



RAIL CORRIDOR PLANNING STUDY

Executive Summary
October 2017



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INC .

Over the past 20 years, Downtown Toronto has experienced unprecedented population and employment growth. High growth is anticipated to continue to 2041. This is increasing demand for and pressure on existing parks, and there are limited lands available for new parks.

Parkland, community amenities and infrastructure must keep pace to ensure Downtown remains a great place to live, work, learn, play, and invest.

Downtown has great smaller parks, including the recently revitalized Berczy Park and Grange Park. But large parks are an essential ingredient in this mix. Large parks serve regional, city-wide, as well as local functions, and provide space for events, civic gatherings and active and passive recreation, with benefits to residents, workers, students, and visitors. Large parks contribute to a high quality of life, physical and mental health and wellbeing, civic identity, economic development and tourism, and environmental sustainability.



The lands along and adjacent to the Union Station Rail Corridor, from Bathurst Street to Blue Jays Way represent a generational opportunity to create a large park in the heart of Downtown, and realize provincial and municipal growth planning and city-building objectives.



Background & Context

In response to rapid growth, in 2014, City Council directed the City Planning Division to initiate a comprehensive study of Downtown (known as the TOcore Planning Downtown Study), to ensure growth positively contributes to Toronto's Downtown. Through the TOcore Planning Downtown Study and other related City studies and initiatives, the City has documented the need for additional parks and open spaces in Downtown, and in particular, a need for large parks.

The TOcore Downtown Study has identified the lands along and adjacent to the Union Station Rail Corridor, from Bathurst Street to Blue Jays Way as a strategic location to create a large, centrally-located signature park in Downtown.

In the fall of 2016, City Council endorsed a City Staff report to initiate planning for a significant new park over the rail corridor, called "Rail Deck Park". At this meeting, Council requested that City Planning Division prepare an Official Plan Amendment to provide a planning framework for a park use over the rail corridor.

Urban Strategies was engaged by the City of Toronto's City Planning division to undertake a comprehensive planning study to assess appropriate changes to the planning framework. The planning study has provided findings that support a proposed Official Plan Amendment ("the proposed OPA") to guide the creation of a large-scale park over the rail corridor.

The Proposed Official Plan Amendment: Rail Deck Park Secondary Plan

The proposed OPA will result in a new Rail Deck Park Secondary Plan for the lands within the rail corridor between Bathurst Street and Blue Jays Way and the existing Northern Linear Park and planned Mouth of the Creek Park ("the Subject Site"). The proposed OPA designates the lands for *Park* uses, while allowing for continued and expanded rail operations within the rail corridor.

Planning Process Timeline - Addressing a long-term need for parkland

Spring 2014

Fall 2015

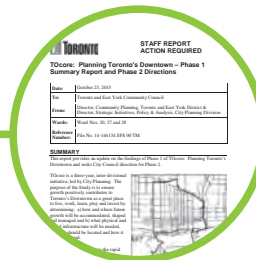
Spring 2016

Summer 2016

Fall 2016



The TOcore Planning Downtown Trends, Issues, and Intensification Report identifies parkland acquisition as a key priority in order to protect quality of life Downtown.



The TOcore Phase 1 Summary Report identifies 4 "Big Moves" including delivering parkland in unlikely spaces such as the rail corridor and the Gardiner Expressway.



Emerging priorities in the TOcore Background Report include creative city-building ideas for establishing new parks and open spaces in the Downtown.



Mayor Tory announces a vision for an iconic new park in Downtown, known as "Rail Deck Park".



City Council endorses the Rail Deck Park Work Plan and directs staff to move forward with the Planning Framework Update and Implementation Strategy.

About the Planning Study

The Planning Study examines the site and surrounding urban context, the history of the Railway Lands planning framework, population and employment growth trends, parks and open space needs, and the existing and emerging planning framework. The Planning Study builds on and incorporates the findings from related studies and ongoing planning initiatives, including the TOcore Planning Downtown Study, the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan, the City-wide Parkland Strategy, and Facilities Master Plan.

