopment initiatives are being decided without community input.

5.2. Research Limitations

The low interview response rate from Markville residents is a limitation of this study. To mitigate this limitation, I relied on the public meeting record to capture community members' viewpoints. While doing so allowed me to obtain more data, it still resulted in my dataset comprising almost entirely people vehemently opposed to redevelopment. This is evidenced by only Brick, a college student, who expressed support for the Markville Mall redevelopment because it would add much-needed housing. Sentiment towards intensification is influenced by age, with younger people generally more supportive of density than older people who stand to benefit from higher property values when housing is scarce (Talen & Wileden, 2025).

In Bolleter et al. (2024), most people surveyed were quietly supportive of the goals of sprawl repair, except for a vocal minority. Opponents of rezoning are generally the most engaged throughout the planning process, strongly motivated to participate in public meetings to make their dissent known (Ruming et al., 2025). Thus, my findings are skewed towards the viewpoints

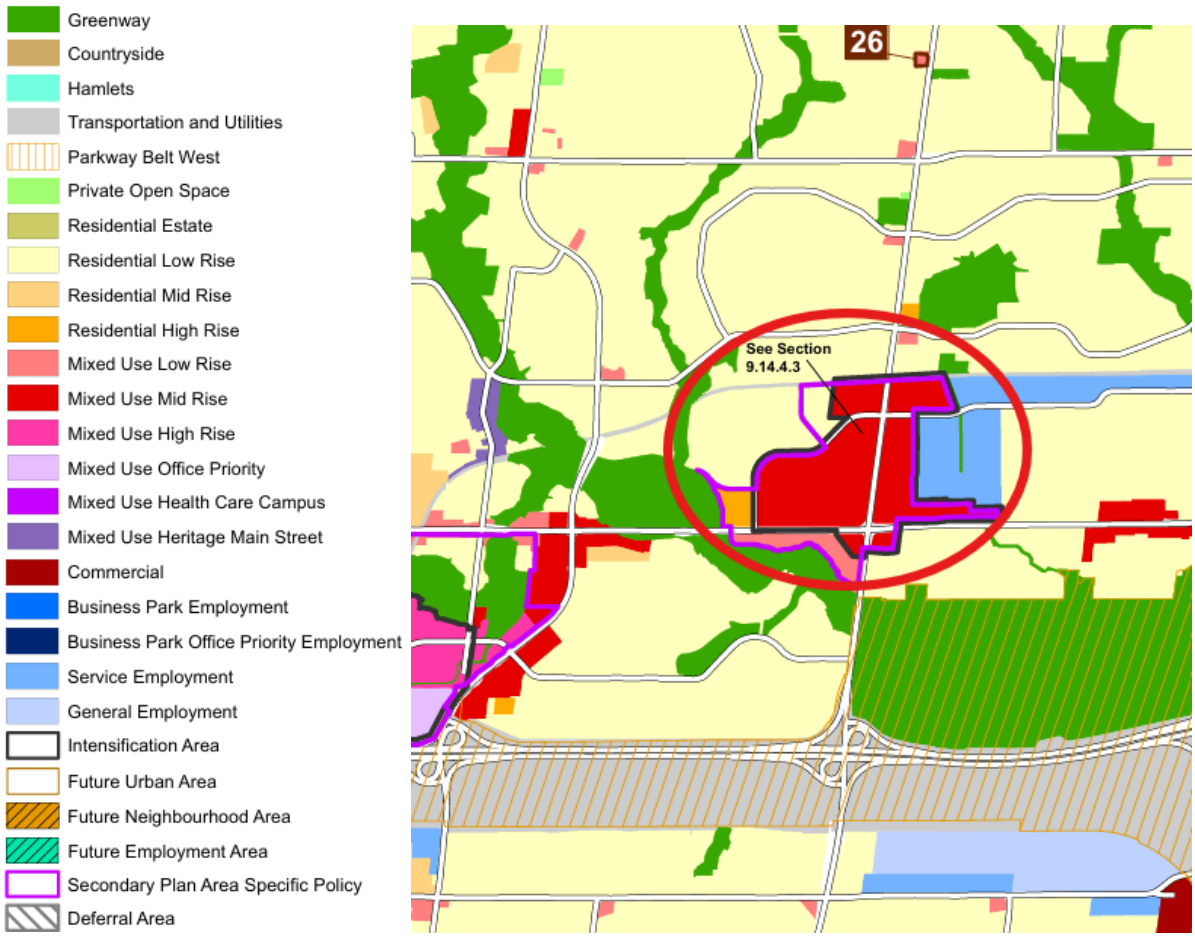
of older and retired homeowners, because this was the demographic I was able to interview and who attended Council meetings. A more diverse sample of interviewees would possibly have revealed varying perspectives as well as more nuanced opinions about Markville's future.

