

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

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Your File/V/Réf.	
DATE	19 December 1996
TO/DEST.	Co-ordinator Transportation Committee
FROM/EXP.	Director Mobility Services and Corporate Fleet Services Environment and Transportation Department
SUBJECT/OBJET	TAXI STAND - QUEEN STREET, NORTH SIDE

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Transportation Committee recommend Council approve the following changes on a six-month trial basis and enact a Special By-law to reflect these changes:

- 1. The revision of curb use regulations on the north side of Queen Street between Kent Street and O'Connor Street to those shown in Annex B;**
- 2. The exemption of taxis from the current northbound left-turn and southbound right-turn prohibitions at Bank Street and Queen Street;**
- 3. The exemption of taxis from the current eastbound left-turn prohibition at Bank Street and Slater Street.**

BACKGROUND

As a result of a number of ongoing safety and operational concerns, the taxi stand serving the C.D. Howe Building at 235 Queen Street has again been reviewed.

The stand, as illustrated in Figure 3 of Annex A, is currently comprised of two components on the north side of Queen Street; a pick-up area west of Bank Street and a storage area east of Bank. The pick-up area has been in place since the building opened in 1977. The storage area has been in place since July 1996. Prior to that, no formal storage area existed. Between December 1994 and July 1996, the stand consisted of two pick-up areas, one on each side of Queen, both west of Bank.

The stand was initially contained in a four-stall layby. Given the trip demands generated by a workforce of 3,500 in the Howe Building, it quickly outgrew its storage capacity. Since then, various measures to mitigate the effects of that shortcoming have been tried; however, all have proven to be unsuccessful.

This report details the history of the stand, identifies the current problems, and recommends measures to ease those concerns. Because many of the issues are subjective, practical solutions cannot be rooted purely in technical analysis. Rather, they must rely on compromises between competing interest groups and a willingness by those stakeholders to make the agreed-upon solution work.

Before addressing the matter, three key points must be recognized - first, that this is by far the busiest taxi stand in the downtown core; second, that taxi drivers want to be where the action is; and third, that unless their cab is occupied by a fare, “time is money” in the eyes of taxi drivers.

The first point confirms the requirement for high volumes of cabs to service the stand. The second and third points help to explain the aggressive, behaviour of those taxi drivers who ignore traffic, parking and stopping regulations to access this stand. More than anything else, it is this indifference to the rules of the road that has frustrated all previous attempts to improve the operation of this stand.

It must also be stressed that in the 20 year period since this stand was introduced, neither the street pattern nor the adjacent land use has changed appreciably. Queen Street is four-lane undivided, the stand is on the north side and a bus zone has always been present between the stand and Bank Street.

DISCUSSION

1. Stand Configuration and Operation Prior to December 1994.

Until 1994, the stand was confined to the four-stall layby between the bus zone and a metered parking zone. On the south side, opposite the stand, a loading zone was present to serve the loading needs of 222 Queen Street.

Those regulations, illustrated in Figure 1 of Annex A, gave rise to a situation where cabs heading east could readily negotiate U-turns into the stand. To complete such turns in one continuous manoeuvre, four lanes are required. The normally vacant loading zone on one side and bus zone on the other provided the necessary four lanes.

When the loading zone was occupied and the manoeuvring width of the road was reduced to three lanes, undeterred taxi drivers would negotiate three-point turns into the stand. If the stand was full but the loading zone was not, taxis would “store” in the loading zone and then U-turn as the stand queue dictated. As a result, they conflicted with loading activities.

When the U-turns were made in peak periods, they triggered congestion. Taxi drivers anxious to avoid such conflicts would therefore U-turn as gaps in traffic permitted and not necessarily as the queue length in the stand dictated. When the layby was full, this required that they store in the bus zone; consequently, they would sometimes conflict with buses.

The U-turns were not just eastbound manoeuvres into the stand, but also westbound manoeuvres out of the stand. Those would occur when drivers picked up a customer wishing to travel east. Taxi drivers explained that such turns were necessary; otherwise, customers felt “ripped off” if the driver proceeded west and then used the circuitous one-way street system to turn around.