The Planning Study provides a comprehensive planning analysis and opinion in support of the proposed OPA. It demonstrates that the proposed OPA, and the proposed *Park* land use designation represents the best and most appropriate land use for the Subject Site. The proposed OPA has regard for the *Planning Act* and matters of provincial interest, is consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, conforms to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and advances the vision, objectives and policies of the Official Plan. The findings of the Planning Study conclude that a park use over the rail corridor is in the public interest and represents good planning.

Study Areas

The Planning Study considers the Subject Site within the following contextual study areas:



The **Local Study Area** bounded by Queen Street West to the north, Dufferin Street to the west, Yonge Street to the east and Lake Ontario to the south; and



The **Downtown Study Area**, which includes the Local Study Area and the Downtown TOcore Study Area, generally bound by the midtown rail corridor and Rosedale Valley Road to the north, the Don River to the east, Lake Ontario to the south and Bathurst Street to the west.

The Planning Study also explores the Subject Site within the wider regional context of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH).

Winter/Spring 2017

Summer 2017

Fall 2017

Planning Study



Implementation Strategy

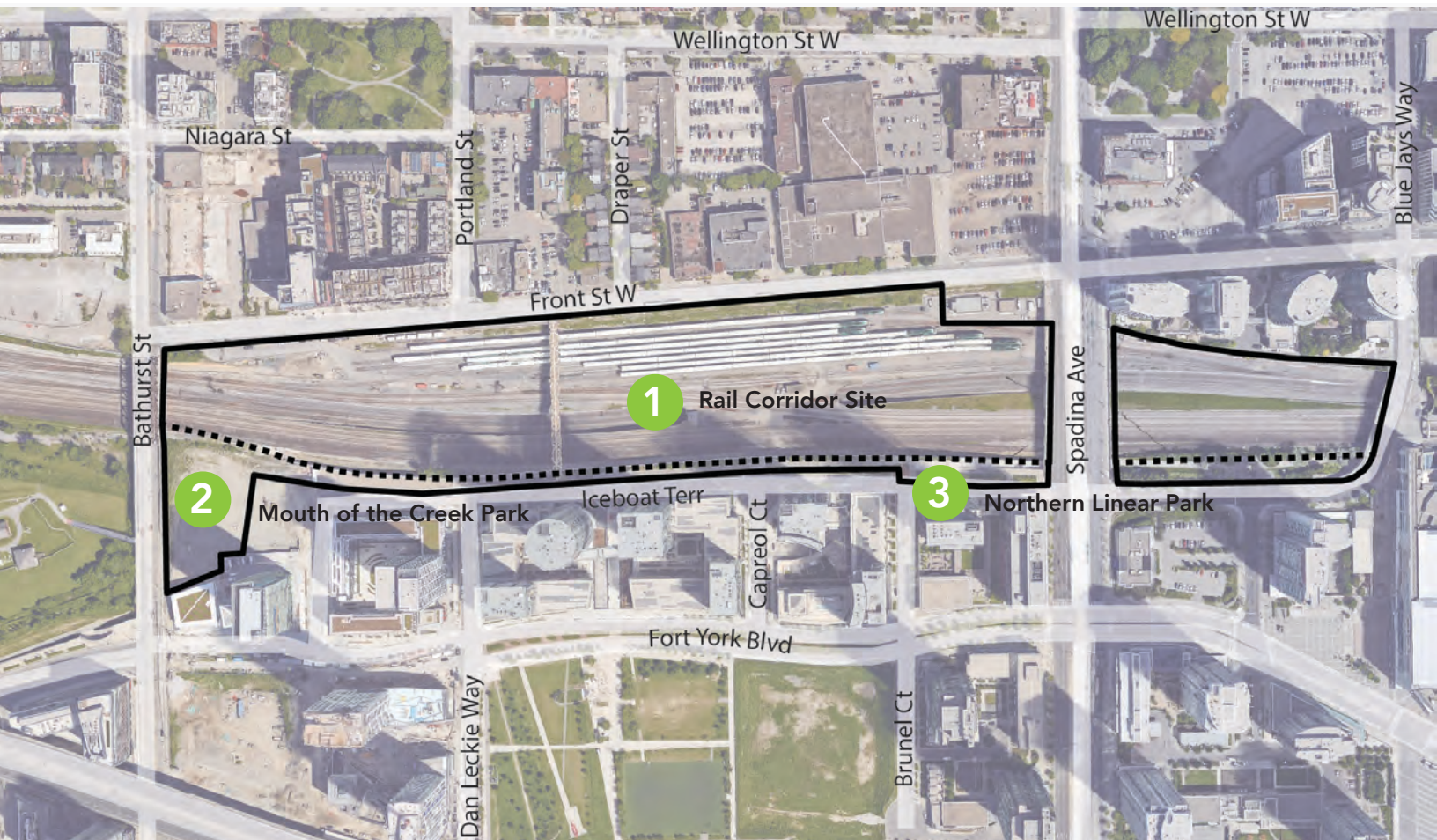
The Implementation Strategy has been prepared separately by the City of Toronto's Rail Deck Park interdivisional team.

