



Davenport Community Rail Overpass

Davenport Community Rail Overpass *Reference Panel Day One Report – April 25, 2015*

On the morning of April 25th, the Davenport Community Rail Overpass Residents' Reference Panel gathered at the Davenport Perth Community Centre. It was explained by Panel moderator Peter MacLeod that the 36 panelists were drawn in a random lottery from 173 applicants who reside in the neighbourhood surrounding the overpass site. They were provided an overview of the four day-long workshops and a binder full of resource materials and background readings on the Davenport Community Rail Overpass to help inform their deliberations and recommendations. The panel members are tasked with learning about transportation planning and processes, weighing design options and approaches, and proposing values, priorities and detailed recommendations to Metrolinx that will shape the design and delivery of the Davenport Community Rail Overpass.

Metrolinx President and CEO Bruce McCuaig kicked off the day by welcoming the panelists and thanking them for making the significant time commitment required to be on the Panel. He reinforced that the Panel is but one of many ways Metrolinx is engaging with the community and their job is to deliberate and come up with recommendations about how this project can provide a legacy for their community. Specifically, he instructed panelists to consider “how we can take a linear, physical barrier to the community and create good, connected public spaces for the community that weren't there before.”

Next, Cristina Martins – Member of Provincial Parliament for Davenport – welcomed panelists, commending them for engaging in the process and giving their time generously to the deliberations. She noted that it had been an exciting few weeks as the Province has stepped forward with \$13.5 billion in funding which will transform GO Transit into a truly regional transportation system. She reminded panelists that her office is open to those wishing to discuss any issues throughout the consultation and provincially mandated Environmental Assessment process.

Panel moderator Peter MacLeod then addressed the panelists delving deeper into the objectives and values behind the Residents' Reference Panel process. As he explained, their task as panelists was two-fold:

- To develop a set of community values to guide the creation, design, use and stewardship of the Davenport Community Rail Overpass and any potential public spaces, parks, trails and connections flowing from the planning and construction of the project.
- To develop specific recommendations concerning the Davenport Community Rail Overpass project that may address preferred land use, transportation planning, walkability and connectivity, potential community benefits such as new public spaces and trails, landscaping and ongoing stewardship for the site.



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MacLeod emphasized that while panelists have a sizeable mandate, there are also constraints. They will need to ensure their recommendations are in line with Metrolinx's broad plans. On this note he said, "the *what* is already decided, it's the *how* that's open for discussion." He encouraged panelists to think not only for their community and what a newly created public space could be, but also for the entire Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area transit region and "how we as a region can best move around".

MacLeod also explained that Metrolinx is invested in this process and the report recommendations the Reference Panel will produce. Metrolinx has committed to reviewing and responding to all recommendations in a timely and transparent manner.

After this overview of the Reference Panel process, panelists were asked to situate themselves physically around the room in relation to where they live – north, south, east and west. This helped illustrate the random and even distribution of participants from across the neighbourhood. Panelist introductions followed, with people saying how long they'd lived in the neighbourhood (a combined total of 414 years) and stating their motivations for being part of the process and conversation. Many shared a broad curiosity about transit issues, neighbourhood connectivity and a belief in civic engagement. A few panelists expressed a skepticism about the process, questioning whether their recommendations would be addressed by Metrolinx and stating they were "disappointed we weren't consulted from the start about going over versus under."

People shared concerns about condominium development and increased density, air quality, noise, vibration and traffic (vehicular and train) saying that while they "believe in public transit, there's a need to mitigate the negative impacts and make this project work for the neighbourhood." Panelists talked about wanting better access to transit, public spaces, cycling trails and pedestrian infrastructure. Several noted their deep appreciation for the economic and social diversity in the neighbourhood, its rich industrial and cultural heritage, and emphasized their desire to "give back and help achieve realistic, tangible and long-lasting local benefits."

