

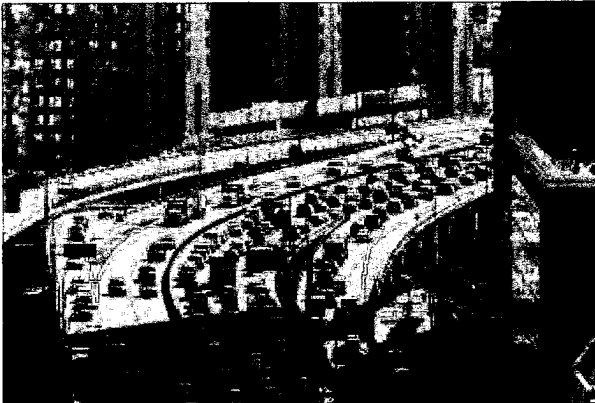
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**Opinion / Commentary**

**We need a win-win solution for the Gardiner East**

Toronto needs a true hybrid alignment of the Gardiner East that keeps traffic flowing and develops the Waterfront.



MARCUS OLENIUK / TORONTO STAR

Neither option currently before council for what to do about the Gardiner is acceptable, writes Eric Miller.

**By:**Eric Miller Published on Tue Jun 09 2015

Once you strip away the considerable hyperbole surrounding the Gardiner East debate, it's really about the future of Waterfront Toronto. The waterfront is evolving into a jewel in our crown, and we must not fail in this endeavour.

The proposed "hybrid" option for rebuilding the Gardiner East would remove 12 acres of developable land along the northern edge of Keating Precinct. To avoid this loss, the "remove" option proposes to replace the Gardiner East between Jarvis St. and the Don Valley Parkway with a rebuilt and expanded Lake Shore Blvd.

This option *will* reduce our capacity for moving people and goods; the impact on our transportation system will be negative. Under dispute is the extent of this impact. Many argue that the expanded Lake Shore can handle the traffic without excessive additional congestion and additional delays will be small and acceptable.

These are convenient assumptions, but unfortunately they don't stand up to scrutiny. Several negative impacts that the remove option would have on transportation have not received adequate attention:

- Road *and* transit access to the downtown south of Bloor is extremely constrained from both the west (High Park) and in the east by the Don and the railway corridor, limiting the system's "carrying capacity" into the downtown. The decision to reduce capacity is a very serious one. We will build more transit capacity but this will have limits as well.

- Commercial movements have been almost completely ignored. The downtown cannot function without excellent truck/van access to provide the massive amount of goods and services it needs. As the waterfront and the downtown continue to grow these needs will only increase.
- Considerable confusion exists concerning the difference between total lifetime costs (\$595 million more for the hybrid) versus the net present value (NPV) costs (\$195 million more for the hybrid). Skipping the technical discussion, NPV values are the only economically rational basis for decision-making. A cost of \$195 million is not trivial, but it also is not the solution to our transit woes. This debate is *not* about favouring the car at the expense of transit.
- Most important is the additional travel delay that the options generate. The city's environmental assessment report estimated that the remove option will generate an additional average weekday morning peak-hour total delay relative to the hybrid option of 1,016 hours. Expanding this to a daily total under conservative assumptions yields just over 5,000 hours of additional travel delay.

If we attach a conservative "value of time" of \$20 an hour, this yields a cost of \$100,000 per weekday. Expanding this using the EA's analysis assumptions yields a transportation net-present-value loss of \$620 million. We can quibble about assumptions and modelling errors, but this sum is so large that the result is undeniable: the remove option transportation costs vastly exceed all other quantifiable costs. They are *not* negligible and must be included in the debate.

But while the transportation costs of the remove option are truly substantial and cannot be dismissed, the urban development costs of the hybrid option are also substantial and are judged by many to be unacceptable.

So what to do? Clearly neither current option is acceptable. We require a true hybrid alignment of the Gardiner East that:

- Preserves the network connectivity that the downtown needs.
- Avoids the construction of a compromised Lake Shore Blvd. that will be overwhelmed by traffic.
- Saves the Keating Precinct lands for optimized development.

The city's EA report says this cannot be done, and so presented a hybrid option that has been criticized as unimaginative and inadequate. This is simply not good enough.

There have been many calls for us to be bold and imaginative. I agree. But this should mean that transportation accessibility and urban development go together and that good urban design optimizes both, not one at the expense of the other.

I suggest that city council request a solution that meets the criteria set out above. And that it immediately commission an international design competition among the world's leading engineering and urban design firms to develop feasible solutions to this problem.

The city's EA report indicates that there are non-trivial technical obstacles to achieving this outcome. But I cannot believe they are insurmountable. Let's for once work together, with imagination and determination, to find the win-win solution that will not only resolve this issue but provide a template for moving forward elsewhere. Now that would be a "world class" outcome.