About the Site

The Subject Site is located in the Railway Lands, in the heart of Downtown Toronto's growing mixed-use neighbourhoods. The Railway Lands, and the adjacent King-Spadina, Fort York, Garrison Common and Central Waterfront neighbourhoods have experienced significant growth over the past 30 years, transforming from primarily industrial areas to vibrant urban neighbourhoods, with a mix of cultural, entertainment, commercial, office and other uses.



The Subject Site in the Downtown Context, view looking east



Map of the Subject Site and Immediate Surrounding Context

Summary of Existing Planning Framework

The Subject Site consists of the following areas:

- 1 **Rail Corridor Site:** the lands within the Union Station Rail Corridor and North Bathurst Storage Yard extending from Blue Jays Way to Bathurst Street, including a linear strip of land to the immediate south of the Front Street right-of-way, 7.5 hectares;
- 2 **Northern Linear Park:** a linear park that runs along the southern portion of the rail corridor from Blue Jays Way to Queens Wharf Road; 0.8 hectares; and
- 3 **Mouth of the Creek Park:** A planned park located to the immediate west of Northern Linear Park and to the north of the Library District Condos and the Fort York Library (municipally known as 170 and 190 Fort York Boulevard); 0.5 hectares.

The total site area is approximately 8.8 hectares.

There is a 0.5 hectares site owned by Metrolinx at the south-west corner of Front Street and Spadina Avenue. The Metrolinx site is not subject to the proposed OPA, although nothing would preclude it from being considered for parkland in the future. The Metrolinx site is the planned location of the Spadina-Front Regional Express Rail (RER) station, which will provide frequent regional transit service.

The Subject Site is subject to the Provincial Policy Statement (2014), the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017), and the City of Toronto Official Plan (2006). It is located within *Downtown and the Central Waterfront*, as identified in the City of Toronto Official Plan (Map 2 – Urban Structure). The Subject Site currently carries the following land use designations, as per Map 18 of the City of Toronto Official Plan:

- Rail Corridor Site: Primarily designated as a *Utility Corridor*;
- Northern Linear Park: Designated as a *Park*;
- Mouth of the Creek Park: Designated as *Mixed Use Areas* and a *Park*.

The Subject Site is currently subject to the Railway Lands West and Central Secondary Plans, which were approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) in 1994, and amended in subsequent years.

The Secondary Plans identify the Rail Corridor Site as a Future Development Area and Utility Corridor A, and detail policies guiding comprehensive overbuilding over the rail corridor. The Secondary Plans require comprehensive studies to evaluate various land use and decking considerations with any application to amend the Secondary Plan. Development in the Future Development Area/Utility Corridor A may only be permitted through an Official Plan Amendment.

The Subject Site is subject to the Railway Lands West and Central Zoning By-law (By-laws No. 1994-0805 and By-law 1994-0806). The Rail Corridor Site is zoned as a Transportation zone, which permits transportation related infrastructure to a height of 15 metres.

