

George Westel

Feb 24, 2018.



To: J. Robert Prichard
Chair, Metrolinx
97 Front St. W.
Toronto, ON. M5J-1E6
chair@metrolinx.com

Dear Mr. Prichard and members of the board:

Re: Access to Don River trails.

A Petition to the Board of Metrolinx to direct the creation of pedestrian crossings across the Richmond Hill GO-train line at points along the Lower Don River.

I am a frequent user of the trails along the Don River. My usual access point is from the bottom of Beechwood Dr. I walk these trails with my dog. Often, I share these walks with my godson; in earlier times, we would have great adventures together along the river bank trails.

On one side of the river is a paved pathway, the Lower Don Trail, and on the other, west side, is a dirt trail, commonly referred to as "the Flats".* *It is access to this dirt trail that concerns this petition, that involves Metrolinx as owner/ operator of the single track rail line that runs up the Don on this same side.*

* <https://www.trailforks.com/region/crothers-woods-18708/?lat=43.694441&lon=-79.357939&z=15&m=trailforks>

Accessing this trail, as many people do, can involve an act of trespass across the rail line. Maintaining access, as people are wont to do, has involved the sabotaging of the efforts of PNR Railworks, the maintenance contractor, to block access. People ought not to be placed in a precarious legal situation simply in order to maintain access to public lands, and to make use of traditional trails.

From Beechwood Dr it is tempting to walk across the rail bridge to get on this trail. Crossing the rail bridge is most convenient, but one has always the fear that a train might appear. PNR has recently installed diamond meshing on the trail side of the bridge, and this seems to have finally stopped this practice. The "official" access to the Flats trail, at this its south end, is indicated clearly on the Trailforks.com map referenced above: crossing the pedestrian span bridge that connects the Lower Don Trail to Cottontail meadows/ Crothers Woods, then on back along the riverbank and under the rail bridge*.

This bit of the trail is right on the bank edge, can be slippery when wet or frozen, and passage under the rail bridge has low headroom and is subject to flooding. To

attach a pedestrian walkway to the side of the rail bridge would be of great convenience.

The more pressing concern is further upstream. This well used rail crossing is located at the bottom of the road leading to the North Toronto Wastewater Treatment Facility (21 Redway Rd.). This access* (see map) is straight forward and quite safe- we cross directly the track and line of sight along the rail track in both directions is good.

Parents with children cross here to venture on the trail and to visit the BMX Park just south of here that communities of (mostly) fathers with their youngsters, and adult and teenage BMX enthusiast have constructed over the past decades. Off-trail riders cross here too. From here one can connect to Leaside; or, via the Redway Access trail, to the Sun Valley Loop, a granular pathway the TRCA has recently constructed, which connects to Bayview Ave, and a trail high along the valley side leading down to Pottery road. For myself, access here creates a looping connection for my dog walk leading back to Cottonwood meadows and thence to Beechwood Dr. I like passing thru the BMX Park on the way upstream, but on the way back I can avoid the awkward crossing under the rail bridge.

The third location is not much north of here. This is labelled on the Trailforks.com map as being across from the hydro station somewhat above the Millwood Rd Bridge, although crossing directly under the bridge is more familiar to me.

At this present moment, a new chain link fence is being installed along the rail corridor cutting off access at both these locations. Certainly, control of access is legitimate for liability and actual safety concerns. Life is full of dangers; we can be reasonable about balancing risks and our self-interests. The planned increase in frequency of service along this route may raise the level of concern; still, the track will remain a single line of moderate speed, and so should not present great problems to the provision of designated crossing points.

At present, I (and many others) am placed in a position of committing an act that may be considered trespass and by so doing am vicariously a party to the actions which allow me to cross. We many seek only to enjoy the fruits of our communal labors, which have created /maintained the trails and the BMX Park, and to find ease and comfort from the stresses of urban living, which only nature can provide. This is not healthy public policy.

I hope my humble petition reaches your ears and that a solution can be reached and action taken in the not too distant future. Summer is not far off.

Yours Sincerely,
George Westel.