A number of food concessions are located on the lower concourse of the Howe Building and a bank is situated on the ground floor of 222 Queen Street. These amenities generate considerable pedestrian activity back and forth between the two buildings. Pedestrians complained that U-turning taxis posed unexpected hazards to them when crossing in that mid-block corridor.

To address that concern, signs were erected in 1984 to prohibit U-turns between Bank Street and at a point 85 m west. For a number of years that regulation was reasonably well obeyed. However, soon after the RMOC moved to its new headquarters in 1990, the problem re-appeared. In retrospect, this was probably attributable to the reduced level of activity in the commercial loading zone.

To counter the problem, enforcement efforts were increased. However, unlike stationary offences which can be ticketed by Parking Control Officers, U-turns are moving violations for which citations can only be issued by police. Constant police surveillance was not possible, nor should it have been required; therefore, that situation developed into a “cat and mouse game”. However, in 1992, following a rigorous enforcement blitz by police, a number of U-turn citations were dismissed in court on the grounds that the 85 metre point was not well defined on the street.

To counter that ruling, the signs and by-law were revised in 1993 to ban U-turns throughout the Bank to Kent block. The set fine of \$90.00 was displayed on those signs; however, that measure had no effect either. Whenever police arrived to monitor the situation, taxi drivers would proceed east and U-turn in the next block. To circumvent the regulation and still remain within the Bank to Kent block, they would turn into the underground parking access at either 222 Queen or 235 Queen and back out onto the street. Turns made in that manner are not considered to be U-turns under the Highway Traffic Act, nor in fact are three-point turns.

There was also another major problem. The Howe Building is occupied by a large work force and its retail sector attracts high volumes of shoppers. It provides amenities for all users, including those mobility impaired. The total disregard for curbside regulations by taxi drivers frequently resulted in situations where, all of the curbspace on the north side between the bus stop and the access to the underground parking area, would be occupied by cabs. This included the metered stalls and some of the bus zone. It was therefore frequently impossible for Para Transpo drivers or others to access the curb, to pick up or drop off mobility impaired passengers.

Public Works staff were also adamant that at least one curb space be made available in front of the building to serve the pick-up and drop-off needs of trade delegates, many of whom were transported in embassy vehicles. Considering that the offices of the Minister of Industry Canada and those of the Deputy Minister and a number of Assistant Deputy Ministers are located in the building, that request was reasonable.

2. Stand Configuration and Operation - December 1994 to July 1996.

In view of all of these concerns, meetings were held in the fall of 1994 with representatives of the taxi union, Para Transpo and the Bank Street Promenade.

To address the safety concerns, taxi representatives suggested that if a new stand was provided on the south side, U-turning movements could be eliminated. They contended that the volume of patrons heading east was about half that heading west. Therefore, if the stand on the north side could be increased slightly and a new stand about half that size created on the south side, drivers would face the same pick-up opportunities and queuing delays at both.

They felt they could manage the operation so that customers who approached the lead cab in one stand, but whose trip actually required travel in the opposite direction, would be referred to the stand on the other side. Drivers would come to view each stand as being just as attractive as the other, and therefore would be content to await a fare in whichever stand they arrived in.

To provide a stand on the south side, the loading zone would have to be shortened. That appeared to be feasible. However, neither staff nor the Ward Councillor were prepared to implement that measure unless something was done to address the curb accessibility issues on the north side. Two proposals were therefore advanced.

First, that a loading zone be created and signed "Para Transpo Only". It would replace the two metered stalls between the taxi stand and the parking garage access - that way, the clear space in front of the access could be used for manoeuvring. It could also be used by any other vehicle displaying a physically disabled permit since holders of those permits may be legally picked up or dropped off in loading zones.

Second, that another zone be placed between the stand and the bus zone to serve the needs of trade delegates. Since there was no way to sign that zone for the exclusive use intended, it would simply be signed as "No Stopping - Anytime". That way, it could also be used for the loading needs of the mobility impaired.

Stopping had always been prohibited on both sides from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., yet those were precisely the periods when some of the highest demands for taxis and Para Transpo vehicles occurred. Cabs could still use the layby during those periods but they were not permitted to park in its tapers; otherwise, they would encroach into the curb lane.