The Planning Study Report provides a review of the history of the Railway Lands planning framework, and analysis of the provincial and municipal planning framework.

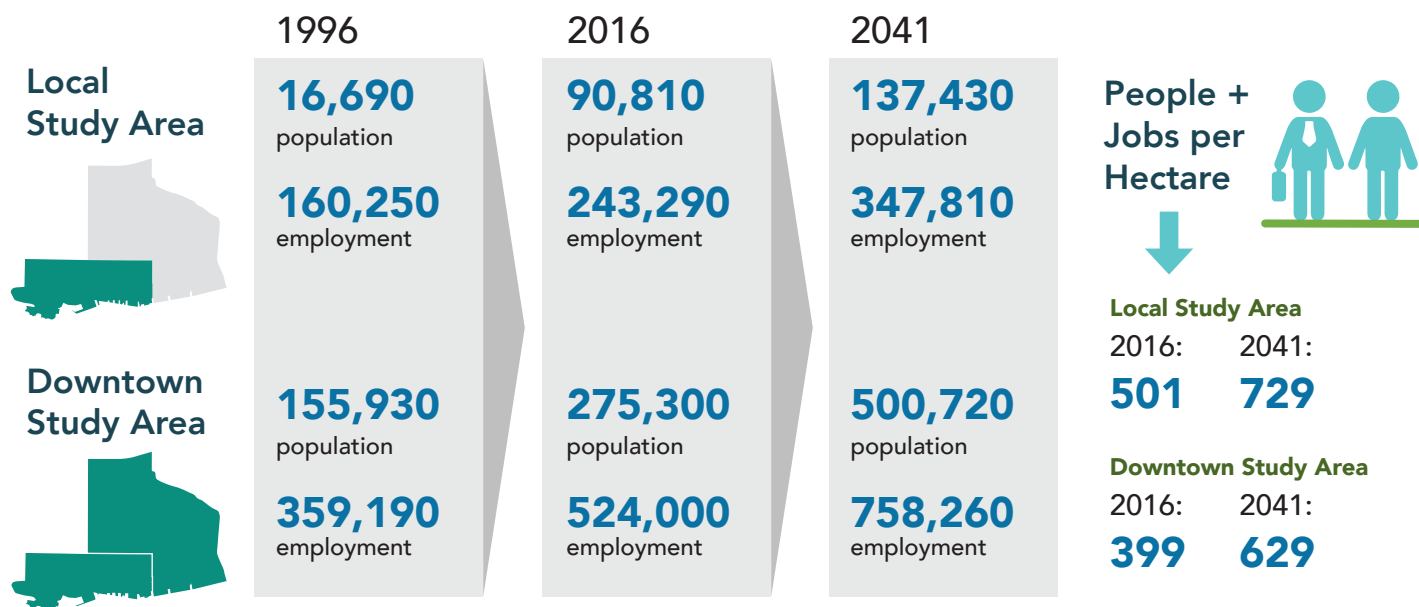
Analysis & Findings

The Downtown and Local Study Areas have experienced exponential population and employment growth since the 1990s. Both the Downtown Study Area and Local Study Area have experienced remarkable population growth since 1996, growing by 76% and 444% respectively. Meanwhile, the city as a whole grew by 11%. This trend is anticipated to continue to 2041. By 2041, the population in the Downtown Study Area is anticipated to exceed over 500,000.

Employment in the Downtown Study Area and Local Study Area has likewise grown exponentially since 1996, by 45% and 51% respectively. Employment in these areas is anticipated to grow by 45% and 43% by 2041.

The Local Study Area and Downtown Study Areas have a dense concentration of people and jobs per hectare. There are 501 people and jobs per hectare in the Local Study Area and 399 people and jobs per hectare in the Downtown Study Area. Based on the population and employment projections, by 2041, this will increase to 729 people and jobs per hectare in the Local Study Area and 629 people and jobs per hectare in the Downtown Study Area.

