



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

Advocating for Sustainable Public and Freight Transportation

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Scarborough ExpressRail (SER) FAQ

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
SER and the Scarborough Subway Extension.....	3
SER and the Scarborough RT (SRT)	4
SER Cost and Construction.....	5
SER and RER/SmartTrack	6
SER and the Relief Line.....	6
SER Serving Scarborough	7
For More SER Information	8

Scarborough ExpressRail FAQ

Introduction

1. What is Scarborough ExpressRail (SER)?

Subway-quality service to Scarborough Centre and possibly points further east and north, providing one-seat service to the downtown core at Union Station. It's also been known as SmartSpur.

2. Is SER a SmartTrack extension?

It provides a second line for SmartTrack service within Scarborough, improving upon SmartTrack's role in connecting Scarborough and especially Scarborough Centre with Toronto and the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

3. Is SER an extension of the TTC's Line 2 (Bloor-Danforth)?

No. SER goes to Union Station instead of Bloor-Yonge and St George, using Metrolinx's Regional Express Rail (RER) infrastructure.

4. How is SER a subway-quality service if it is not a TTC line like Line 2?

SER is electric, heavy rapid transit, that travels at high speed, has no sharing of infrastructure with roadways, with short waits between trains, all like a TTC subway service, but it uses trains that are larger and longer than those on Line 2. It is a surface subway.

5. If it is like a TTC subway service, is the fare the same?

Yes. The fare will be the same as for TTC subway service, like SmartTrack, as that fare is essential to get strong ridership.

Scarborough ExpressRail FAQ

SER and the Scarborough Subway Extension

6. Would SER replace the one-stop Scarborough Subway Extension (SSE)?

Yes. By creating a very short corridor to Scarborough Centre from the Metrolinx tracks at Ellesmere station, the costly Line 2 extension would be redundant.

7. City Planning has evaluated proposals through their eight transit planning lenses. How would SER score?

SER scores are expected to match or exceed those of the SSE. The lenses are Experience, Choice, Social Equity, Shaping the City, Healthy Neighbourhoods, Public Health/Environment, Supports Growth, and Affordability.

8. What is the network impact from SER?

Based on Transportation Tomorrow Survey data, it is estimated that at least an additional 2,000 passengers per hour in 2021 would be diverted from Line 1 and Line 2 by SER. This number is expected to get higher as ridership grows, and be around 3,000 by 2031. This is in addition to SmartTrack ridership impacts. This helps the whole network run smoother, both the transit network and road network, so that drivers and bus passengers also benefit.

9. Does SER alleviate Bloor-Yonge, and would the SSE make Bloor-Yonge more congested?

Yes and yes. Although SmartTrack alone alleviates Bloor-Yonge, SER provides further relief to Bloor-Yonge. The SSE, on the other hand, would increase crowding at Bloor-Yonge.

Scarborough ExpressRail FAQ

SER and the Scarborough RT (SRT)

10. Is SER an experimental technology like the SRT was, or is it proven and widely used by others?

SER is based on very widely-used and long-proven technology (including in winter climates): In the same theme as SmartTrack, it piggybacks on investments already being made by the province to create an electrified RER system to optimize the usefulness of existing surface rail corridors owned by the government, and as a technology uses the same kind of vehicle as the subway (but larger).

11. Is SER similar to the LRT?

No, SER is heavy rail and has higher capacity.

12. Will SER be faster than the SRT or SSE?

Yes. TTC vehicles are designed to go 70-80 km/h, but SER would be able to run at 160 km/h where the corridor design allows such speed.

13. Will SER be more convenient than the SRT or SSE?

Yes. SER will provide a fast, one-seat ride downtown from Scarborough Centre to Union Station, with no need to transfer at Kennedy or Bloor-Yonge stations, saving up to twenty minutes.

14. Will SER have less crowding than the SRT or SSE?

Yes. SER trains are larger and longer than TTC subways, and each train can carry more people comfortably.

15. Will SER have the frequency of the SRT or SSE?

SER could run at about the same frequency as the SRT does today.

16. Is SER more reliable than the SRT or SSE?

Yes. SRT is very vulnerable to winter weather interrupting service, and that causes poor reliability for the coldest parts of the year. Although rare, the subway between Warden and Victoria Park can also see service disruptions during heavy overnight snowfalls that cover over all of the tracks, including the third rail, suspending service east of Woodbine until staff clear snow from the third rail. SER does not have that vulnerability as it uses overhead lines instead of third rail.

SER Cost and Construction

17. What happens to the SRT during construction of SER?

It continues to operate throughout the construction period. The new corridor would run parallel to the east-west portion of the SRT.

18. What is the cost of SER?

From Ellesmere to Scarborough Centre, the cost would be roughly \$1.15-billion. This represents Phase I. That's about \$1.4-billion less than the one-stop SSE, enough to extend SER to Progress Campus.

