TORONTO

REPORT FOR ACTION

Hoverlink Terminal Proposal Update

Date: March 16, 2026
To: Toronto and East York Community Council
From: Director, Waterfront Secretariat, City Planning Division
Wards: Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York

SUMMARY

In May 2023, Hoverlink Ontario Incorporated ("Hoverlink") notified the City of its intent to initiate a hovercraft service between Toronto and St. Catherines in the Niagara Region. Subsequently, the Toronto and East York Community Council requested that staff report on project-related technical studies which would assess the impact of the introduction of this service. Hoverlink proposes to start its service in the first quarter of 2028 at the earliest.

This report provides an update on the process to assess information to be provided on the proposed Hoverlink hovercraft service and associated terminal facilities. This report also outlines expectations around information sharing and issues identification. Hoverlink has indicated that it is willing to provide technical information and to work collaboratively with the City on the project.

The proposed terminal, made up of a landing pad, docking station and passenger waiting area, is proposed to be located on the south side of the Western Gap at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. Hoverlink clients will use ferries or Billy Bishop Airport pedestrian tunnel to access Downtown Toronto and local transportation and transit connections. All vessel servicing would occur in St. Catharines, where Hoverlink has entered into a lease with Transport Canada/St. Lawrence Seaway to locate maintenance and deliveries infrastructure, and other facilities.

The technical information provided by Hoverlink will be subject to a staff review and comment, which may result in future discussions with Hoverlink to resolve outstanding matters. Coordination with the Toronto Port Authority will be required as there is no City approval or regulatory process that applies in this case. Staff will report back in the second quarter of 2027 with a further update, once additional information is available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director, Waterfront Secretariat, City Planning Division, recommends that:

1. The Toronto and East York Community Council direct the Director, Waterfront Secretariat to provide a further update in Q2 2027 on Hoverlink Ontario Incorporated's hovercraft service and terminal, once additional technical information is available.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan and Transportation Study

On June 26, 2018, City Council adopted the Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan Study and related Site and Area Specific Policy. The Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan Study established a vision, guiding principles and actions to provide a framework for achieving a complete community on the waterfront. The plan provided direction on transportation issues such as co-ordination with public realm improvements, enhanced safety and increased connectivity for non-vehicular modes of transportation.
Agenda Item History - 2018.TE33.9

Location of Hoverlink terminal adjacent to the Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport

On June 5, 2025, Toronto East York Community Council directed the Director, Waterfront Secretariat, in consultation with Waterfront Toronto, report back to the Toronto East York Community Council in Q1 2026 on the results of project related technical studies, to be provided by Hoverlink Ontario and/or the Toronto Port Authority.
Agenda Item History - 2025.TE23.56

Bathurst Quay Transportation Study

On February 19, 2026, Toronto and East York Community Council directed the Director, Waterfront Secretariat, in consultation with Transportation Planning, City Planning and Transportation Services, to undertake a comprehensive multi-modal transportation study and road safety audit of Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood to understand baseline mobility conditions and report back in the third quarter of 2027 on the preliminary findings and recommended next steps.
Agenda Item History - 2026.TE29.69

COMMENTS

Background

Hoverlink's Proposal

Proposals for high-speed marine transit between Toronto and Niagara have circulated for many years. The concept advanced when Hoverlink Ontario Incorporated ("Hoverlink"), a private entity, secured Federal Government approvals for operations at St. Catharines in the vicinity of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Since then, Hoverlink has secured a long-term lease agreement at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport and began preliminary site planning in Niagara. The current proposal includes:

- Two large, climate-controlled hovercraft vessels, each with a capacity of 180 passengers (no vehicle capacity);
- 48 daily crossings, operating 18 hours per day, year-round;
- An estimated 30-minute travel time between Toronto and St. Catharines;
- An estimated project launch of no sooner than Q1 2028;
- Pricing (details still to be confirmed) that is competitive with GO Transit and private shuttle services that operate between Niagara Region and Union Station;
- An estimate that up to 8,000 vehicles per day would be removed from the Queen Elizabeth Way.

Hoverlink's Vessel and Servicing Plans

Hoverlink has noted that its vessels are being designed and will largely (80%) be built in Canada. The hovercraft will not transport vehicles but will accommodate bicycles and luggage, offering a passenger-focused service. All storage, servicing, and maintenance activities will occur at the St. Catharines terminal, ensuring minimal operational footprint in Toronto. The technology proposed is similar to that used by "Hovertravel" in the United Kingdom, which operates a hovercraft service between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, a 10-minute route compared to the 30-minute Toronto to St. Catharines trip.

