

March 13, 2023

Deputy (Acting) Mayor Jennifer McKelvie and City Councillors  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen St. W.  
Toronto, ON  
M5H 2N2

Dear Deputy (Acting) Mayor McKelvie and City Councillors,

***Re: An updated account of costs and foregone revenues for Gardiner Expressway rebuild***

The challenges facing our city provide a compelling rationale for an updated account of the projected costs, and foregone revenues, of the decision to rebuild the eastern Gardiner Expressway. The budget shortfall and troubling issues of poverty, affordable housing, and the climate crisis today rank far higher in priority than in June 2015 when council approved, by a narrow margin, the rebuilding of the eastern Gardiner.

***Updating actual costs of the rebuild, and lost opportunities for new revenues***

Toronto's ten-year capital budget allocates \$2,000,000,000 for the Gardiner Expressway, including the re-building of the eastern Gardiner with a new, elevated highway link to the Don Valley Parkway (DVP). (The location of the new connection, further to the north, was approved in March 2016.) The \$2 billion is in addition to amounts already spent to refurbish deteriorated sections of the eastern Gardiner between Jarvis and Cherry Streets.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the current budget shortfall, estimated at \$1.4 billion (subject to federal and provincial contributions) --- and the funding constraints it entails for other community priorities --- prudent fiscal management demands an up-to-date accounting not only for the cost of the re-built eastern Gardiner but for the comparative cost of an at-grade connection between the expressways via Lakeshore Blvd East, articulated as the "boulevard" option, and recommended by

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013, council approved repairs to Gardiner from Lower Jarvis to Cherry St, part of a broader repair project.

city staff, during the original debate. Based on available information, the cost of the eastern Gardiner rebuild, including the new link, entails far larger costs, and lost revenues, relative to the boulevard option:

- higher one-time construction costs, amounting to as much as \$500 million<sup>2</sup>;
- loss of land sale revenues and development charges of an estimated \$450 million (or more if sold gradually) by freeing up an additional 5.4 acres of land<sup>3</sup>;
- higher long-term maintenance and operating costs for the elevated expressway; and
- loss of property tax revenues that could be generated from new developments.

Since contracts for the rebuild have yet to be tendered, this is an opportune time to evaluate the construction costs and the foregone revenues. In fact, since the piecemeal repair of the Gardiner will lock the city into a waterfront expressway for generations, it is also an opportune time to fully evaluate the long-term costs of, and alternatives to, the Gardiner.

### ***Changing circumstances require up-to-date information***

“The climate crisis grows more urgent every year,” declares the city’s updated [TransformTO Net Zero Strategy](#). The U.N. Secretary General recently sounded a similar alarm: “We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator.” In its climate plans and policies, including its 2019 declaration of a climate emergency, the city recognizes the urgency of action and the need to reduce the 36% of the city’s GHG emissions from transportation. The city has committed to convert to walking, cycling, and transit 75% of all trips under 5km by 2030.

Several mass transit investments that in 2015 were largely prospective are today shovel-in-the-ground projects. The Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway, and the Finch and Eglinton LRTs will soon require patrons instead of competition from cars. As well, a waterfront LRT may soon supplement GO train service along the

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<sup>2</sup> Toronto’s former chief planner, Paul Bedford, and architect Ken Greenberg: [For Toronto’s future, we need to tear down the Gardiner Expressway.](#) *Toronto Star*, May 11, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Bozickovic, “John Tory doesn’t want to discuss the Gardiner Expressway - but Toronto should,” *Globe & Mail*, Oct 19, 2022. The land could potentially house 15,000 people, citing planning and architecture firm Smart Density.

lakeshore. And yet the massive investment, and loss of revenues, from re-building the eastern Gardiner will only serve a tiny percentage of morning commuters into the downtown – an estimated 3% of commuters.<sup>4</sup> By comparison transit already delivers 68% of morning commuters into downtown.

The many thousands of new residents who will soon join the thousands of people who already live along the waterfront will also want an updated account.<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that the composition of city council has changed significantly since 2015, with many new faces and new priorities.<sup>6</sup>

***Our call for an account in current dollars of the eastern Gardiner rebuild***

City Council is entitled to pursue past decisions and budget allocations, but we believe the mayor and councillors are also obliged to prudently manage the city's fiscal resources and to disclose the updated financial implications of their decisions.

**We therefore urge you, prior to signing new contracts for the Gardiner, to assess and report, in a clear and comprehensible manner the current projected cost, and foregone revenues of alternatives, to rebuild the eastern Gardiner Expressway, including the associated long-term maintenance costs. This investment of effort is both timely and small given the massive financial commitment involved and the limits it places on spending for other urgent priorities facing our city.**

Sincerely,

Signatories:

*(continued on the next page)*

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<sup>4</sup> WaterfrontToronto and City of Toronto: [“Backgrounder: Gardiner Expressway East / Lake Shore Boulevard Reconfiguration Environmental Assessment and Integrated Urban Design Study \(EA\).”](#) 2014. TTC: 49%; GO Transit: 19%; walk/cycle: 4%; western Gardiner: 4%; and other roads: 21%.

<sup>5</sup> Toronto Public Health, Rapid Health Impact Assessment, May 2015: teardown-boulevard option “expected to provide more health benefits overall and fewer adverse health impacts compared with the hybrid alternative.”

<sup>6</sup> Only 12 of 44 councillors, or 25%, of the councillors who made the original Gardiner decision remain in place.

*32 Spokes, a Beaches-East York Road Safety Advocacy Group*  
*ABC Residents' Association (ABCRA)*  
*Association for Canadian Education Resources*  
*Carbon Conversations TO*  
*Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) - Toronto*  
*Climate Action for Lifelong Learners (CALL)*  
*Climate Pledge Collective*  
*ClimateFast*  
*Community Bikeways (TCBC)*  
*Cycle Don Valley Midtown*  
*David Suzuki Foundation*  
*Ecologos/Water Docs*  
*Etobicoke Climate Action*  
*Federation of North Toronto Residents Associations (FoNTRA)*  
*Federation of South Toronto Residents' Associations (FoSTRA)*  
*For Our Kids Toronto*  
*Friends and Families for Safe Streets (FFSS)*  
*Green 11*  
*Green 13*  
*Greenspiration*  
*Lytton Park Residents' Organization (LPRO)*  
*MobilizeTO*  
*Parkdale High Park for Climate Action*  
*Plant Based Treaty*  
*PlasticFree Toronto*  
*RideFair*  
*Safe Parkside*  
*Seniors for Climate Action Now!*  
*StopPlastics*  
*TTCriders*  
*Toronto East End Climate Collective (TEECC)*  
*Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA)*  
*Toronto Climate Save*  
*Toronto Health Save*  
*Toronto350*  
*Transport Action Ontario*  
*Walk Toronto*

*Yonge4All*