

Deputations made to Toronto City Council Infrastructure and Environment Committee

April 26, 2022

Item IE29.14 Metrolinx's Proposed Don Valley Layover Facility and the Wonscotonach Parklands

Deputation #1: Sandra Dosen

Six months ago, I was gutted to learn about Metrolinx's Proposed Don Valley Layover Facility and I am here today to express my opposition to this project.

As an avid commuter, I strongly feel this project is an antithesis to what public transit represents.

The Don Valley is a haven for me and the millions of visitors it welcomes but more than that, it is a haven, a home, an ecological corridor and migration route for wildlife, big and small. The Don Valley's ecological and social importance cannot be overstated but seems to be continually undervalued.

As an avid birder, cyclist, hiker and explorer of the Don Valley, it is evident to me why its a cultural and environmental cornerstone and this development will fundamentally change it, destroying swaths of the ravine system's ecosystem that took decades and decades to revive and thrive.

We are looking at large-scale habitat loss, the irreversible interruption to an ecological corridor and noise and light pollution that will inevitably disrupt and push wildlife out. If you think we're the only ones experiencing a housing crisis, our more-than-human kin are too. This development will add enormous volumes of concrete and pavement to an existing flood plain, worsening flooding in addition to creating an urban heat island effect, worsening extreme heat. We are in an accelerating climate emergency and we need to protect biodiversity and Nature.

On top of this, I am hearing the use of language that seeks to devalue this area in the ravine system to dampen what would be a collective loss. Concepts like reviving an existing rail corridor and invasive species are disingenuous, lacking in transparency and seek to justify development in Toronto's largest urban park. It should be noted that this proposed development happens in a city-designated Environmentally Significant Area.

As for invasive species, much of Southern Ontario is covered by a mix of invasive and native species but I cannot imagine anything more invasive than paving over an ecosystem! It took over 60 years of replanting and revitalization to turn this area into a cornerstone of Toronto's outdoor culture and natural heritage. This development will undo this. There is a site downstream from this proposed area that would serve this proposed use as well.

Lastly, I am concerned about the research being used to inform this development. Things have changed drastically as we head into a post-pandemic era. Is there any current data to back this project that is reflective of our new hybrid work culture and mobility trends?

My question to you is where is the imagination, the foresight and will to do and plan better?! Please protect the Don Valley Parklands. Please expand public transit. You can do both with making it a trade-off between essential services.

Sandra Dosen

Deputation #2: Tom Connell

Chair McKelvie and Council members,

Thank you for the opportunity to make this statement to the Committee. My name is Tom Connell, and I live on the west side of the Don Valley, and am involved with various community groups that support protection of Toronto's green space and ravine lands, as well as needed transit improvements.

I'd like to focus my comments today on certain assertions that have been made on behalf of Metrolinx as part of the justification for the layover proposal. I believe these assertions understate the likely environmental impact of the layover.

My comments concern the area of the Don River that I'll call the *Winchester Gap*. This is a section of the valley just north of the Riverdale footbridge, and is the former location of the Winchester Street Bridge. More significantly, it is the area where the old portage trail—roughly running along Davenport Road, and used for thousands of years by indigenous populations—reached the river. This is also where the Don Branch rail line crosses the river, on a railway bridge completed a century agoⁱ.

As part of the Transit Project Assessment Process, the **Go Expansion Environmental Project Review** (dated March 2021) assumed that [QUOTE] “the existing rail bridge over the Don River will be used as part of the layover facility, which eliminates potential impacts to the Don River and fish habitat.”ⁱⁱ [UNQUOTE] However, Metrolinx has subsequently indicated the layover project will include “replacement of the Don River bridge” along with reconstruction of track infrastructure running from the rail line west of the river, to the layover site.ⁱⁱⁱ

Given that there clearly *will* be impacts on the Don River bed and banks and fish habitat, it is essential that a complete environmental review be carried out, to clearly document the full environmental impact of the layover proposal.

Metrolinx has claimed that the layover approach of “new use for old track” will produce the [quote] “least possible impact on the Don Valley”^{iv}. But now it seems that the facility will use reconstructed track, and one of the selling points for the project just went by the wayside.

The Environmental Review also asserted that Metrolinx was “aligned with the city of Toronto to develop a layover facility outside of the City's *ESA* limits [so] as to preserve the natural function

ⁱ Source: [Don Rail Bridge Source](#)

ⁱⁱ Source: Environmental Project Review Chapter 5, p. 126

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Metrolinx RQ&Q issued 17 Dec. 2021

^{iv} Source: [Article New Use for an Old Track dated 15 April 1991](#)

of the Don River Valley”^v. An ESA is an *Environmentally Significant Area*, which typically encompasses ecologies needed for healthy ecosystems, diverse undisturbed areas, and sensitive plant and animal communities.