Policy Framework

The Central Waterfront Secondary Plan provides important direction for evaluating new transportation and marine based proposals along the waterfront. Its principles are as follows:

A. Removing Barriers/Making Connections
B. Building a Network of Spectacular Waterfront Parks and Public Spaces
C. Promoting a Clean and Green Environment
D. Creating Dynamic and Diverse New Communities

The Central Waterfront Secondary Plan speaks specifically to opportunities around water based regional transportation:

- Promoting a Clean and Green Environment Policy 18: *As part of the strategy to reduce car dependence and shape people's travel patterns early, a comprehensive range of efficient and competitive transportation alternatives will*

be provided in tandem with the development of new waterfront communities. These include a new transit system as generally illustrated on Map B, as well as pedestrian, cycling and water transportation opportunities as generally illustrated on Map D.

The Downtown Secondary Plan provides the overarching vision for how emerging travel modes and new connections to support the economic role and accessibility of the core, as outlined below:

- Connectivity Policy 3.7 *Downtown will continue to be Canada's corporate capital and the region's largest and most accessible employment and institutional centre. Union Station and an expanded subway system will strive to provide unparalleled access to skilled labour and linkages to Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport and Toronto Pearson International Airport will contribute to national and international connectivity.*

The Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan and the Airport Lands policies provide detailed, area-specific direction for land use, transportation, and community considerations in and around the Western Channel and Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

- Site and Area Specific Policy 194. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/8e02-city-planning-official-plan-chapter-7-sasps-100s.pdf

The operations at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport are governed under a Tripartite Agreement that was signed by the three landowners in 1983, provides a legal framework and forms part of the policy context for the proposed hovercraft terminal. This agreement has a current end date in 2045. Once the City knows more about the plans for the hovercraft use and terminal location, a review of the proposal and consideration of impacts relating to the Tripartite Agreement would be required.

Marine Use Strategy

The 2020 Marine Use Strategy led by Waterfront Toronto together with the City, the Toronto Region Conservation Authority and the Toronto Port Authority outlines several key priorities for the Inner Harbour. The movement chapter is rooted in a principle of creating "more connections to more destinations". This means not only making it easier to get people to the water's edge, but also on, in and over the water.

Directions set out in the movement chapter of the document encourage future potential marine transportation connections over the water. Proposals are expected to consider important factors such as protection of all natural features and aquatic habitats, navigation conditions and industrial shipping. One of the considerations in this chapter speaks to the importance of close proximity and connectivity to existing or planned onshore transit.

Issues and Opportunities

The Hoverlink proposal to operate a rapid hovercraft service between Toronto and St. Catharines promises improved connectivity and economic benefits. There are technical considerations that require further review:

Western Gap and Inner Harbour Considerations

The Western Gap is a 120-metre-wide, 31-metre-deep, artificial channel serving as the primary western entrance to Toronto's Inner Harbour from Lake Ontario. Located beside the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, it is a heavily used, narrow passage that is used by ferry traffic, small watercraft and large commercial vessels. The proposal is anticipated to address any impacts to the small personal watercraft, ferry traffic, large commercial traffic and other Inner Harbour users.

The Toronto Port Authority has guidance for navigating narrow channels (https://www.torontoportauthority.com/port-of-toronto/permits-and-authorizations/harbour-master-authorizations/harbour-master-notices/narrow-channels-avoiding-a-close-quarters-situation/) providing priority for commercial vessels.

Traffic and Transportation Impacts

Further details are needed on projected ridership and modal splits to and from the city side point of departure/arrival. Current information on airport operations says that: "more than half (55%) of users now leave the airport by transit, shuttle, walking, or cycling, based on combined seasonal averages." (Source: Travel Modality Trends at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport)

To evaluate Hoverlink's potential impacts, additional information is required to determine whether Hoverlink passenger volumes or drop-off and pickup activity at Billy Bishop Airport could influence traffic flow in the Bathurst Quay neighbourhood and whether users are likely to use transit and/or active transportation infrastructure. It will be important to understand how existing higher order transit connectivity and active transportation infrastructure on Dan Leckie way can mitigate any potential impact. The City expects that this information will be captured and summarized in a scoped transportation study or technical memo provided by Hoverlink. City staff in Transportation Services and City Planning (Transportation Planning) will work with Hoverlink and the Toronto Port Authority to provide a comprehensive view of traffic and transportation issues.