Since cab drivers ignored the stopping restrictions anyway, it was obvious they could be relaxed and the signs delineating the stand re-positioned to include the tapers. The stand would then legally accommodate six cabs at all times. Similarly, by relaxing restrictions on the south side and creating a new four-cab stand, a total of 10 stalls would then be available at all times.

As a final precaution to ensure that taxis did not spillover into the Para Transpo zone, a nearby “Refreshment Vehicle Vendor stall” was moved and placed between that zone and the taxi stand. The chipwagon licensed for that stall would then serve as a barrier. This would reduce the Para Transpo zone to one stall, but company officials felt that would be acceptable.

Taxi representatives were in total agreement with these proposals and they promised to do their best to make them work. The resultant curbside regulations are shown in Figure 2 of Annex A.

For at least a year after those changes were implemented, no complaints were received about the operation of either stand. Then, with the single exception of the curb accessibility issue as it pertained to the mobility impaired, all of the previous problems resurfaced.

Observations revealed the stand on the south side was being used as a storage area only. Customers approaching the lead cab on that side were being told they could not be picked up there and that they had to cross the street for service. Operation of the stands in that manner required that most cabs entering the pick-up stand on the north side, first had to proceed through the storage stand on the south side. It also required that most cabs negotiate a U-turn before entering the pick-up stand. Taxi representatives were asked why this was happening.

They explained that while the distribution of trips heading east and west was more or less what they had estimated, there were high demand situations where the two stand system broke down. This would occur whenever a large meeting broke up in the Howe Building and created an immediate need for more than six cabs. Apparently, demand surges requiring 10 to 15 cabs are not uncommon.

Under such circumstances, cabs on the north side would advance very quickly to the head of that queue and upon stopping, would immediately become occupied by customers who opened the doors and jumped in. At that point, it was too late for drivers to ask those heading east to get out and use the stand on the south side - the best they could do was exit the stand as quickly as possible so that delays to other waiting customers would be minimized.

Since that stand only held six cabs, such demands would rapidly exhaust the supply of cabs stored on that side. Drivers parked on the south side felt it was then reasonable for them to service the excess demand. This introduced internal conflicts because the string of U-turning cabs, some of which may have been delayed for several minutes on the south side before advancing to the U-turn point, could easily be cut off by a westbound cab driver who would then experience virtually no delay before loading. Since taxi drivers had no awareness of when these demand peaks might occur, they decided the only fair way to avoid such squabbles was to have all cabs pick up on the north side only.

They were warned by Departmental staff that unless U-turning activity ceased and both stands were operated in the manner intended, the stand on the south side would be removed and police intervention would be requested. Despite these warnings and the ensuing enforcement efforts, the U-turns persisted.

Then another issue surfaced - again that of curb accessibility but this time on the south side. Unlike the stand on the north side which was constrained in size by the bus stop at one end and chipwagon at the other, the stand on the south side had no constraining impediments. The easterly end abutted the loading zone and the westerly end abutted the parking access to 222 Queen. West of the access, metered parking was permitted.

With many of the taxis serving the Howe Building now being cycled through the stand on the south side, the queue on that side frequently overflowed the taxi stand and occupied the loading zone and the metered parking area. Furthermore, it frequently obstructed the garage access or created visibility hazards for drivers egressing that facility.

Confrontations were not uncommon between taxi drivers and motorists intent on parking in the garage. These would occur whenever a westbound cab entered the access for the express purpose of backing out, and was followed into that access by someone who wanted to park there. The trailing driver would suddenly face a stopped cab whose driver wanted to back out. Motorists complained that the resultant exchanges were abusive, unpleasant and unnecessary.

Finally in the spring of 1996, high-ranking officers of the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service called a meeting and asked staff and the Ward Councillor to review the stand with a view to resolving its operational problems, by some means other than enforcement.

3. Stand Configuration and Operation - July 1996 to Present.

Another round of meetings was held with representatives of the taxi union and the Bank Street Promenade.

