

Date: Friday, February 17, 2022

To: Phil Verster, CEO Metrolinx

cc: Donald Wright, Chair, Metrolinx Board  
Rosemarie Powell Toronto Community Benefits Network  
Simon Chamberlain, Secretary Mount Dennis Community Association  
Frances Nunziata, City of Toronto Councillor York South Weston  
Faisal Hassan, MPP York South Weston  
Ahmed Hussen, MP York South Weston  
Kelly Hagan, Metrolinx VP Community Relations & Capital Communications

From: Rick Ciccarelli, Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative

Re: Metrolinx Board Closed Meeting Discussion on Doing Community Benefits Differently

Dear Mr. Vester,

I have been asked to make comments for your Board's discussion on community benefits at its closed meeting being held later today, February 17, 2022. Previously, I have been the community organizer in the founding years of the Toronto Community Benefits Network, and previously was the Chair of the Clean Train Coalition advocating that Metrolinx GO Electric. Currently I am part of a grassroots group in Mount Dennis that is working on climate action from a neighbourhood level, the Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative.

Our issues are straight forward, and time sensitive. We are available for follow-up discussions at Metrolinx's earliest convenience. Please consider the following:

### **1. Community Engagement:**

The engagement of Metrolinx in defining its Community Benefits Agreement for the Eglinton Crosstown was ground breaking.

To date, however, there has been no public engagement or information shared about Metrolinx's plan for Community Benefits Agreement as part of its Eglinton Crosstown West Extension Project even though the main tunnel construction contract has already been awarded and we have been told to expect tendering of remaining work this year as its hurry up time. We have raised the need to address community benefits in every one of the ECWE consultation meetings and received a pacifying response without any commitment nor detail nor follow-up.

We are rapidly losing trust in Metrolinx having any corporate interest in meaningfully engaging the citizen representatives in its planning consultations. Rather than an honest and tough exchange on issues and a mutual commitment to find solutions, these have taken on the character of sales puffery covering over pre-determined traffic engineering plans and lacking substantial exchange or any ongoing dialogue on planning issues.

**PLEASE, we need you to ensure that your projects put the "community" in community benefits, and that Metrolinx strengthens the impact of community benefits through your tendering processes without inaccurately re-defining its purpose!**

## **2. Social-Economic inclusion:**

We have had many years of engagement on transit planning and our community leadership in Mount Dennis sees it as a springboard for revitalizing our historically disadvantaged neighbourhood. The Eglinton Crosstown Community Benefits Framework developed with government, Institutions, Labour and Communities-- all hosted by you at a reference group table-- was a collaborative breakthrough.

This effort recognized and attempted to address barriers people face to reach toward the social-economic opportunities created by the economies of large transit infrastructure project being planned to cross through many historically disadvantaged neighbourhoods like ours across Toronto.

But if we want to build an inclusive society, it takes more than being at the table and talking together. It requires determination to make change happen and create the mechanisms for intentionally and equitably sharing economic opportunities so all peoples have pathways to prosperity and away from circumstances of poverty.

The importance to creating construction workforce connections for Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, Women and Youth from low income families cannot be understated. We expect Metrolinx to ensure minimum employment thresholds for equity deserving groups are in you tender calls and project agreements. This includes at least a10% equity hiring provisions for Apprenticeships and Journeypersons positions in construction projects as well as including employment pathways to Professional, Administrative and Technical positions

We have achieved advances where contractors and sub contractors provide contract opportunities to local businesses, diverse owned businesses or social enterprises as part of the requirements for Community Benefits Agreements. Catering and courier services sub-contracting provided for work of people with Mental Health challenges involved in organizations like the members of Working for Change; youth entry into the workforce through UrbanArts Toronto and BuildingUp, both Mount Dennis-based, are important not just to the youth they help to get work in their fields of interest, but also to supporting the wider community through the roles these organizations have in the artistic endeavours and home retrofit services they perform for our neighbourhood.

Metrolinx should advance ways to encourage these important community wealth-building partnerships. At minimum, your decision-making criteria used for qualifying bidders and in tendering should include demonstrating history of supporting local businesses, diverse owned businesses and social enterprise.

## **3. Neighbourhood and environmental improvements**

On this matter we ask the Metrolinx Board of Directors to please:

- ensure ongoing engagement with local communities impacted by LRT construction to co-design enhancements that encourage use of public transit, cycling and walking as part of place making.