At its meeting of February 19, 2026, Toronto and East York Community Council directed staff to undertake a comprehensive multi-modal transportation study and road safety audit of Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood (Agenda Item History - 2026.TE29.69). This study will take into consideration information provided by Hoverlink as a part of its broader analysis.

Environmental, Noise, Air, and Water Impacts

No Environmental Assessment (EA) is required by Transport Canada. As directed by TEYCC, studies have been requested from Hoverlink and these details are forthcoming. To date, Hoverlink asserts that noise levels will range between 60 and 67 decibels offshore. Decibel levels generated by the craft are designed to meet Transport Canada standards. As per Transport Canada, Hoverlink is required to provide a safety management system and meet Safety Operation Regulations SOR-Federal

Regulations-ACV Designation (Marine). There are no external engine components or drive systems that enter into the water on the proposed vessels.

Independent technical studies will be provided in 2027 as the vessel design is finalized. Additional technical analysis of the cumulative noise impacts on Bathurst Quay and surrounding area during the proposed operating hours of 6:45 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. will be required to understand potential impacts and mitigation measures. Hoverlink indicated that additional noise assessment data can be provided once operational, similar to information previously provided to the Marine Coordination Committee.

A scoped environmental impact analysis will be provided by Hoverlink in order to understand potential effects and mitigation strategies that the proponent could undertake. City staff will expect information on any water quality and aquatic impacts, as well as any impacts on wave action and shoreline stability, In particular, staff will be seeking clarity on any impacts related to the Hanlan's Point shoreline.

Safety and Regulatory Oversight

Additional clarity regarding emergency response protocols, jurisdiction and marine safety measures for hovercraft operations within the Inner Harbour and Western Gap will be helpful to understanding safety context of the proposal.

Marine safety is a part of the Toronto Port Authority's mandate and it will ensure continued coordination on the proposed service with relevant municipal agencies through the City.

Policy and Planning Framework

The City's primary interests under existing policy are land-side impacts. A review of compliance and alignment with the Official Plan, Central Waterfront Secondary Plan, Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan, and the 2020 Marine Use Strategy will be included in the 2027 staff report.

Process of Engagement

Hoverlink has hosted preliminary information sessions and indicated plans for future public meetings, including outreach to waterfront community organizations. The company has also referenced coordination with Toronto Port Authority and Transport Canada, but a formal engagement plan has not yet been developed by Hoverlink. Hoverlink will initiate public engagement activities in 2027.

Hoverlink will be leading discussions with community. It is anticipated that Hoverlink will provide timely updates and technical documentation to support review of information and public engagement. These commitments will be tracked by City staff with the expectation that the proponent will meet best practices and community expectations.

The joint staff level Marine Coordination Committee, composed of the City, Waterfront Toronto, Toronto Port Authority, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and Harbourfront Centre, also provides a forum for ongoing coordination on marine related

initiatives and will serve as a venue for sharing information related to the Hoverlink proposal and associated studies that are forthcoming with relevant agencies.

City Review of Information

There is no established review process for City review of water-based transportation proposals.

Hoverlink has indicated a willingness to work with the City and other stakeholders across the waterfront. Information provided by Hoverlink to the City will be reviewed by relevant City Divisions and partners and comments will be provided to Hoverlink for consideration. The City expects that comments provided will be considered alongside feedback that may come out of community engagement activities led Hoverlink.

Issues identified in the review of materials will be raised in a follow up issues resolution meeting with Hoverlink and City staff, Waterfront Toronto other agencies as required, with an eye to addressing or mitigating any impacts that may be identified.

Start of Service

Hoverlink has shared that its current target date for the start of service is Q1-Q2 2028. This timing will allow for Hoverlink to submit required studies as they are made available through the process with Transport Canada, and in sufficient time for staff to assess the content for City staff report in the second quarter of 2027.

Next Steps

The following information, in the form of studies, summaries and technical memos related to the Hoverlink proposal, is expected to be received by the City by January 2027:

- Conceptual drawing and outline of proposed facilities;
- Traffic analysis (City side);
- Air and noise analysis;
- Environmental impact analysis;
- Economic impact analysis, and;
- Coordination with other marine users.

Staff will report back in the second quarter of 2027 with an updated analysis, once the above noted information has been provided by Hoverlink in coordination with the Toronto Port Authority. This report will present a review of materials provided and a further analysis of the existing policy framework on large vessel proposals across the Central Waterfront.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Conceptual landing pad location for Hoverlink Service

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