



6-June-2023

To: City of Toronto Executive Committee  
From: Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative  
Re: Request City Support in Principle for Reassessing Infrastructure Alternatives to ECWE Bridge

Dear Deputy Mayor McKelvie, Executive Committee Members, Councillor Nunziata, Mr. Toigo and staff,

My name is Rick Ciccarelli, a York South Weston resident. I am a community volunteer representing the Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative (MDeNI), our local grassroots climate action partnership-building effort with the Mount Dennis Community Association. Both MDeNI and MDCA are members of the local indigenous led coalition opposing the Elevated Guideway across what is known as Eglinton Flats, but I am not here to speak on behalf of the transit coalition or its partners.

Today's deputation concerns the Mount Dennis – Scarlett Segment of the Eglinton Crosstown Western Extension (ECWE). It responds to background information provided to you in report EX5.3 contained in the May 23, 2023 Report from the Executive Director, Transit Expansion on Update on Metrolinx Subways Program - Second Quarter 2023. My comments address Community Engagement, Indigenous Relations, and Impacts and Design. There are several next steps proposed for consideration of Council and staff.

## 1. Community Engagement

When the initial process to review of infrastructure engineering alternatives was set up by Metrolinx, MDCA was informed that the working committee was for the Etobicoke segment, and that there would be a subsequent review of alternatives to cross from Etobicoke to Mount Dennis station once the initial segment plan was determined. Despite our continual reminder to Metrolinx and its Eglinton Crosstown West Extension team, this commitment has been intentionally by-passed and our community has been presented with a pre-determined infrastructure design plan with a "Metrolinx Knows Best" attitude.

Given Metrolinx history in transit infrastructure planning in the Mount Dennis community (and elsewhere), we do not trust its expedited timeline as delivering the expected design excellence for sustainable transit. The "world class bridge" promised us by Metrolinx's internationally renowned urban planning consultant for the connection from the Crosstown's Keele portal to Mount Dennis Station has the park-edge aesthetics of a 401 off-ramp, and the environmental damage done to the previously forested Black Creek western embankment continues to demand attention. This is only part of a lengthy community experience of public infrastructure intentionally designed to make the urban area more sustainable, but not living up to its designed purpose.

The Mount Dennis community dispute with Metrolinx ECWE Design Stage Community Engagement process was raised to the level of City Council and to Metrolinx Board last year. Since then, we have

made every effort to engage Metrolinx to set in place a collaborative review process so the needed adjustments can be made and transit construction can proceed in a timely and budget conscious way. Instead, “Metrolinx Knows Best” continues, and Building Transit Faster Act authority plus interagency budget transfer incentives are encouraging the buy-in of City Forestry and Toronto Region Conservation Authority. Despite this chain of legal authority and potential for intergovernmental funding, we continue to ask for the City to act on behalf of our local community in dealing with the very serious problem of Metrolinx’s community engagement failures in infrastructure project planning.

## **2. Local Indigenous Relations**

The river known as the Humber has particular significance to indigenous peoples as well as to the governance history of establishing a system of land ownership at the beginning of colonial settlement. Eglinton Avenue’s crossing through the flood plain and the Carrying Place heritage of Humber River has a fundamental connection to first peoples and Crown history in acquiring and using lands. The importance of the area cannot be understated.

Work has been happening along the riverside for a number of years involving various native peoples in plantings and cultural education in the Mount Dennis area. We have most recently spent two years in attempting to make connections happen between Metrolinx ECWE planners and our local indigenous colleagues, with hope for it offering a place for planning input and local action on reconciliation.

Instead, Metrolinx has refused to act in any meaningful way on the underlying need for building local relationships with urban native peoples for this important transit connection. This has become increasingly visible as a failure in need of being re-addressed, as the indigenous-led community coalition is active in support of raising several tipis and placekeeping for cultural ceremony for protection of nature.

We are now at a place in the dialogue where within the coming week, Metrolinx head of Indigenous Relations is to arrange a meeting with the lead representative of the indigenous-led community coalition opposing the ECWE bridge. The Coalition, now led by a representative of the American Indian Movement, involves ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency, Turtle Island Carers of Fire, Edge of the Bush, Stop the Trains in Our Parks, Mount Dennis Community Association and Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Association.

## **3. Reassessment of Impacts and Collaborative Redesign**

As City staff and the Toronto Transit Expansion Office were aware since summer of 2022, Mount Dennis community representatives have asked Metrolinx for a separate community working group process to undertake a review of the impacts of the main infrastructure alternatives for connecting across Eglinton Flats and the River between the existing Tunnel 1 and proposed Tunnel 2 projects. The indigenous led coalition has since called upon Metrolinx to reassess the alternatives by reviewing impacts using an indigenous lens.

We all are in agreement that we want to build transit infrastructure, and recognize that construction effects will occur regardless of whichever alternative. However, the priority concern of the coalition on environmental sustainability is being downplayed by Metrolinx as it justifies its past decision-making on infrastructure design for ECWE.

Part of the rationale of the single-minded approach to implement a bridge is the flood risk presented by the prospect of a severe weather event affecting the Eglinton Flats flood plain. Yet, in our awareness, no detailed analysis has been done on local ways to solve the localized issue. Surely, transit service running across a bridge would be put on hold during an extreme weather event. Flood

risk maps indicate water ponding in two spots, one on Jane north of Eglinton and one on Eglinton west of Jane. Given this issue impacts emergency vehicles as well as the functioning of the traffic corridor including TTC Jane Priority Bus line improvements as well as TTC buses, both district and local service routes that use Eglinton as well as Jane, we strongly recommend the flood risk situation deserves a second look. If the matter does get examined more carefully, perhaps Metrolinx and the City can remove their transit blinders and consider using other approaches than the bridge for this segment.

**4. Next steps**

We await the upcoming meeting with the American Indian Movement representative of the local coalition and the Metrolinx Indigenous Relations Senior Manager, through which we expect to learn about Metrolinx' latest proposal for a win-win solution.

Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative asks for the City to consider supporting our community efforts to independently assess alternative infrastructure design impacts using an indigenous lens and to build community-based knowledge. This includes making technical assistance available.

We also ask for the City to support our community efforts through addressing the Eglinton Flats flood risk issue affecting at grade TTC buses, Police, Fire, Ambulance and other emergency response vehicles.

Respectfully,

Rick Ciccarelli

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