The existing and projected population and employment density significantly exceeds the Growth Plan targets for *urban growth centres* (400 people + jobs / hectare) and *major transit station areas* (150 - 200 people + jobs / hectare).



Sources: 1996 & 2016 - Population: Statistics Canada, census data; Employment: City of Toronto Employment Survey.
2041 - City of Toronto population and employment projections (Hemson Consulting Ltd.)

Parkland provision per capita has not kept pace with growth. With the significant rise in population and employment in recent years, no commensurate increase in parkland has not followed suit. In the Downtown Study Area, there are 10.85 square metres of parkland per resident, and in the Local Study Area there are 10.41 square metres of parkland per resident. This compares to the City-wide median of 28 square metres of parkland per resident.

How much total park area is there per resident?

Downtown Study Area

10.85 m²
park / resident



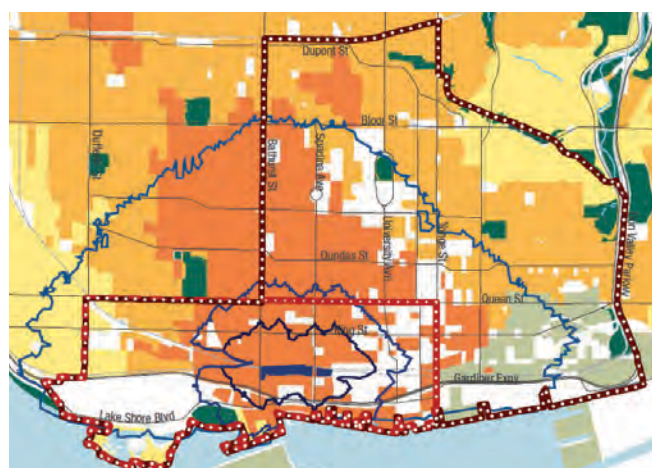
City-wide

28 m²
park / resident



District + City Parks per Person (2016)

There is a shortage of large parks in the Downtown Study Area, and particularly in the high growth areas in the Local Study Area. This map illustrates how much district or city-wide parkland (all parks larger than 5 ha) is available to the surrounding population within a 30 minute walk (or 3km) catchment area. The provision of district parks per capita is expected to decline significantly with continued population growth.



Source: Parkland analysis prepared by: O2 Planning + Design Inc. for City of Toronto as part of City-wide Parkland Strategy.

With high growth anticipated and limited sites for new parks, parkland provision will decline in Downtown Study Area in the future. In order to maintain the rate of 10.85 square metres of parkland per resident in the Downtown Study Area, by the year 2032, the City would need to acquire over 165 hectares of additional parkland. This is approximately equal to the size of High Park. This magnitude of parkland deficiency cannot be addressed through on-site parkland dedication or via cash-in-lieu contributions collected under Section 42 of the *Planning Act*, without a suitable receptor site. To maintain the high quality of life in the Downtown Study Area, and provide an adequate and appropriate supply of parks and open spaces for future generations, the City of Toronto must take proactive actions to plan for new parkland.

There is a particular need for large parks in the Downtown Study Area. Two-thirds of the parks in the Downtown Study Area are less than a hectare in area. These spaces are increasingly strained by rapid growth. The seven district parks in the Downtown Study Area (greater than five hectares) are primarily located on the perimeter of the Downtown Study Area and associated with the Toronto ravine system, or have other institutional, civic and commemorative purposes, limiting opportunities for large-scale civic and recreational opportunities.

Large Downtown parks go beyond serving the local community, and also provide valuable space for workers, students and visitors. As the Greater Golden Horseshoe region grows to a population of over 13 million people in 2041, there will be an increasing need for regionally significant parks and open spaces with event and gathering space, and recreational uses that are accessible by regional transit.

The Subject Site is an excellent location for a large, centrally-located contiguous park. The Downtown Study Area consists of a densely built-up area with very large limited undeveloped and unplanned sites. The Subject Site represents a distinct opportunity to create a large signature park in the Downtown. The size, scale and location of the Subject Site make it uniquely suitable for a signature large-scale park to serve the local community, residents and workers from across Toronto, and visitors from across the Greater Golden Horseshoe region and beyond.

