

June 5, 2015

Re: Gardiner East Environmental Assessment alternatives

Dear Mayor John Tory and Toronto City Councillors,

I am writing to you today about the decision that City Council will be making at its June 10/11, 2015 meeting on the preferred Gardiner East Environmental Assessment (EA) alternative.

Who We Are

The Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) is a project of the registered charity Clean Air Partnership. TCAT's mission is to advance knowledge and evidence to build support for safe and inclusive streets for walking and cycling.

The Two Options

At its special meeting on May 13, 2015 the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee recommended either:

- 1) remove 1.7 kilometres of the elevated Gardiner East expressway and replace with a tree-lined boulevard, for an estimated cost of \$461 million, or
- 2) retain the continuous elevated expressway linkage to the DVP, estimated at \$919 million.

An Evaluation of the Two Options from the Perspective of Pedestrians and Cyclists

From the perspective of mobility for people who walk and bike, the first option - to remove the eastern portion of the Gardiner expressway and replace it with a Boulevard is the far superior solution. This is based on the extensive research conducted within the Environmental Assessment report, as well as best practices in road safety, walkability, and cycling.

First and foremost, I would like to highlight that **in every aspect of the EA report, the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option is better for:**

- **road safety**, not only for pedestrians and cyclists, but also motorists, and
- **pedestrians**

More detail is provided below on the specific design elements of the Optimized Remove/Boulevard that will provide a better environment for cyclists and pedestrians:

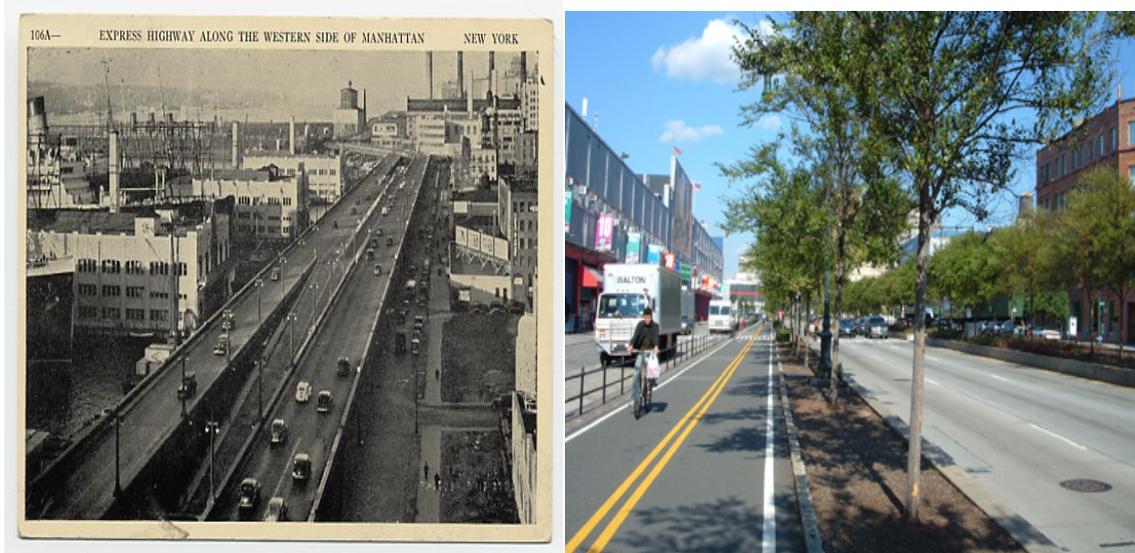
- **Eliminating visual barriers:** Current conditions along Lake Shore Boulevard are unsafe for everyone, particularly pedestrians, with the columns that support the elevated expressway creating a visual barrier. From 2009-2013, the intersection at Jarvis Street and Lake Shore Boulevard was the most dangerous in the city in terms of total number of collisions, relative to traffic volume; while the intersection of the Don Roadway and Lake Shore had the second highest number of collisions relative to traffic volume over this period. By choosing the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option, sight lines would increase as the Gardiner columns would not be present.

- **Safer crossing distances:** For pedestrians, safety would be enhanced by normalized intersections and shorter crossing lengths. It has been indicated that the crossing distance for the Optimized Remove/Boulevard alternative ranges from 25-39 metres and 25-55 metres for the hybrid option (Dillon Consulting Limited, et al., 2015).
- **Eliminating dangerous free flow right turns:** For both pedestrians and cyclists, safety would be improved as the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option would eliminate all free flow right turns thus significantly reducing conflict with vulnerable road users (Dillon Consulting Limited, Morrison Harshfield, HR&A, & CPCS, 2015).
- **Creating thousands of kilometres of new sidewalks:** Building the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option would allow for sidewalks to be constructed to city standards along the entire length of Lake Shore Boulevard, on both the north and south sides. This option would allow for 5,600 total linear metres of city standard sidewalks, while the Hybrid option is only able to achieve 2,700 total linear metres of sidewalks due to physical constraints (Dillon Consulting Limited, et al., 2015).
- **Creating a more vibrant built form:** The Optimized Remove/Boulevard option would provide more opportunities for mixed-use development, in keeping with the city's Official Plan, and other relevant planning documents. Specifically, since the elevated structure is removed, it would allow for approximately 80% of corridor space for retail and other various uses versus 15% of corridor space for the hybrid alternative (Dillon Consulting Limited, et al., 2015).
- The **public realm** would also be much improved, with more opportunities for better streetscaping, usable public realm area. Combined, the potential for urban design improvements with the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option can create a much more attractive and welcoming environment for people who walk and bike.
- The **environment and health** of people visiting the area will also be much better served by the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option, as shown by both the EA report (Dillon Consulting Limited, et al., 2015), as well as the Medical Officer of Health's report on the subject (2015).
- **Expanding our tree canopy:** The Optimized Remove/Boulevard option allows for a 52% tree canopy, far exceeding the 12% estimated tree canopy possible with the Hybrid, and the difference between exceeding and falling well short of the City's tree canopy targets. Trees are associated with many elements of an improved pedestrian experience, including absorption of noise and pollution.

Overall, the evidence shows that the Optimized Remove/Boulevard option is superior for protecting our most vulnerable road users: pedestrians and cyclists.

To conclude, the two images below illustrate Westside Highway in New York City before and after demolition. The demolition of the Westside Highway opened up an opportunity to improve West Street, (which was directly underneath the elevated West Side Highway) into a more pedestrian

and bicycle friendly environment. The removal of the Gardiner East offers us a similar opportunity in Toronto to build a legacy we can all be proud of.



Westside Side Highway, New York City, Before and After Demolition (Source: The Preservation Institute)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Nancy Smith Lea, Director
Toronto Centre for Active Transportation,
Clean Air Partnership

References:

1. Dillon Consulting Limited, Morrison Hershfield, HR&A, CPCS (2015, May). Gardiner Expressway and Lake Shore Boulevard East Reconfiguration Environmental Assessment and Urban Design Study; Interim Report – Addendum. Retrieved from <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/pw/bgrd/backgroundfile-79867.pdf>
2. Medical Officer of Health (2015, May 15). Rapid Health Impact Assessment on the Alternative Solutions for the Gardiner Expressway and Lake Shore Boulevard East Reconfiguration. Retrieved from <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-80375.pdf>
3. Garrick, N & Billings, J. (n.d). Case Studies of the Access and Mobility Impact of Freeway Removal. Retrieved from <http://www.crcog.org/publications/TransportationDocs/Viaduct/CS-UConnGradResearch.pdf>