- commit to an early and solutions-focused community dialogue on impacts and related concerns enhance neighbourhood-scale liveability and the sustainability of built and natural environments where transit is being built.
- consider affordable housing for lower income people, innovation spaces for local business innovation, education spaces, community service facilities as neighbourhood improvements relating to community benefits.
- consider sustainable transportation and infrastructure issues and opportunities in Mount Dennis through an educational and climate policy lens.
- NOT consider the private sector building access to nearby public transit facilities as a “community benefit”, but rather a planning mandatory, and do your share. So far the public access to Mount Dennis Station are very limited, and do not reach the south side of Eglinton. Similarly access to the Mount Dennis GO/UPX platform is only from the west side. Building accessible Public Transit requires basic access, which is currently lacking. Asking private developers to pay for facilities associated with projects which already have dedicated government capital funds is, bluntly, stealing from contributions that should go to neighbourhood improvements needed for local schools and the shelter system.

Metrolinx efforts to work with the Mount Dennis BIA on street improvements furniture improvements are window washing services are commendable. The monumental work of retaining and repurposing the former Kodak Building was inspiring as an example of circular economy to repurpose old buildings. Your Doors Open event at the Mount Dennis Maintenance and Storage Yard was both fun and educational. Well done on all counts!

But these do not mean you have achieved what was committed to in your planning of the first Eglinton Crosstown project. We have a list of pain points:

- The former Kodak Employees Building was designated for community purposes at public meetings, but nothing further has been discussed as a method for this to happen. Rumours of Metrolinx using it as a Community Relations Office or leasing it out as a private commercial enterprise are simply not acceptable.
- The footprint of the MSF was shrunk by Metrolinx planners with the intention of creating future employment lands as a commitment that predated the Crosstown Community Benefits Framework. These sites are apparently “occupied” until project completion-- which now means 2032. This is a total of 17 years after the community planning meetings finished and many changes of staff and consultants since that affect your corporate memory. Our memory still holds that commitments were made that you need to honour.
- Your general contractor has deforested the western valley of the Black Creek with no public consultation, let alone any follow-up commitment to the community to ensure reforestation in our neighbourhood, As a result, while ECWE boasts about tree planting in Etobicoke, the bare slope on the side of the Mount Dennis MSF has been eroding onto Industry Street and Todd Baylis Drive for the past 3 years during extreme downpours, which are occurring more frequently as climate change advances. Perhaps a job training program? Perhaps some of the trees being cut down by Metrolinx across

the region might be young Sugar Maples, which our colleague leading the local indigenous school need for re-building their healing lodge this spring?

- Running an LRT Expressway bridge across Eglinton Flats is more than an environmental blight, it is an offensive imposition on major green space and an overuse of highly ghg- producing construction materials like concrete and steel. The plan for this section is totally out of character with the natural environment that it cuts across in the name of saving riders a few minutes. Rather than permit this, Metrolinx ECWE needs to reset its plan for connection between Scarlett Road and East of Jane, with a comprehensive review of the option of an at-grade, middle of the road connection between tunnel portals. It should cost less to use the existing bridge across the river and instead build a new crossover for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as deal with flood risk issues affecting road level traffic through Eglinton Flats.

#### 4. Sustainability Strategy

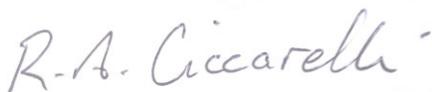
Mount Dennis has been designated as a pilot net zero neighbourhood, and we have advocating for all neighbourhood stakeholders to work together on climate action as an “ecoNeighbourhood”. Despite the initial conflict that both sides successfully resolved, district energy solutions like the Mount Dennis 20 MW utility battery located on the north west of the MSF, are definitely heading in the right direction.

But will Metrolinx ensure its electric power is not supplied by Natural Gas in the future as the supply from Pickering Nuclear gets phased out? Calgary invested in renewable energy for its LRT years ago, perhaps Ontario Ministry of Transportation might approve a Metrolinx investment in Indigenous Power Generation as offset? (And how does the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension compare with their Green Line planning?)

We respectfully request you look for ways to ensure facilities being built transportation support the transition toward net zero, both in our local neighbourhood and across your system. Critically, we urge you to engage with the City of Toronto’s Sustainable Transportation Technology Sector Hub planning, and with Mount Dennis neighbourhood’s satellite post secondary educational campus planning so we can get education, research and innovation happening locally and globally.

In sum, we recognize that Metrolinx has been a key player in shaping community benefits through public transit infrastructure, and we respectfully ask that you continue to be a champion for this collective approach to work. Please work with the community in building a sustainable future together.

On behalf of the Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative Team



Rick Ciccarelli , Lead Director (vol) Mount Dennis ecoNeighbourhood Initiative

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