Planning Issues & Opinions

The Planning Study Report provides a comprehensive review and assessment of the proposed OPA in the context of the existing and emerging provincial and municipal policy framework.

The following summarizes the main planning issues and opinions in support of the proposed OPA.

Land Use: Park

The proposed park use is the best and most appropriate land use for the Subject Site. Planning for and protecting for a new large-scale, contiguous park in this location will address the need for a large Downtown park.

Developing a large-scale park in this location is appropriate, reflects good planning and is in the public interest. The Subject Site is an excellent location for a regionally significant park. The proposed park use optimizes the unique attributes of the Subject Site within the regional and city-wide context. The Subject Site is centrally located in Downtown, directly accessible by existing and planned regional and municipal transit, adjacent to other parks and open spaces, major tourist destinations, densely populated mixed-use neighbourhoods, and office and cultural districts. There are no other sites that can accommodate a large park in Downtown that provide the same scale, proximity advantages or city-building opportunities.

Consideration of Other Land Uses

Non-residential and residential development is not required in this location to address provincial and municipal growth planning policy objectives and support provincial investment in transit.

Within the context of high growth and development in the Railway Lands and adjacent areas, residential and/or non-residential development would not reflect the most appropriate land use for the Subject Site.

Residential and non-residential development in this location is not required from a growth planning perspective to meet the Growth Plan population and employment forecasts for the City of Toronto, the targets for *urban growth centres*, and the targets for *major transit station areas*. The City is already achieving and exceeding the population forecasts for the City of Toronto, as per Growth Plan, and is expected to significantly exceed the targets for *Downtown and the Central Waterfront Area* by 2031. The existing population and employment density within 500 metres of the Spadina-Front RER Station, already significantly exceeds the Growth Plan targets for *major transit station areas*.

As the current development pipeline demonstrates, there are and will continue to be opportunities for residential and non-residential development in the Downtown Study Area for the foreseeable future. However, residential and non-residential development over all or on part of the Subject Site would eliminate the opportunity to create a new park of this scale in Downtown Toronto. For this reason, the Planning Study concludes that the Subject Site should not be developed with residential or non-residential uses.

Achieving Complete Communities in Downtown

The proposed park use fully supports provincial and municipal policy objectives to achieve complete communities in Downtown, within the context of high growth.

Provincial policy directs municipalities to plan and manage growth to achieve complete communities. The proposed OPA will contribute to the achievement of a complete community and enhance the liveability of the Downtown environment, by providing a large contiguous space for recreational amenities, and civic and community programming.

The proposed park use will advance the vision for Toronto and the growth and reurbanization objectives in the Official Plan, and the proposed vision, goals and policy directions in the Proposed Downtown Plan. Downtown is anticipated to continue to evolve as a healthy and attractive place to live and work. The Official Plan recognizes that investment in the Downtown environment will be required to maintain and improve the public realm, maintain and upgrade public amenities and infrastructure, enhance existing parks, and acquire new parkland. The Official Plan provides direction for adding new parks and amenities in growth areas, making investment in infrastructure and services to maintain and improve the quality of life in the city, and investing in growth related infrastructure.

Economic Development, Tourism and Global Competitiveness

The proposed park will advance regional economic competitiveness and economic development, and contribute to Toronto's quality of life. It will connect major tourist attractions within the Downtown and adjacent areas to create a distinctly Toronto offer.

The Growth Plan articulates a vision for the Greater Golden Horseshoe's regional economy to mature into an economic powerhouse of global significance, and recognizes Toronto as the heart of a thriving metropolis - a celebrated centre of commerce, culture, and innovation. The Official Plan provides further direction to enhance economic competitiveness and growth, and draws a link between land use planning and economic development.

