



This Week in the Annex:

February 28, 2024

When Apps Go Rogue

No doubt about it. The rise of Google Maps and Waze and the like has been a godsend for drivers. That is, until the apps go wrong. Unfortunately, that recently seems to be the case for those seeking addresses on the lower section of Howland Avenue.

As anyone in the 'hood knows, Howland is a street of two minds. For pedestrians, no problem. But vehicles heading south from Dupont are caught up short at Barton and forced to turn left or right. Similarly, drivers heading north from Bloor find themselves blocked at Barton from advancing further.

This measure works well at controlling speed and traffic congestion, especially at certain points in the school day, but if the signs aren't clear and the app maps are wrong, the set-up is a recipe for a disaster.

Uber Makes a Boo-boo



It's perfectly obvious to drivers arriving from Dupont that there is no way they should consider continuing south on Howland past Barton.

Recently it has become clear to residents on the lower block of Howland that the maps used by Uber have gone awry. Drivers accessing addresses below numbers 84 (on the west side) and 91 (at the east side) are blithely sailing the wrong way down towards Bloor.

We were alerted to the issue by Howland resident Blair Mascall who told us, "We now have a procession of Uber drivers turning south on our block and often speeding down the street. Several of us have stopped a few and discovered that their map has a mistake."



The signage is not so compelling looking east along Barton. No wonder that despite the one-way arrow floating in the middle of the intersection and the no-entry sign tucked away on the hydro pole to the right, Uber drivers privilege the directions from their app. The screen shot above clearly directs the Uber driver to turn south down Howland from Barton.

In an act requiring Herculean patience and not a small dollop of good humour, Howland resident Karin Treiberg has twice navigated the obtuseness of Uber's chatbot in hopes of securing an audience with a living breathing company representative. At one point the chatbot generously informed her that Uber takes safety seriously and consequently refunded a ride she'd taken weeks ago in Miami despite her frantically typed protests that that wasn't germane.

The living breathing reps who did ultimately reach out were really no better. One recited by rote the line about Uber taking safety seriously and promised to "look into it." The other decided that a \$30 credit to Karin's Uber account might sweeten the deal. But nothing on the ground has changed.

Safety First

Neighbours on the street are primarily worried about safety. And rightly so. One of those vehicles charging down the road at a speed well past the posted 30 km/h is almost certain to suffer a head-on collision with disastrous consequences. But when neighbours called the Toronto police to address the situation, they were rewarded with just one Friday night's monitoring and ticketing of drivers.

"Do you think anything else can be done?" asks Blair. "Can we marshal the might of the ARA to our cause?"

Now there's a challenge we like. The case has been passed on to our Road Safety and Transportation Committee Chair, Tim Hadwen. Let's see what can be done. We'll keep you posted.



It's not only Uber that can get it wrong. It took a few months to convince Google Maps and the drivers who depend on them that the gate pictured here is not the front door of a house on Admiral Road to which flowers should properly be delivered.

That Wasn't for Television

It was the ARA's Sandra Shaul who first alerted us to what we can only describe as "The Incident at St Alban's."

According to Sandra, she and her partner, "... were coming to the end of a beautiful late morning walk — sunny and warm. It was around 1:00 pm. [*FYI last Wednesday, February 21st*]. We had just crossed from the west side of Albany and Barton to walk through St Alban's Square when we heard a speeding car and then a split second later were shocked by a huge bang. We turned to see the car had crashed into the curb of the park as it tried to navigate that turn on the south side and was rapidly wedged in by multiple police cars."



They weren't kidding. A Royal Saint George's student also at the scene managed to whip out his phone and capture a grainy video of the last moment of the crash followed by a posse of police in pursuit of the miscreants: [click here](#) to view.

Up Close and Personal

Sandra and her partner, unschooled in the arts of self preservation, stood on the path as one of the occupants jumped out of the car and started running in their direction. "I believe that at least two of the officers had their guns drawn," reports Sandra, "I guess because he may have been armed. This made me a touch nervous. [*Editor's note: Oh really?!.*] There was no place to get out of the way! But luckily the cops tackled him before he reached the path."



The tackle was just a little bit too close for comfort, don't you think, especially given the gun on the ground just behind the trio wrestling in the mire?

In true Toronto fashion, passersby tried hard to behave normally. Royal St George's students ambled back to school from lunch, while a couple on a bench who had unwittingly scored ringside seats, returned to eating their takeout.

"As we resumed our walk," continued Sandra, "We encountered two officers running as fast as they could from Brunswick. Apparently, whatever crime they had committed, the two suspects (to employ police parlance) must have decided to split up. By the time we reached Brunswick we saw what you see in the photo of the officers with the second suspect seated next to the fancifully painted truck."



"While one officer stayed on guard, the others searched the vehicle and found an object stashed in the right hand rear exhaust pipe of the truck. If you blow up the photo you can see it. I assume the suspect did not wish to be caught in possession of whatever it was."

Not for prime time. Not for any time.

To finish the saga, the principal of Royal Saint George's that afternoon sent a message to parents describing the incident. [Click here](#) to read the final report. And let's pray that's the last of such adventures in the park!

Notes and Queries

Unintended Consequences

It was only with the best of intentions that the Bloor Annex BIA (Business Improvement Area) decided to turn the orphaned mudflat at the corner of Brunswick and Bloor into an entertainment venue with a sturdy stage serviced by a convenient onramp backed by comfortable Muskoka chairs for members of the audience. While some daytime buskers have proven a treat, not so much the drummer who has recently taken to practising his art long after dark. Residents

are advised to contact 311 to make an "amplified noise" complaint. (Let's face it, that wooden stage certainly amplifies the sound.) We can't let this one settle in.



Kudos for ARSC

Last Sunday, February 25, our MPP Jessica Bell hosted the annual University-Rosedale Community Recognition Awards. Amongst those honoured was the [Avenue Road Safety Coalition](#), a team of indefatigable activists working tirelessly to turn Avenue Road from a perilous freeway to a more pedestrian friendly thoroughfare.

As Arelene Desjardins, acting chair of the coalition, noted in her remarks, "We are eagerly awaiting the final report on the Avenue Road Study, which will provide recommendations for near-term interventions and a long-term vision for Avenue Road. At this time, we believe these recommendations will be presented at the March 27th Infrastructure and Environmental Committee (IEC) meeting, and then to the City Council for a final decision."



Pictured here to collect the award, L to R: Deborah Williams TDSB Trustee Ward 10, Tim Hadwen ARA, Arlene Desjardins ABCRA, Jessica Bell MPP University-Rosedale, Albert Koehl, Brock Howe, Murray Campbell RARA, Henry Wiercinski ARA. Just outside the frame: Jessica Spieker of Friends and Families for Safe Streets, and Nigel Fung of Church of the Redeemer.

Spring?

Well, the temps have risen again, and you'll see from the image below that the robins have returned. Ditto for the video [available by clicking here](#).



That said, we also feel obliged to take you back to that same garden almost exactly a year ago on March 5, 2023. Just saying. . .





The Annex Residents' Association is a volunteer organization of residents committed to improving and preserving the distinctive character of our neighbourhood. Our strength depends on our base of support in a well-informed community.

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The Annex Residents' Association