Next, Metrolinx President and CEO Bruce McCuaig presented Metrolinx's three-fold mandate:

- deliver the best transportation services while leading to a better, more convenient service tomorrow
- Make the best possible use of public transportation investment dollars
- Measurably improve quality of life in the region

McCuaig noted that Metrolinx's regional planning and infrastructure projects directly influence neighbourhoods and they are looking for innovative ways to engage with communities and to create connections across all Metrolinx-owned rail corridors. He stated that Metrolinx is interested in being a good neighbour and serving communities while implementing major projects and delivering local benefits.

Next, Richard Joy – Executive Director of the Urban Land Institute of Toronto – provided an overview of some of the major planning issues affecting the GTHA region. He stated that these issues largely come down to population growth pressures and gridlock. The



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implications of these issues result in productivity loss, deepening inequality across the region, and poorer health outcomes. This part of the presentation was about the “big picture” in the region, to provide context around the need for the Davenport Community Rail Overpass project within the broader pressures facing the GTHA region and understanding the implications of maintaining the status quo.

Elise Croll, Metrolinx Director of Environmental Programs and Assessments, addressed the panelists next. She contextualized how this Panel process fits within the wider environmental assessment and public engagement required for the project. She explained how Metrolinx would use design excellence principles for this project and that the noise, air quality, vibration issues would all be mitigated as directed by regulatory requirements. She reviewed in detail how Metrolinx arrived at its preferred option for going ‘over’ the Davenport Diamond rail crossing, as opposed to ‘under’ after extensive review and consideration. She reiterated that Metrolinx recognizes the overpass will have impacts as well as offer potential benefits for the community. It’s the Panel’s job to make recommendations on how to mitigate any impacts and to identify opportunities for long-term local benefits.

The presentations from McCuaig, Joy and Croll prompted questions from panelists and further discussion to shed light on the process, scale and purpose of regional transportation expansion and infrastructure planning. People were curious to know if a specific budget had been allocated for investing in the community with public realm improvements such as park and public spaces. Metrolinx clarified that in developing the Regional Express Rail strategy, it is working to finalize a program to fund public realm improvements, similar to what was done for the Eglinton Crosstown. Questions were also asked about the plans and timelines for electrifying the Barrie Corridor (an 8 - 9 year horizon for all of the GO lines with work still to be completed on the phasing for which corridors would be electrified first). Panelists were provided copies of the presentations and backgrounders in binders and encouraged to continue to ask questions and discuss the project at any time during the process with their neighbours, stakeholders, Metrolinx resource people and the facilitation team.

After a quick lunch break, the entire group headed outside for a site walk to explore the area where the overpass will be constructed and envision how new community connections and public spaces could be ‘unlocked’ with this project. The walk allowed panelists to learn more about the construction, engineering and mitigation requirements. Seeing the rail corridor allowed panelists to better absorb the height and scale of the overpass as well as actively envision creative possibilities for community place-making. En route, people brainstormed creative ideas for the proposed public spaces – pop-up markets, community art projects, native species plantings, community gardens and engaging local artists – but also worried that their efforts will be met with resistance or be deemed ‘impossible’ or ‘unaffordable’ by decision makers.

This conversation continued into the post-walk observations with one person noting that good design doesn’t necessarily mean expensive or high maintenance, “but regardless, we should think big about what we want in this community.” Moderator Peter MacLeod said that while all their ideas and recommendations may not be possible, it was their job



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as panelists to think expansively about what they want, what would be good for the community. Their task was to get their ideas out on paper for all to hear and discuss. Metrolinx's job is to consider all recommendations and engage with, respond and explain their plans with the community on an ongoing basis.

After the walk, panelists took part in small group discussions about their initial impressions, as well as their own values and priorities that would guide their deliberations on the Davenport Community Rail Overpass. A volunteer from each table shared their collective ideas with the room. Some common themes included: sustainability, environmental stewardship, heritage, and safety. Panelists were curious to know what kind of resources and budget would be allocated to this project, something that Metrolinx confirmed they were in the process of determining and would report back. A number of people felt that regardless of the constraints, it was critical for the community to "think big and make sure this is something that serves the community and is as good as it can possibly be."

As the meeting adjourned, panelists were encouraged to share what they learned from the day with family, friends, and colleagues to deepen their sense of community perspectives and priorities.