The Subject Site is in close proximity to the Financial District and major tourism attractions and economic development amenities, including the Air Canada Centre, Metro Convention Centre, Rogers Stadium, the CN Tower, Ripley's Aquarium, amenities along the Central Waterfront, Fort York and Ontario Place, and Exhibition Place. It is also well connected to international, national and regional gateways into Toronto. It is within walking distance of Billy Bishop Airport and Union Station which also provides direct connection to Pearson International Airport via the Union-Pearson Express.

Signature parks, like New York's High Line and Chicago's Millennium Park are major tourist attractions, and generate spin-off activity for nearby cultural and tourist destinations. In Toronto, the Subject Site is adjacent to major entertainment and tourist attractions that generate millions of visitors annually. The proposed park will improve connections to surrounding communities, employment districts and adjacent attractions and institutions. A signature park in this location has the capability of providing beneficial symbiotic effects, elevating economic activity in the area and through the city.

The proposed park use optimizes the Subject Site's locational attributes, and will contribute to the region's economic development, global competitiveness and tourist offering.

Transportation and Transit-oriented Development

The proposed OPA and the proposed park use advances provincial and municipal policy objectives regarding the integration of land use and transportation, and multi-modal transportation connectivity.

The Subject Site benefits from excellent transit accessibility. It is the location of the planned Spadina-Front Regional Express Rail (RER) station, which will provide frequent regional transit service. The Subject Site is also serviced by the 510 Spadina Streetcar and the 511 Bathurst Streetcar, and in close proximity to Union Station and the St. Andrew TTC subway station.

The planned Spadina-Front RER station is supported by a high-density cluster of residents and jobs, and is located next to major sporting, cultural, recreational and tourist destinations. The Subject Site is not required for residential and/or non-residential uses to accommodate additional residential and employment density to support transit investment.

Creating a new large park in this location is a transit-supportive development pattern, and will optimize provincial investment in transit. Protecting for public uses over the rail corridor will allow for the integration of regional and local transit service and park and open space uses, and enhance multimodal transportation connectivity with new cycling and pedestrian connections to the RER station. A large-scale park will become a major attraction and destination in the Greater Golden Horseshoe region, driving demand for increased transit use.

Connectivity and Integration

The proposed park will significantly enhance connectivity between the central city and the waterfront, minimize the barrier impacts of the railway, and fully integrate the Railway Lands within Downtown.

Connecting the Downtown with the Central Waterfront and adjacent areas is a long-standing planning objective in the City of Toronto. The Official Plan, the Railway Lands Secondary Plan and Secondary Plans for adjacent areas aim to enhance visual and physical connections across the rail corridor, and minimize the barrier impacts of the corridor.

The proposed park use advances the Official Plan and Secondary Plan policies to improve connections between parks and open spaces, and enhance visual and physical connections between the central city, Railway Lands and the Central Waterfront.

The creation of a large-scale public park will significantly enhance pedestrian and cycling connections over and across the rail corridor, and promote active transportation as a viable transportation mode. The park use will create an urban environment that encourages and supports pedestrian and cycling movement through Toronto, with regional transit connections.

Heritage and Views

The proposed OPA provides policy direction to ensure the proposed park use acknowledges and conserves the history of the Railway Lands, and maintains and enhances view corridors.

The Subject Site is adjacent to multiple heritage resources and heritage conservation districts (HCD) including the Fort York HCD and National Heritage Site, Draper Street HCD, and the King-Spadina HCD. The proposed OPA includes policies to ensure that the development of the proposed park supports heritage resources within and around the Railway Lands. The proposed park use provides opportunities for interpretation of the historic Lake Ontario shoreline through landscaping, public realm and public art elements.

The City of Toronto Official Plan identifies views from the public realm that are part of the form and image of the city. This includes the view from the Fort York grounds of buildings including the CN Tower which compose the Downtown/Financial District skyline. A park use over the Subject Site will maintain this view.

A park use over the Subject Site will create a new public gathering space for residents, workers and visitors in the Downtown to enjoy a direct view of the CN Tower and Financial District. This will become one of the most iconic signature views of the CN Tower and the Financial District in Toronto. The proposed OPA also identifies a series of view corridors, which will be maintained and enhanced through the design of the park.

