



Office of the Dean
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June 8, 2015

Dear Mayor Tory and Members of Toronto City Council:

The attached letter articulates our position in support of removing the eastern portion of the Gardiner Expressway and creating an urban boulevard in its place.

The letter is signed by a majority of my colleagues at the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, including myself and my two predecessors as Dean (representing almost 20 years of leadership at our Faculty). The Directors of our programs in Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Visual Studies, Architectural Studies, and Urban Design have also signed.

We are joined by several senior academic experts and leaders across the University of Toronto, including the Deans of The Dalla Lana School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Forestry, Faculty of Arts and Science, and Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education. Our letter has also been signed by the Directors of the Munk School of Global Affairs, Centre For Landscape Research, Green Roof Innovation Testing Laboratory, Martin Prosperity Institute, School of Public Policy and Governance, and the School of the Environment.

The Daniels Faculty typically takes an advisory, consciousness-building approach to complex city projects such as this. Yet, our Faculty has historically intervened at critical junctures in Toronto's history, including in the design of the current City Hall, and the saving of the old City Hall, stopping the Spadina Expressway, and more recently against political attempts to scrap our Portlands planning process. We have studied Toronto, the waterfront, and the transit and Gardiner expressway challenges that the city has faced, and will face, over many years. Given our understanding of the planning, design, and city-building questions at stake in the current debate, we believe a more direct approach is warranted today.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Sommer

Dean

Professor of Architecture & Urbanism

John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design

George Baird

Professor Emeritus

(and former Dean)

Larry Wayne Richards

Professor Emeritus

(and former Dean)



June 8, 2015

To The Mayor and Members of Council:

We are writing because we believe that the impending decision concerning the fate of the Gardiner Expressway will have profound and lasting consequences for the future of our city.

The Gardiner debate is about much more than impacts on congestion from one single route and mode of travel into our city. The decision you are about to make strikes at the heart of the direction our city is taking as it attempts to shift to a more livable and sustainable future. We must act to improve access and mobility for all of our citizens, and to preserve and enhance our waterfront, perhaps our city's most invaluable and irreplaceable physical resource.

A better-connected, green, more open, active, and beautiful waterfront is a benefit for ALL the citizens of Toronto. Our central waterfront and downtown are not just for those who reside in their immediate environs. As our region intensifies, and our population becomes more diverse and urban in character, we must think of the tens of thousands of citizens – and more to come – for whom the waterfront is the “cottage.”

Our view is that the “hybrid” option is in reality a revamped “wolf” expressway in costly “sheep’s clothing.” We are not swayed by the automobile traffic studies that calculate impacts according to very narrowly focused criteria and fail to consider important external factors. These analyses also fail to take the real scope of the problem, and the broad benefits of a more holistic solution, into proper perspective. Phenomena affecting human health and the environment such as carbon emissions, air quality, our ability to encourage commuter behaviors that engage other modes of urban mobility, and the value of the space created by removing the expressway must all be built into the equation.

Better research, conducted internationally on the impact of highway removal tells a more complete and convincing story. Studies have shown that urban highways have been successfully removed to great benefit. Examples include the removal of Harbor Drive in Portland, Cheonggyecheon in Seoul, The Embarcadero in San Francisco, and Park East Freeway in Milwaukee. New York City dispensed with its elevated west-side highway a generation ago and has reaped incredible benefits from the development and recreational use of adjacent areas ever since.

We urge you to consider the limited impact of changing the commuting pattern and travel habits of a small percentage of the population who commute downtown on the current Gardiner route. The convenience for a few, including those who can afford a car and pay the price of parking downtown, must be measured against the gains to the quality of life and working atmosphere for a greater diversity of citizens, business interests, and visitors to our city. We need to make a decision that is going to be transformative for the overall functioning and character of Toronto. The creation of a stellar new urban boulevard will change the experience and feel of our city, and, just as critically, enhance its image and status in the national and international arenas in which we must now compete.

Elevated highways were a short-lived 20th century solution to improving mobility in cities and have brought as many problems with their single purpose structures as they have solutions. It is inconceivable that we would fail to seize this 21st century opportunity to commit ourselves to a new idea of mobility, openness, and access while at the same time using our scarce resources to better advantage.

Our waterfront is already riddled by a long history of poor decisions and misshapen infrastructure, born too often of politically motivated compromises and half-measures! We call on you to provide the necessary leadership to make a decision like those made by dozens of progressive cities around the world that are liberating their waterfronts and other areas from badly conceived highways. These cities have suffered none of the dire consequences that are being predicted in this debate.

Let's not expend our precious resources on fixing the wrong problem. Instead, let's pool our most valuable assets – our energy, talent, and the good will of our citizens — to create a magnificent new connection to our waterfront and shared public amenity for the City of Toronto.

If you are brave enough to make the right choice, opting for city-building over stagnation in this debate, the undersigned pledge our wholehearted support to help build this vision.

Sincerely,



Richard M. Sommer
Dean
Professor of Architecture & Urbanism
John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design



George Baird
Professor Emeritus (and former Dean)



Larry Wayne Richards
Professor Emeritus (and former Dean)

University of Toronto Leaders

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