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## **Proposed diesel rail expansion in Georgetown South Corridor predicted to increase health risk**

Toronto's Medical Officer of Health (MOH), Dr. David McKeown, supports expanded public transit as a means to reduce individual vehicle traffic, but remains concerned about the increased health risks and air quality impacts predicted to occur with the proposed diesel rail expansion in Georgetown South Corridor. Studies conducted by the proponent Metrolinx clearly indicate an increase in these risks. Electrification of the proposed rail line is the mitigation option that most clearly addresses the predicted air quality and health impacts. Whether other mitigation options could reduce the predicted air quality and health impacts to an acceptable level remains to be demonstrated.

### **What is the Georgetown South Service Expansion and Union-Pearson Rail Link?**

Metrolinx, the former Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, plans a number of improvements to the GO Georgetown South corridor to accommodate increased GO Transit traffic. Metrolinx also plans a separate spur line from the Georgetown Corridor to the airport, which will be used by a private carrier to provide the Union-Pearson Rail Link service. Total train traffic on the corridor is projected to increase from the current rate of about 50 trains daily to approximately 250 to 450 trains per day.

### **Will the trains be diesel or electric?**

Metrolinx' current plans are to use diesel trains for this project. Metrolinx has stated in its report *The Big Move* that electrification of the Georgetown South Corridor is part of their long term plan.

### **Why does the Medical Officer of Health think that the trains should be electrified?**

Diesel trains emit diesel exhaust, which has known adverse health effects. The higher diesel train volumes proposed by Metrolinx would result in increased air pollution and health risk in adjacent communities. By contrast, electric trains do not produce direct air pollution emissions, and are therefore desirable from a public health perspective. Electrification would protect public health by mitigating the local air quality and health impacts of the proposed project. Metrolinx has not shown that their proposed mitigation measures will provide a similar level of health protection.

### **What are the predicted health impacts of the Metrolinx proposal?**

Metrolinx's studies predict that local air concentrations of pollutants would increase, and that some pollutants would exceed their maximum threshold concentrations at some times in some locations. The assessments also predict increased risks of irritation (respiratory, eye or throat irritation) throughout the study area during peak air pollution events. This means those local residents who already experience coughing and wheezing on poor air quality days can be expected to experience these symptoms more often, and that other local residents may begin to experience these symptoms.

The Medical Officer of Health is also concerned about exposure to diesel exhaust because it has been identified as a probable human carcinogen by several agencies including the International Agency for Research on Cancer. In particular, exposure to diesel exhaust has been associated with lung cancer.

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## Metrolinx backgrounder

### **Why is leukemia risk no longer predicted?**

The scientific community has recently determined that exposure to 1,3-butadiene, which is one of the carcinogens contained in diesel exhaust from trains, is less harmful than was previously thought.

Metrolinx' assessment has been updated to reflect the new consensus of the scientific community on this chemical. In revised calculations submitted to the Minister of the Environment, the maximum predicted leukemia risk for 1,3-butadiene associated with the Georgetown South Corridor expansion is now below the one-in-one million excess cancer risk threshold. As a result, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health has indicated his agreement that there is no longer a concern of increased leukemia risk associated with the proposed project.

### **Where can I get more information?**

More information on Toronto Public Health's position on this issue can be found at [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health). Metrolinx' Environmental Project Report can be accessed at: <http://www.metrolinx.com/gsse/default.aspx>.