Environment

The proposed OPA provides policy direction to ensure that the park use contributes to environmental sustainability, and incorporates innovative solutions with regards to stormwater management and the environment.

Decking over the Subject Site and the creation of a large-scale park in this location offers the potential to address provincial and municipal policy directions with regards to the environment, sustainability and resiliency.

The environmental requirements, set out in Section 9.1 of the Railway Lands West and Central Secondary Plans have been retained and updated in the proposed OPA. The proposed park will be planned, designed and developed to address environmental considerations related to noise, vibration, air quality and stormwater management.

The PPS and the Growth Plan provide policy direction related to energy conservation, air quality, climate change, water conservation, and low-impact development. A large-scale signature park in this location offers potential to incorporate green infrastructure, and incorporate innovative approaches to stormwater management, and waste production.

Railway Uses, Operations and Safety

The proposed OPA protects for the continued and expanded use of the Subject Site as a utility corridor. Decking and development of a park will be compatible with, and supportive of the long-term function of the corridor.

The PPS, the Growth Plan and the City of Toronto Official Plan all contain policies to ensure that development in and adjacent to existing and planned transportation corridors will be compatible with, and supportive of the long-term purposes of the corridor, and should avoid, mitigate or minimize negative impacts on and around the corridor. The existing Railway Lands West and Central Secondary Plans provide further policy direction with regards to the rail corridor within the Railway Lands and technical considerations related to decking and overbuilding.

Any decking and development over the Subject Site must be compatible with continued and expanded rail operations in the rail corridor. An engineering feasibility study has been prepared as a part of the Implementation Strategy for the proposed park. The study examines technical issues related to decking over the rail corridor to support a park use at a conceptual level. The study describes design and construction issues related to future track works, signalizing system upgrades, switch machine replacement, electrical enabling works and track clearances.

The proposed OPA requires a number of technical and environmental studies to implement the proposed park related to the decking structure, civil and structural works, rail safety and operations, noise, municipal infrastructure and servicing, environmental, safety and mitigation requirements. These will be addressed as part of more detailed design work for the decking structure and park.

Conclusion

The proposed OPA has regard for the *Planning Act* and matters of provincial interest, is consistent with the PPS, conforms to the Growth Plan, and conforms to the vision and advances and implements the goals of the City of Toronto Official Plan. It also advances the goals of the provincial Regional Transportation Plan. It aligns with and advances with the emerging directions for Downtown, as articulated in the Proposed Downtown Plan.

Provincial and municipal policy emphasize the importance of healthy, liveable and safe communities, achieving complete communities, and planning for and providing a full range and equitable distribution of parks, open spaces and recreation facilities. The Official Plan specifically supports the expansion of the parks and open space system, investment in the public realm and Downtown environment, and the acquisition of lands for parkland. It also provides direction for investment in infrastructure and services to maintain and improve the quality of life in Toronto, and the need to invest in growth related infrastructure, through a variety of implementation plans. The Downtown is recognized as a vital component of Toronto, the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Province's economic competitiveness, and investment in the Downtown environment is required to enhance the Toronto region's position within the global economy.

The proposed OPA fully conforms to and advances the Major Objectives for the Railway Lands, as per the Railway Lands West and Central Secondary Plans. The creation of a public park in this location will minimize the barrier effect of the rail corridor, and reunite the central city with the waterfront. The proposed land use optimizes the Subject Site's size and central location to address the need for a large Downtown park.

The proposed *Parks* land use designation reflects the best and most appropriate use for the Subject Site. Decking and development of a park over the Subject Site will be compatible with, and supportive of the long-term purposes of the rail corridor.

The findings of the Planning Study conclude that a park use over the rail corridor is in the public interest and represents good planning. The proposed park use and implementation of the proposed OPA will contribute to the achievement of complete communities, multimodal transportation connectivity, and economic development, tourism and competitiveness within a high growth area.