5.3. Future Research Directions

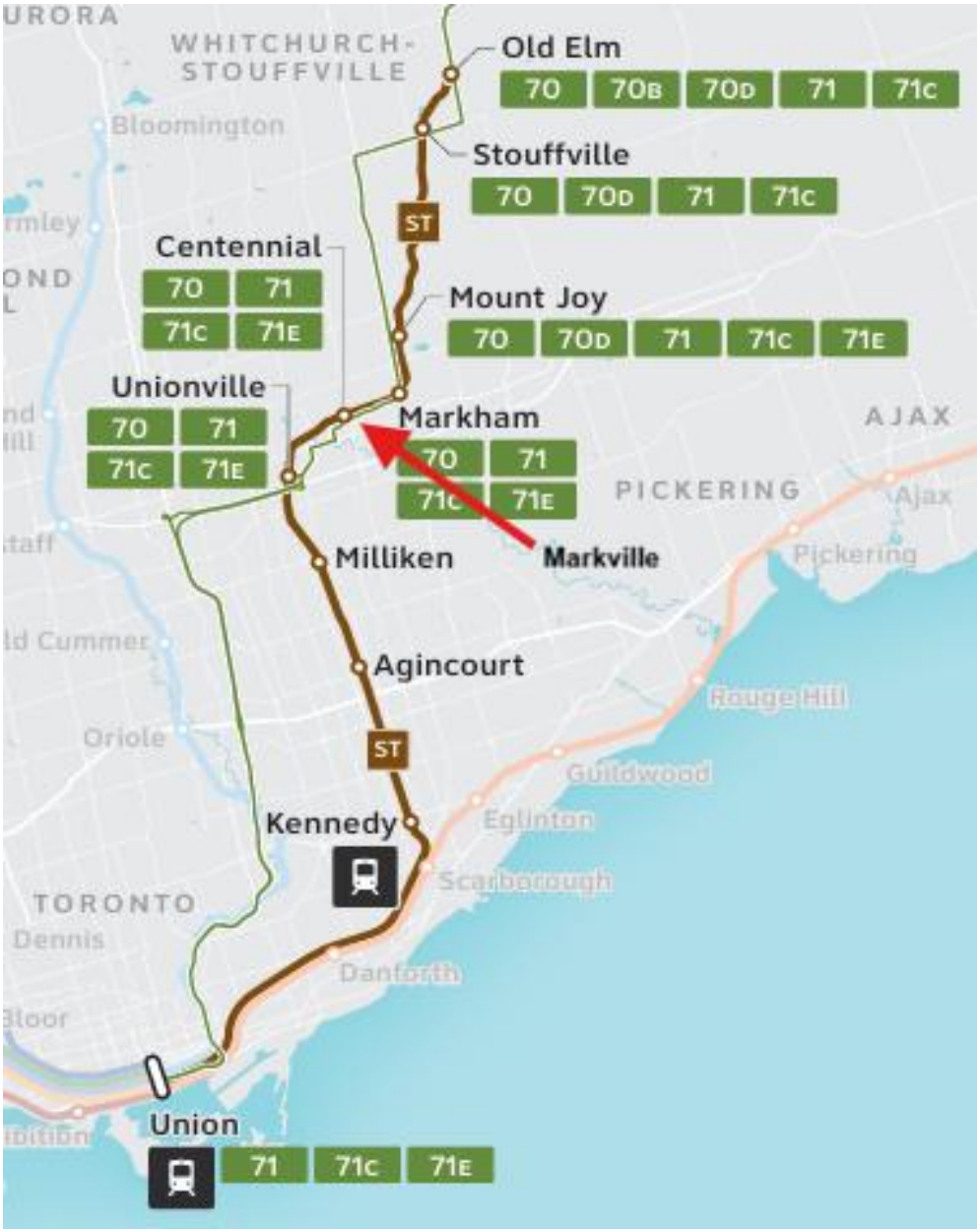
Although there has been extensive research into how intensification around transit stations affects travel behaviour, there has been less attention on its impact on neighbourhood livability. Besides Haarhoof et al. (2016) and Allen et al. (2018), few studies have focused on how residents in existing low-rise areas perceive the impact of densification on livability. Given that sprawl repair promises to realize complete communities where individuals can access all the amenities they need for daily life (Grant, 2024; Tachieva, 2010), future research should evaluate how suburban intensification affects access to public amenities and livability, with specific attention paid to both before and after redevelopment to test those assumptions.

AI Disclaimer: No AI was used for any aspect of the research and writing.

Appendices



Appendix A: Markham Official Plan land use map (Markham, 2024, Map 3)



Appendix B: Stouffville GO Line (GO Transit, 2026)

School Board	Elementary/ Secondary School	School	Capacity	2020/2021 Enrollment	Over/Under Capacity
York Region District School Board (YRDSB)	Elementary	Central Part Public School	467	569	Over Capacity
		James Robinson Public School	359	390	Over Capacity
		Franklin Street Public School	534	537	At Capacity
		Reesor Park Public School	441	398	Under Capacity
	Secondary	Markville Secondary School	1,092	1,470	Over Capacity
		Bill Hogarth Secondary School	1,500	1,607	Over Capacity
		Pierre Elliot Trudeau High School	1,422	1,730	Over Capacity
York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB)	Elementary	St. Matthew Catholic Elementary School	300	154	Under Capacity
		St. Patrick Catholic Elementary School	317	314	At Capacity
		St. Edward Catholic School	392	382	Under Capacity
		St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary School	291	249	Under Capacity
	Secondary	St. Augustine Catholic High School	1,218	1,249	At Capacity
		St. Robert Catholic High School	1,104	1,696	Over Capacity

Appendix C: School capacity and enrollment for the home schools in Markville (WSP Canada Inc., 2023a, pp. 117-119)





Appendix D: Portable classrooms at Markville Secondary School (Photographs by author)



Appendix E: Construction of a new wing at Markville Secondary School (photograph by author)

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