In reviewing the problems associated with the stand as configured "before and after" December 1994, it became clear that they all boiled down to those of safety and those of annoyance. The scarcity of reported accidents involving taxis confirmed that the safety issues were more perceived than actual. Nonetheless, they were legitimate concerns and their resolution required that U-turns be separated from the mid-block pedestrian crossings and that storage queues be kept away from the parking garage accesses.

It also became clear that the positioning of U-turning activity could probably be somewhat controlled since it appeared to be directly linked to the positioning of the end of the storage queue - move the end of the storage queue and the U-turn point would move along with it, at least during those times when the storage area was full.

Looking at the taxi driver behaviour throughout all of this, two other findings emerged. First, they had clearly demonstrated a universal unwillingness to comply with any regulation which impeded their progress into the queue and second, and more importantly, they had also clearly demonstrated that they were extremely mindful of one another when it came to picking up fares - they would never intentionally “jump the queue”.

Since the pick-up area in front of the main doors to the Howe Building was fixed, as was the pedestrian crossing corridor, the only thing that could really be moved was the positioning of the storage queue.

An area which appeared attractive to accommodate that need was the area on the north side of Queen, just east of Bank. Taxi drivers had often asked about the possibility of using it as a storage facility; however, these requests had always not been judged to be unacceptable by staff and the Ward Councillor because of the generally accepted loading needs of Bank Street merchants. The drivers contended that if that storage area was provided, the lead cab stationed there could observe the queue in front of the Howe Building and then proceed across Bank as the pick-up queue dictated.

The westerly two thirds of that block was signed as “No Parking - 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (Monday to Friday)” and the Trafalgar Building on that corner functions as an office building with minimal loading needs. East of that building, there were very obvious commercial loading requirements for The Mayflower Restaurant & Pub, the Marks and Spencer Store and a number of other businesses that fronted on Sparks but could load from Queen, by means of a service alley.

The option certainly looked attractive, but the only way to really find out if it might work was to try it.

The real issue of concern was still the U-turns. Their positioning would move to a new site at the easterly end of the storage queue east of Bank, which would separate them from the pedestrian corridor between 222 and 235 Queen, but what problems would they create at the new site?

Taxi representatives felt that U-turns would not be an issue because drivers would prefer to turn at the mid-block accesses to a surface parking lot on the north side between Marks and Spencer’s and the former Woolworth’s Store.

With those reassurances, the Bank Street Promenade representative agreed it was worth a trial - the general consensus being that any problems that did surface would be documented and then the whole issue brought before the Transportation Committee for resolution. That way, all of the options would have been tested and the problems associated with each would be known.

A four-cab storage area was therefore installed on the north side of Queen just east of Bank and taxi union officials embraced the measure as being long overdue. Driver representatives at the stand promised they would ensure that the loading needs of the abutting businesses were not interfered with and that they would store in their assigned area only.

To deter taxis from storing on the south side in the vicinity of the garage access, or in the area opposite the bus zone, as many metered parking stalls as possible were then installed in those areas. The resultant curbside regulations, which are currently in place, are illustrated in Figure 3 of Annex A.

Within days of changing the stand to its current configuration, complaints started coming in. The cabs routinely spill out of their assigned zone and block the nearby service alley. They dominate the curb lane further east and obstruct the commercial loading needs of abutting businesses. They routinely U-turn just east of Bank and in doing so, by means of three-point turns, frequently encroach onto the northerly sidewalk thereby posing unacceptable risks to pedestrians.

Another concern is that the Aids Committee of Ottawa maintains a drop-in support centre (The Living Room) in the Trafalgar Building. The doors and lobby to that building are situated right beside the taxi stand and some visiting the centre have complained that they feel intimidated entering the building. Some of those visitors are in poor health and therefore require curb accessibility by private vehicles when being transported to and from the centre. Staff were not aware of the presence of the Living Room in the building and sincerely regret any inconvenience or difficulties that visitors may have encountered as a consequence of moving the stand to that location.

4. Proposed Stand Configuration.

In view of these concerns, staff recommend that the stand be reconfigured again and the storage area be moved.

