



ADVOCATING FOR SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC
AND FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION
P.O. Box 6418 Station A, Toronto M5W 1X3
www.transport-action-ontario.com

March 2, 2014

Re: PW29.2 - Gardiner Expressway and Lake Shore Boulevard East Reconfiguration EA

To the Chair and Members of the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee:

Summary

Transport Action Ontario endorses the staff report and the recommendations therein.

Transport Action Ontario would also add the following points in support of staff's conclusions:

- "Remove" is the lowest NPV cost alternative, freeing up hundreds of millions of dollars for other infrastructure such as transit. "Remove" also brings in revenue from land sales.
- The Gardiner only affects 3% of downtown-bound traffic, and is therefore manageable.
- Regarding the "barrier" effect of the Gardiner and the railway corridor, the latter is a much less significant barrier as it does not involve ramps or channelized turns.
- For the 80% of drivers that take the Gardiner downtown, their travel time will increase by five to ten minutes. Ways to improve that would be the subject of future discussions.

Transport Action Ontario asks that staff be granted the authority to develop detailed design solutions associated with the "Remove" option for Council's future consideration.

Endorsement of Staff Report

Transport Action Ontario (previously Transport 2000 Ontario), a Non-Government Organization advocating sustainable transportation solutions that was represented on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, extends its support for the conclusions staff have published in their Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Gardiner East and support their recommendations for the removal of this elevated highway structure as written in the staff report before Committee.

It is worth highlighting from the staff report that "[a]n extensive consultation program and technical assessment of alternatives has found that the Remove option for the Gardiner East best meets the transportation and infrastructure, urban design, economics and environment objectives of the EA study." This is worth highlighting because transportation objectives were included in the assessment and staff concluded that the "Remove" option was the preferred alternative. Transport Action Ontario would also highlight staff's comments that "[t]he EA Terms of Reference are based on the City's Official Plan and Central Waterfront Secondary Plan policies to revitalize the waterfront and reconnect it to the City, balance modes of travel, achieve sustainability and create value." Notable by its inclusion is the balance of travel modes.

Justification

Staff have done an excellent job on a very challenging undertaking. Transport Action Ontario is pleased to have participated in this process and endorses staff's conclusions. Transport Action Ontario would also add the following points in support of staff's conclusions:

1. In terms of the economics, the “Remove” option is unquestionably the most fiscally conservative option. This is important because the undertaking is going to be on Toronto’s shoulders alone, without assistance from senior levels of government. It will be on Toronto’s shoulders despite a significant portion of the users along this infrastructure not being Toronto citizens, but citizens of surrounding municipalities that are not paying for this infrastructure. As a municipality with limited powers compared to senior levels of government, Toronto is inadequately equipped to look after this calibre of infrastructure. The cost of the “Remove” option not only frees up hundreds of millions of dollars in lifecycle maintenance for application to other infrastructure across the city, like transit, but the “Remove” option also brings in revenues from land sales as the Gardiner East footprint is partially used for redevelopment, substantially offsetting the net present value capital costs by at least one-third. For fiscal conservatives looking to keep capital and operating budgets under control, the “Remove” option shines.
2. The loss of the Gardiner East is not a crippling loss to the capacity of travel into and out of downtown. The EA study team clearly divided the demand of downtown access by route and mode, and found that only 3% of downtown-bound traffic was using the Gardiner East. At 3%, it is hardly a “major artery into the core.” The neighbourhoods did not deteriorate east of Leslie St when the Gardiner came down along that portion, and the same should be expected east of Lower Jarvis St. In fact, as an area that is booming with change already, the Gardiner East’s removal will open up increased economic activity and benefits in the local community from the resulting urban design opportunities associated with the “Remove” option. The EA study noted that a reconfigured corridor in the “Remove” option would yield improved traffic safety for both drivers and pedestrians as well.
3. There is debate about the “barrier” effect, a debate that inevitable leads to a reference to the railway corridor. The railway corridor is not as much of a barrier as the Gardiner East, because there are no expressway ramps between the railway tracks and Lake Shore Blvd. The channelized turns that are present along Lake Shore Blvd at its intersecting streets to connect the various ramps on and off the Gardiner East create an environment that is very intimidating to pedestrians, thereby acting as a barrier. In contrast, the railway corridor has no such relationships with pedestrians, and as a berm it can always have additional underpasses built through it that would be benign to pedestrians. The Gardiner, however, will be intimidating because of the pedestrian-vehicle interactions that exist beneath and beside it. As such, the urban design impact of the “Remove” option very much reduces the barrier to the waterfront, improving access by active transportation modes especially.
4. The travel time increases have been inaccurately reported by some in the media: Travel times do not increase by twenty minutes into downtown. For the 80% of drivers that take the Gardiner to reach downtown destinations, their travel time will increase by five to ten minutes. There are many ways that this may be improved, such as Intelligent Transportation Systems, traffic signal systems such as SCOOT, and other detailed design considerations of roadway configurations that would be the subject of future discussions at a later stage in the undertaking. Concerns that have been expressed by the Chair and others in the media about the “stroad” (a wide street/road hybrid) are reasonable, and are shared by Transport Action Ontario, but it must be emphasized that staff are not asking Committee and Council to approve the “stroad,” per Recommendation two (2) in the staff report.

Future Opportunities to Debate Design

Transport Action Ontario agrees with staff that deferral by Committee would be inappropriate. This item will be, if it has not already become, an election issue in any event. Should Council not be satisfied with the detailed design solutions that come forward later, the City could withdraw from the EA in 2015 and revert to the "Maintain" option at that time. Until that time, Transport Action Ontario asks Committee and Council to grant staff the authority they need to develop detailed design solutions associated with the "Remove" option for Committee and Council's future consideration.

Sincerely,

Karl Junkin
Gardiner East Stakeholder Advisory Committee Representative
Transport Action Ontario