

GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY

"YORKVILLE LOOP LINE"

By 1870, the railway network of Southern Ontario was becoming more established as to extent (including proposed lines which were ultimately built) and ownership. The Great Western, (GWR) the Grand Trunk (GRT) and the Midland (MR) each had their "areas", including (in retrospect) those independent systems which they would soon absorb.

But there was still much "manoeuvring", not only on acquisitions, but also on proposed lines to fill "voids" and expand "empires".

Two such charters were the Ontario & Quebec (O & Q) between Toronto and Ottawa, of 1871 and the complementary Huron and Quebec (H & Q), between Goderich and Peterborough, of 1874.

The GTR became alarmed because while they effectively covered south-western Ontario with their main line, a route to Ottawa tapped the area north of their Toronto-Montreal "lakeshore" route, interfacing with the Midland. Moreover, the joint charters meant a route through Toronto, less congested than the Union Station/Esplanade "tangle".

In 1877 the promoters of the H & Q, realizing their "western" aspirations were difficult, decided to abandon their association with the O & Q by becoming re-incorporated as the Toronto & Ottawa (T & O) for a line through the same territory as the O & Q (Toronto - Peterborough - Ottawa) which meant still an entry into Toronto.

Between 1874 and 1877, the GTR reacted in various ways. To meet the 1874 threat of a route through "north" Toronto, they proposed a "Yorkville Loop Line" which would have been Toronto's first "bypass" line north of the Union Station. It would enable an east-west connection of the two GTR main lines, and carve out an alignment north of the (then) city limits before the new charters made definite surveys.

The proposed "loop" is shown on ~~the attached map from~~ the 1878 York County atlas, with an excerpt describing it. It commenced at the site of the present CN West Toronto station, following the NE leg of the Junction and the present CPR North Toronto line to the Poplar Plains/Davenport intersection, then continuing essentially straight east (below Macpherson and Rowanwood) across the Don Valley, through the village of Todmorden, (just north of the Pottery Road/Broadview intersection), and on the south of Cosburn Ave to Donlands Ave (Leslie St). From that point the line continued south-easterly in an almost straight line to join the GTR Montreal-Toronto line at Victoria Park Avenue (south of Danforth) which was the eastern limit of the "flat" Little York area, soon to become (in 1884) the GTR's York yard complex.

Coupled with this was a "cross connection" from the GWR near Ellis Avenue (High Park) to the "loop line" at Perth Avenue.

In 1877, the "need" for the loop line was just as vital, but the GTR was attempting to protect their interests in other ways. When G.A. Cox became President of the Midland in August 1878, he was working quietly to bring (a) the minor railways (Victoria, Toronto and Nipissing, Grand Junction and Whitby, Port Perry and Lindsay) into the Midland fold (which he did in 1881) and (b) the Midland into the GTR system (which he accomplished in 1884). Moreover in 1881 he offered to take the T & O under the Midland's wing, which was accepted by the promoters as achieving their goal. But, in fact, with the charter secure, the Midland/GTR liasion ensured it would not be a challenge to them. It was only exercised to build 4 short "links" for the convenience of the Midland (announced in May 1882); as a competing through route it was dead. The primary (hidden) purpose of the "Yorkville Loop Line" died as well.

Cox (and the GTR) felt that their moves, coupled with the 1877 "flip-flop" of the H & Q, had also sounded the death knell of the "competing" O & Q, and said so publicly.

But in 1881 the O & Q was rechartered and (not surprisingly) was amalgamated with the CPR who needed entry into Southern Ontario (along with the Credit Valley and Toronto Grey and Bruce acquisitions). By 1884 their line from Smiths Falls to West Toronto was opened using the "loop line" alignment across North Toronto from Poplar Plains road westwards. And, after the CPR reached Union Station from the east via the Don Valley in 1887, the "Yorkville Loop Line" was in fact just that, referred to as the "North Toronto Cut-off" - but serving not the GTR, but its competitor which was the latest arrival in Toronto.

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