There are few options left to make this stand operate in a safe and reasonable manner. There is absolutely no reason why it could not have functioned acceptably well and to everyone's satisfaction, in any of the configurations tried. Its track record clearly shows that taxi drivers are just not willing to obey the posted regulations or abide by the rules of the road, yet that is a fundamental requirement for any traffic plan to work. However, those same observations are consistent with taxi driver behaviour at other stands and yet they seem to function in an acceptable manner.

There is no denying the fact that taxi servicing facilities at this site are woefully inadequate and were poorly planned for. Given the size of the workforce in the building and the nature of business that Industry Canada is involved in, a four-cab stand is not, nor ever has been, sufficient for their needs.

It could also be argued that since the building is owned by the Federal Government and managed by Public Works Canada, they should take some initiative in resolving the problem. However, they are not responsible for the street or the transportation activities taking place on it.

The Department is faced with the responsibility of assessing alternatives and seeking solutions until some workable means to correct the problem is found. Therefore, we are proposing yet another compromise solution for the consideration of the Transportation Committee.

It is proposed that the bus stop on the northwest corner be moved to the northeast corner. The existing bus zone is 50 m long. Allowing 15 m on the west side for intersection requirements (crosswalk, etc.), an additional 35 m of curb space could be assigned to store taxis west of Bank. The stand would then accommodate six or seven more cabs so that in total it would hold 12 or 13. That should be more than sufficient to meet the taxi servicing needs of the building.

The length of the bus zone on the northeast corner would be approximately the same length as the current taxi stand storage area. The owner and tenants of the Trafalgar Building will have to decide on the relative merits of that measure.

Existing and proposed curbside regulations are illustrated in Annex B.

If experience is any indicator, the positioning of the eastbound U-turns will surely follow the queue. Since the most easterly stall will now be situated right at Bank Street, cabs would probably continue to U-turn in the Bank to O'Connor block. Therefore, taxi drivers must somehow be encouraged not to make U-turns in that block. The best way to do that is to provide them with attractive alternative routes to access the stand.

The main reason drivers make eastbound U-turns is because it is much more convenient to do that than to use any existing alternative routes. A high percentage of drivers approach Queen from Kent which is one-way northbound. If they adhered to the posted regulations and did not U-turn on Queen, they would be forced to access the stand by following Kent to Wellington, then proceeding east to O'Connor, then proceeding south to Queen and then proceeding west to the stand. They cannot use Bank Street to shorten that route because southbound right turns are currently prohibited from Bank onto Queen from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (Monday to Friday).

That route takes them through eight signalized intersections. In the taxi business, time is money and drivers will not voluntarily follow any such route because of its attendant delays. To help shorten these delays and provide cab drivers with an acceptable compromise route, it is proposed that they be exempted from that turn restriction at Bank and Queen. They would still have to pass through a total of six signalized intersections to access the stand; however, the time spent following that route may not be significantly longer than U-turning east of Bank. The U-turning route would still require that they pass through three signalized intersections and they would also face some additional delays when negotiating the U-turns.

That turn restriction is in place because the level of pedestrian activity in the westerly crosswalk is high and can therefore delay southbound right-turning vehicles. In turn, those delayed right turns delay southbound buses. Since Bank is only two lanes wide, the buses do not have much room to manoeuvre around those right turns. However, if taxis were exempted from that regulation, it is unlikely that their turning volumes would significantly impact transit operations.

Similarly, it may be possible to exempt taxis from the northbound left-turn prohibition from Bank onto Queen. That turn is banned at anytime for the same reason. In conjunction with that measure, if they were also exempted from the eastbound left-turn prohibition from Slater onto Bank (currently in place from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.), northbound cabs on Kent would be able to directly access the enlarged stand on the north side of Queen without having to resort to U-turns. They would proceed north on Kent to Slater, turn right and proceed east to Bank, turn left and proceed north to Queen and then turn left into the stand.

However, those changes to turn prohibitions would require traffic signal modifications. Of further concern is the fact that while none of these turn exemptions will in themselves compromise the operation of the Regional Road system in the core area, they will in aggregate contribute to the overall degradation of the system. These results cannot be accurately predicted beforehand because the volume of turning cabs is not known at this time.

