



## **TE10.40 - Metrolinx's Ontario Line Construction within the Toronto and East York District - First Quarter Update**

January 24, 2024

Dear Members of the Toronto & East York Community Council,

We are writing to express our concerns related to the Metrolinx Ontario Line First Quarter update on community benefits in the attached City staff report.

The TCBN has participated in previous City of Toronto public meetings and the Subcommittee for the Ontario Line to share the importance of a Community Benefits Agreement as part of the Ontario Line that follows best practices and standards set on previous provincial infrastructure projects and which aligns with the approach set by the municipal City of Toronto Community Benefits Framework. We applaud Toronto City Council for its continued leadership in calling on Metrolinx and the Province to work with the City and TCBN to formalize a Community Benefits Agreement as part of the Ontario Line project.

Unfortunately, while the \$18B dollar publicly funded Ontario Line project activities have commenced and more contracts are awarded, we have yet to see follow through from Metrolinx on our expectations for a Community Benefits Agreement.

As such, we would like to request the City of Toronto urgently investigate this issue and provide further analysis on our community benefits concerns and we would like to work with the City of Toronto on exploring options to escalate this issue with Metrolinx, relevant provincial ministries and federal government if necessary.

### **About Community Benefits Agreements**

Community Benefits Agreements are a mechanism that are supposed to enhance public transparency and accountability with targeted commitments to local and equity hiring that ensure Black, Indigenous and equity deserving groups, who are underrepresented in the construction sector, have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the development of public infrastructure in their communities.

Through this approach, our network has supported over 2,000 individuals from historically disadvantaged communities and equity seeking groups into good jobs and careers in the construction industry on large public infrastructure and development projects like the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, Finch West LRT, Casino Woodbine and West Park Healthcare Centre. Local communities have also identified opportunities to secure additional benefits including local and



social procurement opportunities and other neighbourhood and environmental improvements like the Jane-Finch land transfer for a future Community Hub and Centre for the Arts.

Over the past three years, TCBN has been advocating that Metrolinx uphold this standard in maximizing high quality jobs to deliver local economic benefits and social value in neighbourhoods who will be severely impacted by transit construction.

In 2021, as part of the federal government project funding announcement, it outlined that federal funding is dependent on satisfying conditions including:

*Measures to maximize high quality jobs and benefits for communities including through mechanisms such as Community Benefit Agreements with hiring targets of at least 10% for historically disadvantaged communities, equity-seeking groups, Black, Indigenous and people of colour, with possible higher targets based on an assessment of local representation;*

### **Lack of Follow Through from Metrolinx on Community Benefits Agreement**

In a 2021 letter from Metrolinx CEO Phil Verster to TCBN, there were numerous commitments including the following:

- 1. Updated RFP and contract requirements for Apprenticeship and Workforce Development Plans (AWDPs) that include quantified targets to meet agreed upon hiring targets for historically disadvantaged communities and equity seeking groups, including 10% Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour; 10% Women.*
- 2. Updated RFP and contract requirements to include planned submissions requiring contractors to implement an anti-racism strategy and method of communication with Metrolinx on all issues arising.*
- 3. Enter into an agreement (outside of the PA), between the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development, the Ministry of Transportation, Metrolinx, and the Preferred Proponent, that codifies the targets in contractual commitments that are monitored, mitigated if required, and with transparent data reporting.*
- 4. Establish a working group comprised of Metrolinx, TCBN, Preferred Proponent and other stakeholders to collaborate and share ideas for how to implement these Targets.*
- 5. Project Companies will also be encouraged to establish voluntary apprentice hiring targets through the ITA financial incentive.*

In our review of all of the RFPs and project contracts posted publicly, we don't see any of these commitments reflected and community benefits are not mentioned once in any of the Ontario Line project agreements publicly posted on the project website. Moreover, our expectation on #3



was to be a CBA that codifies *“the targets in contractual commitments that are monitored, mitigated if required, and with transparent data reporting.”*

While Metrolinx says it's committed to working with its contractors to meet goals around equity hiring and community benefits, we cannot confirm this until there is a Community Benefits Agreement developed with TCBNs involvement and we would like for the City to urgently investigate this issue.

### **Ontario Line Construction Impacts in Black, Indigenous and Racialized Communities**

As project activities commence and ramp up to build Canada's largest public infrastructure project in history, we risk leaving local communities in neighbourhoods like Flemingdon Park, Thorncliffe Park and Moss Park behind. These are also neighbourhoods with a high proportion of visible minority populations in Toronto and who are facing the most significant impact from the Ontario Line construction, with the Metrolinx decision to build a Maintenance and Storage facility that has led to the displacement of local businesses in Thorncliffe Park and the loss of Moss Park park for over 6 years due to the Moss Park station, a significant green space in the Downtown East community.

TCBN is seeing first hand the interest from local communities and Black youth in accessing local opportunities in construction. Our most recent cohort for the NexGen Black Youth Academy program which supports Black youth into careers in construction received over 200 sign ups, with program spots available for only 25 Black youth. In addition, we continue to face challenges in finding employers to recruit, hire and retain Black youth from previous cohorts who have the prerequisites, training, skills and certificates to start an apprenticeship and/or career in construction.

Metrolinx has confirmed in the City staff report that they are working with Connect6ix to host a job fair informing the local communities about employment opportunities on a portion of the overall Ontario Line Project. However, this one off gesture does not replace the need for a well resourced, formal, coordinated and targeted workforce development program as part of a Community Benefits Agreement to employ members of equity deserving groups as stated in the announcement of federal funding for the Project and the numerous motions passed by Toronto City Council in recent years.

### **TCBNs Continued Advocacy**

Over the last year, the TCBN has led advocacy participating in committee meetings, hosting community town hall meetings with local elected representatives and City staff in Downtown East (June 2023) and Flemingdon Park (December 2023) neighbourhoods, have secured over 500 signatures on our Ontario Line campaign petition and sent letters to Metrolinx leadership.



Some progress was made this past Fall when Metrolinx began discussions with TCBN on establishing a Community Benefits Working Group terms of reference, however progress has been stalled by Metrolinx for over four months now.

As such, the TCBN has exhausted all avenues and are seeking the support of the City of Toronto to develop further investigate and provide further analysis on this community benefits issue and to work with us in exploring options to escalate this item with Metrolinx, relevant provincial ministries and federal government if needed to discuss the gaps related to the development, implementation and community oversight of a Community Benefits Agreement as part of the Ontario Line project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R Powell", is written in a cursive style.

Rosemarie Powell  
Executive Director  
Toronto Community Benefits Network