



Not a ‘Drive-Thru’ City

The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) has a strong history of advocacy for the design and building of sustainable and healthy cities across North America. CNU believes that replacing elevated urban freeways with surface streets, boulevards and avenues is the most cost-effective, sustainable option for cities with aging grade separated roads. To implement this philosophy, CNU created the “Highways to Boulevards” and releases a biannual list of “Freeways without Futures” which identifies elevated highways across the globe that are in the most need of removal. Toronto’s Gardiner Expressway is one of the few highways that has been named to the list in each of its four publications: 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014. For more information on CNU’s Highways to Boulevards initiative, please visit: <https://www.cnu.org/highways>

CNU Ontario, the Provincial Chapter of CNU, supports this initiative. Toronto now has the opportunity to remove a large section of this highway and make a lasting, positive impact on our core.

Since its completion in 1966, the Frederick G. Gardiner Expressway has carved an east-west path through Toronto’s core. Connecting downtown Toronto to the western suburbs, the Gardiner is a reminder of a time when most of the area was industrial and not a civic waterfront destination. With the changing character of Toronto’s waterfront, from a location for industry to one of housing, culture and entertainment, there is a clear need to address the local built form and its impact on the area; and no part of the local urban form has a more detrimental impact on Toronto’s waterfront than the Gardiner.

Previous efforts to address the Gardiner’s negative impacts have met with some success. The 1999 removal of the easternmost portion of the Gardiner resulted in the creation of a linear park where Torontonians and tourists can enjoy a bike ride, a stroll, and public art installations. Over a decade and a half later, Toronto finds itself with another opportunity to remove a section of the Gardiner, to further increase connectivity to its waterfront, and to continue improving its urban form.

In the *Gardiner Expressway/Lake Shore Boulevard East Reconfiguration Environmental Assessment (EA) and Integrated Urban Design Study Round Three Consultation Report*, approximately 60% of participants supported removing the eastern portion of the Gardiner. CNU Ontario also supports this alternative. Financially, this option is the least expensive. It also supports transit and auto trip reduction. Most importantly, this option offers a significant opportunity to reclaim the land and remove the divide between the city and its waterfront. CNU Ontario believes the economic, urban design and transportation benefits resulting from the Gardiner’s removal far outweigh the singular function that the elevated corridor currently provides.

Transportation

CNU Ontario questions the notion that removing the Gardiner will result in significant increases in commute times and traffic congestion. Looking to New York City's West Side Highway, the removal of which initially reduced the count of vehicles per day by nearly half and currently remains 30% below pre-removal levels, we see that commuters can readily adapt to such change and are likely to become more thoughtful about their transportation options and travel patterns. As such, the removal of the Gardiner can and should go hand-in-hand with increased and improved public transit options.

Public Realm

Removal of the Gardiner will allow Toronto to reclaim a significant linear swath of land from cars and reimagine it as a space for everyone – a safe space for people that doesn't preclude the use of vehicles. A 'Grand Boulevard' would still ferry commuters into and out of downtown, but would also provide the opportunity to create high quality public spaces, such as parkettes and linear trails for pedestrians and cyclists. The dramatically improved streetscape would improve connectivity between the downtown and waterfront by transitioning the area from a space of grey concrete and shadows to a place full of green space and sunshine.



Economic Development

Currently, the Gardiner Expressway is a deterrent to the economic development of adjacent properties. Its removal, along with the creation of a 'Grand Boulevard', would support redevelopment of the area. Mixed use developments would do more than just create a coherent urban form between downtown and the waterfront; it would increase the local land values and tax base.

CNU Ontario urges City staff, councillors, government agencies and other stakeholders to work together to help convert this outdated, single-purpose elevated highway to Grand Boulevard that will better serve the public interest.

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