19. Is SER constructible?

Yes. The Scarborough Centre tunnel is just over 1 kilometre, including the Scarborough Centre station, and the local lay of the land works very well for the transitions from surface to underground.

20. What would be the time line for construction of SER?

Construction to Scarborough Centre would take less time than the subway extension, with time savings realized from no bored tunnels as the underground portion of the SER line is short and shallow, which allows faster construction. There would be some additional time required for the extension to Progress Campus because the SRT must be shut down first and the SRT yard beside McCowan station removed before the extension to Progress Campus can be completed. This corridor has EA approval from the previous LRT conversion of the SRT, and an EA amendment could be sufficient for accommodating SER.

21. Are there any grade separations involved for SER?

One. The only grade crossing that affects SER is Danforth Rd, which will be grade separated for RER in any event as it may already warrant a grade separation today, even though there are only 15 trains a day from Stouffville GO rail service. SmartTrack requires nine grade separations north of Ellesmere that do not affect SER; SER could actually save SmartTrack over a hundred million dollars in grade separations - in an urban area, grade separations can easily cost upwards of \$30 million each. Some would not be needed for just RER.

Scarborough ExpressRail FAQ

SER and RER/SmartTrack

22. Does RER have to be built first?

RER would have to be built concurrently. SmartTrack and RER have similar timelines for implementation, and SER piggybacks on SmartTrack work, just as SmartTrack piggybacks on RER work.

23. Who would operate SER?

Metrolinx. It is expected Metrolinx would have to operate SmartTrack as well since Metrolinx is the owner of the corridors and infrastructure.

24. Can the Stouffville GO corridor handle the train volume from SER as well as other demands?

Yes. Metrolinx upgrades for a modern signalling system can accommodate at least 10 trains an hour between Scarborough Centre and Union Station in addition to RER service. Once the SRT has been shut down, corridor capacity can be further increased.

25. Does SmartTrack require the high frequencies north of Ellesmere that need those grade separations?

No. Demand gets lower further north. Ten- or fifteen-minute service would be able to handle the ridership, confirmed by demand models.

26. Can Union Station handle the train volume from SER as well as other demands?

Yes, with modern operating practices at the station and some modest changes to the configuration, capacity can be increased significantly.

SER and the Relief Line

27. The Relief Line will provide alleviation to Line 1, how much alleviation to Line 1 would SER provide?

With SmartTrack every five minutes, the Relief Line would take 1,800 riders off Line 1 in the peak hour, and SER would offer similar benefits.

28. How do SER and the Relief Line affect Bloor-Yonge?

At Bloor-Yonge, adding the Relief Line to the network in addition to SmartTrack operating every five minutes diverts 1,400 riders in the peak hour, and SER is expected to have a similar impact.

Scarborough ExpressRail FAQ

SER Serving Scarborough

29. Where would the SER Scarborough Centre station be?

Between the Civic Centre and the YMCA, under Town Centre Court.

30. Does SER provide the needed support to make Scarborough Centre a vibrant urban node?

Yes. SER provides a very attractive service that can take people to or from Scarborough Centre farther and faster than the SSE, while insulating Scarborough Centre from capacity constraints on the inner parts of the overloaded TTC subway.

31. Will SER serve employment areas in Scarborough?

Yes. SER serves the employment areas of Scarborough Centre like the SSE, but SER does more than that. SER would serve the faculty jobs at the Centennial College Progress Campus, and the underdeveloped employment area on the north side of Highway 401 at Progress Avenue. Future extensions would serve additional employment areas (also underdeveloped) in Malvern and Morningside Heights.

32. Will SER serve educational areas in Scarborough?

Yes. SER would serve the Centennial College Progress Campus; The SSE is unable to do that. At Union Station, the George Brown College St James Campus would be within walking distance as well.

33. Does the SER concept affect the proposed Crosstown East LRT to UTSC?

No, but it is possible that the absence of construction-related activities along Eglinton from the SSE may allow the Crosstown East LRT to be built a little faster.

Scarborough ExpressRail FAQ

34. Can the SER be extended to north of the 401?

Yes, by using the corridor set aside for the previously proposed Scarborough LRT to Centennial College and Malvern, it would extend service to the "M1B" area of Scarborough, at a much better price than a subway extension. In addition to Progress Campus, later stations could include:

- Malvern Centre (Tapscott/McLevin)
- Finch/Neilson
- Morningside Heights (Passmore/Peterborough rail corridor)
- Extension through Markham along the Peterborough rail corridor

35. Does SER serve Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)?

Yes. Woburn, which has the NIA designation, is right beside Scarborough Centre, and the Progress Campus of Centennial College is also in Woburn. The Progress Campus station would also provide a connection to the southern edge of Malvern, which once was a Priority Investment Neighbourhood (predecessor of the current NIAs). The SmartTrack corridor connects more current and former NIAs to SER.

For More SER Information

36. How can I get more information?

Contact us at Ontario@transport-action.ca