Should Committee and Council wish to explore this option further, it is proposed that these turn prohibition exemptions could be implemented on a six-month trial basis during which time their impacts can be monitored. A follow-up report could then be presented on the operation of the stand in its revised configuration and its impacts on pedestrian movements, traffic operations and transit delays at Bank and Slater and at Bank and Queen would also be considered.

CONSULTATION

Other than the meetings described above, there has been no public consultation. Permitting taxis to turn at these intersections may increase conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists, but this would be balanced by the reduction in conflicts from U-turns.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Sign modification costs will be minimal. Traffic control signal head modifications are estimated to cost \$6,000.

*Approved by
Doug Brousseau*

JFB/cf

Attach. (2)

FOR SYMBOL LEGEND PLEASE SEE ANNEX B

ANNEX A

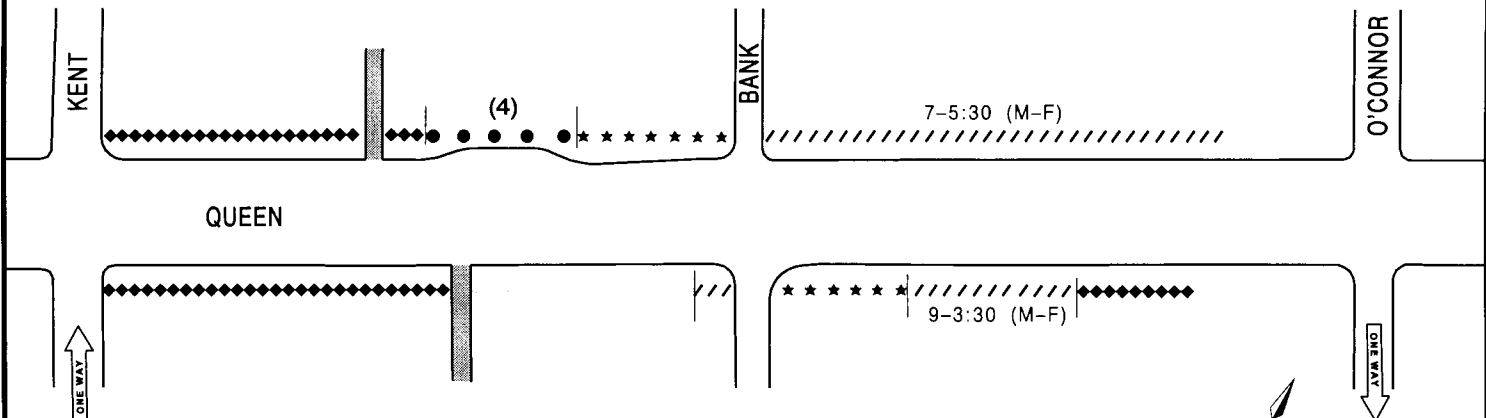


Figure 1 - Prior to December 1994

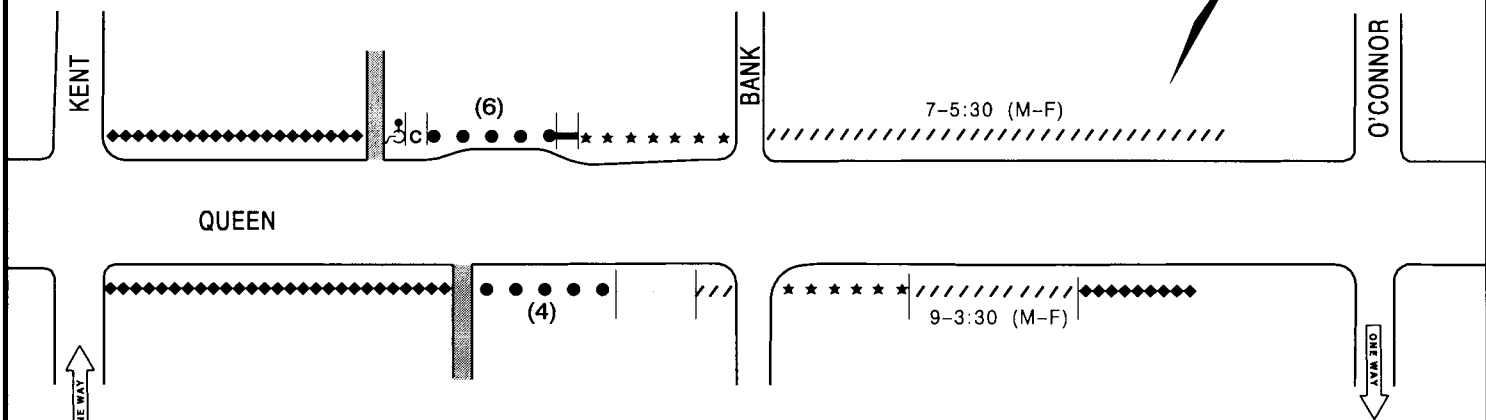


Figure 2 - December 1994 to July 1996

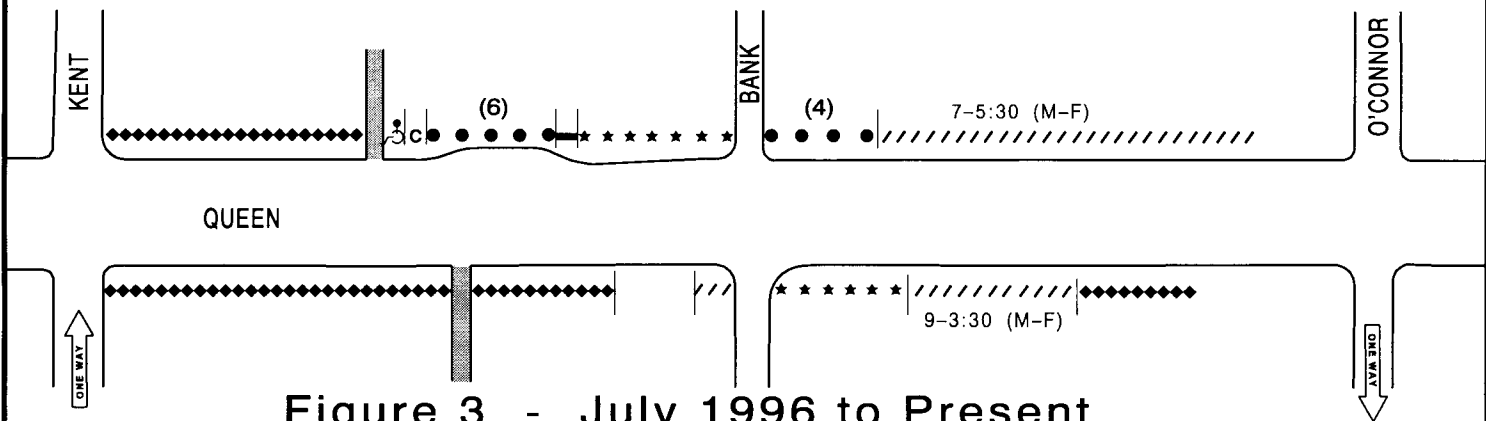


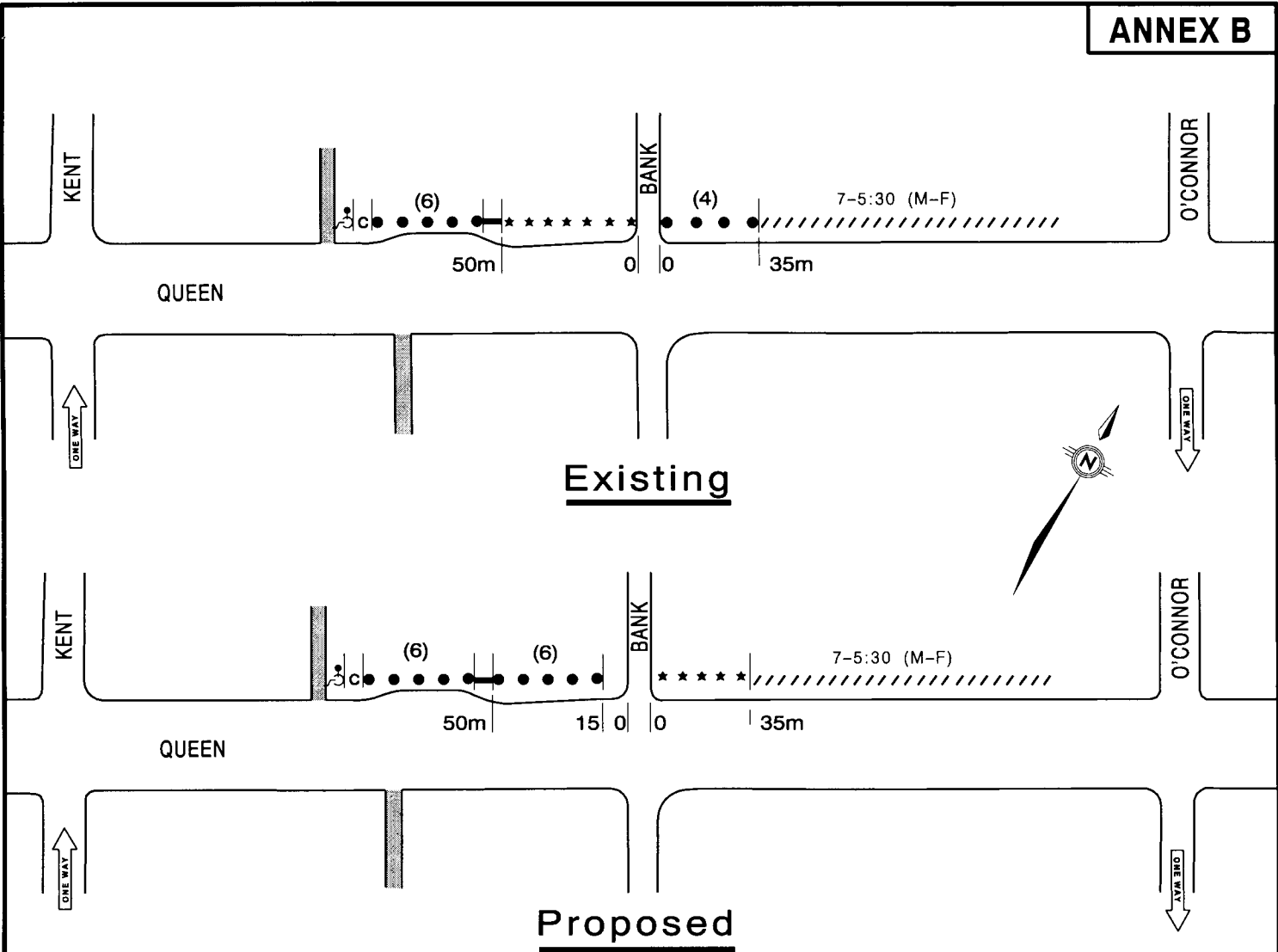
Figure 3 - July 1996 to Present

**Queen Street
Between Kent Street and O'Connor Street
Curbside Regulations**



SCALE	DRAWN BY	CHECKED BY
N.T.S.	G.P.	J.B.
3471s5	DATE	APPROVED BY
	DEC. '96	

MOBILITY SERVICES
Environment & Transportation Department



Existing

Proposed

LEGEND

- ***** No Stopping Bus Zone
- No Stopping 7-9 3:30-5:30 (M-F) at Anytime
- //////// No Parking at Anytime or as Indicated
- ♿♿♿ Loading Zone - Para Transpo
- ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ Parking 1Hr 9-3:30 (M-F) or as Indicated
- Loading Zone 9-3:30 (M-F)
- Taxi Stand
- (4) Number of Taxi Stalls
- c Chipwagon

**Queen Street - North Side Between
Kent Street and O'Connor Street
Existing And Proposed Curbside Regulations**



SCALE N.T.S.	DRAWN BY G.P.	CHECKED BY J.B.
3471s5	DATE DEC. '96	APPROVED BY

MOBILITY SERVICES
Environment & Transportation Department