

CanU

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To: Toronto City Council

RE: Toronto's Gardiner Expressway East

Robert Freedman, MRAIC, AICP, LSUC
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The Council for Canadian Urbanism (CanU) is a national non-profit information and advocacy group incorporated in 2009. CanU was founded by and includes many of Canada's leading urban experts, from the fields of city planning, urban design, architecture, landscape architecture, transportation, community development and related disciplines.

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We are writing to share our organization's perspectives and draw attention to a matter of utmost importance to the success of Canadian cities: the decisions being made around aging urban expressways in Canadian cities. Today, the conversation is triggered by the debate on options for Toronto's Gardiner Expressway East. This is a debate that is echoed in cities coast to coast.

Alexandru Taranu, FCIP, MRAIC, OAA
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Many Canadian cities are currently faced with aging elevated expressways, particularly along their waterfronts and in their downtown areas. Examples include: Toronto's Gardiner Expressway East, Montreal's Turcot Interchange, Vancouver's Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts (Vancouver having never built urban expressways), Halifax's Cogswell Interchange, Ottawa's Nicholas expressway and King Edward Ave, and many others.

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In fact, cities around the world are successfully reinventing and revitalizing their urban environments by removing expressways. Examples include: Portland's removal of the Harbour Drive Freeway; Chattanooga's conversion of the Riverfront Parkway from a four-lane expressway to a boulevard and park; San Francisco's removal of the upper deck of the Central Freeway (1996) and replacing the Embarcadero Freeway with a boulevard (1989); New York's removal of traffic from Broadway in Midtown (2010) and the replacement of the elevated West Side Highway with a boulevard in the decades after it collapsed; Seoul removed the Cheonggye elevated expressway and the road beneath it, replacing them with a riverside park (2005); and others in Madrid, Oslo, and so on.

Given their age, many of these expressways are at a critical state, where significant investment/maintenance is required — so, cities are being forced to make a decision regarding their future.

CanU: Council for Canadian urbanism/Conseil canadien d'urbanisme

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As a national organization, CanU recognizes a tremendous opportunity for Canadian cities to reinvest in and revitalize their waterfronts, downtowns and inner cities by seizing the moment and re-committing to a more successful city-building agenda.

We recognize a generational opportunity to shift the planning of our cities from an expensive, generally unsuccessful car-oriented paradigm, to one that is people-oriented, healthy, vibrant, economically successful, socially supportive, and more environmentally sustainable.

We write this letter as a call to action, inviting community and political leaders, design professionals, urbanists, and the residents of Canadian cities to have higher aspirations for our cities, for the character of our waterfronts, for the quality of life in our neighbourhoods, for public transit and alternative modes of transportation, and to prioritize people-places.

Toronto's Gardiner Expressway East is reflective of this national conversation. In Toronto, two main options are being considered.

1. An expensive 'hybrid' option that, in our view, maintains the failed car-oriented paradigm by providing only incremental changes to the existing transportation system.
2. The second option, the 'remove' option, seeks to transform the area of the city into a more walkable, livable, economically successful and welcoming environment for residents, workers, investors, and visitors. In doing so, it will save significant amounts of public money, both initially, and dramatically more-so when full cost accounting is considered. As Toronto embarks on truly transforming how people move across the city and region – reducing car-dependency in favour of transit and alternative modes of transportation – decisions such as these must be congruent with the future we aspire to, not hindered by repeating the same choices we are now trying to overcome.

We note that the City's Chief Planner has expressed support for the 'remove' option and we support and agree with her reasoning. We remain hopeful that a successful removal outcome in Toronto will have positive repercussions and will exemplify a positive approach for other cities across Canada.

Yours respectfully,

The Council for Canadian Urbanism

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