The review seems to ignore the fact that the new bridge and connecting rail line leading to the layover run right through the middle of the ESA that stretches from the Riverdale footbridge to the Viaduct. Bridge and track construction work and related staging may well have a significant impact on the natural functioning in this area, while making it more difficult to strengthen the environmental corridor between the lake and the central Don Valley. The entire nature corridor, not to mention the Don Valley Superpark, will be squeezed through the 3-by-4 meter concrete box of the Belleville Underpass.

Based on the enduring damage that the layover project may impose on the area around the Winchester Gap, the current layover proposal is too big a price to pay for a diesel train parking facility. And this is just one piece of the case against the layover. I encourage City Council to work with the Transit Expansion Office and TRCA to critically evaluate Metrolinx’s plans around the Winchester Gap, and to request Metrolinx to bring forward plans that show clearly what would be required to develop functional layover capacity at one or more other more appropriate sites.

Thank you.

Tom Connell

^v Source: Environmental Project Review, Appendix D2, p. 90

Deputation #3: Shane Dunworth-Crompton

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Metrolinx's proposed layover and storage facility for diesel trains in the Don River Valley Watershed. My name is Shane Crompton. I am fortunate to have been a resident of the west side of the Don River Valley since I moved here in 1996 and I've been a regular visitor to the beautiful ravine there. Like my native Australia, Canada has beautiful natural spaces and its citizens value and appreciate them. I have admired the Don Valley ravines' magnificent trees, the sparkling river, & the varied and profuse wildlife, including birds, foxes, coyotes, deer, rabbits in a setting that is surprisingly natural despite being in the middle of a bustling & growing City. The Don Valley is a natural haven for 1.4 million downtown residents as well as an ecological corridor linking the Oak Ridges Moraine to Lake Ontario.

Toronto is a world-class City, the 4th largest city in North America and a leader in so many areas such as technology, finance, film, music, culture and innovation. Toronto consistently places at the top of international rankings for liveable cities. A world-class City has to have a world-class park.

Recognising this, in October of 2016 Mayor Tory announced the "First Mile" of the city-wide ravine strategy, the Don River Valley Park project. An innovative and exciting partnership between the City of Toronto, Evergreen and the TRCA with support from corporate and private donors, the goal was to create a 'super park' stretching from Evergreen Brickworks all the way to Lake Ontario. As Evergreen CEO Geoff Cape said at the time, the park would give "Torontonians and visitors to our great City access to the incredible green space that is the Lower Don".

The Toronto Region Conservation Authority has stated that The Lower Don is the site of one of the largest urban environmental restoration projects in the world.

In 2020 City Council unanimously adopted the Toronto Ravine Strategy, and the City website stated the aim was to clean up and protect the city's more than 300 km ravine system as a "natural, connected sanctuary essential for the health and well-being of the city, where use and enjoyment support protection, education and stewardship". Since these enormously positive & exciting commitments to building a park in the Don Valley ravine were made, Metrolinx made an announcement of its own: it plans to build a layover for 3 diesel trains from the Milton commuter line in the middle of the "First Mile" of this park, in the watershed between Evergreen Brickworks and The Prince Edward Viaduct.

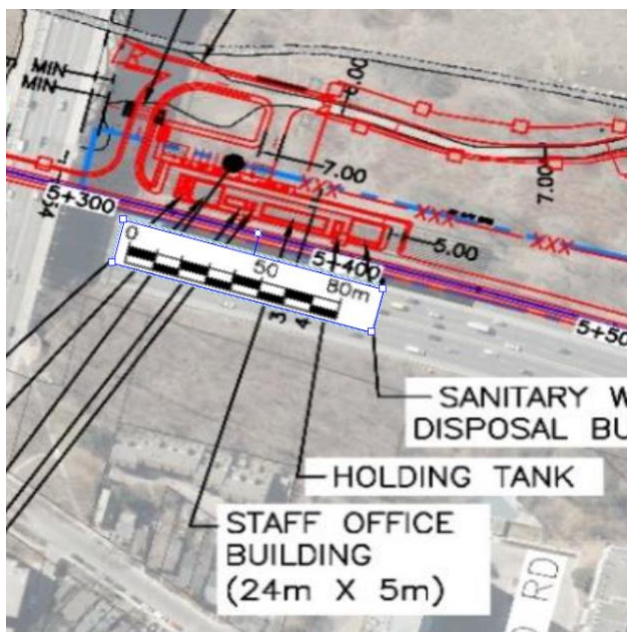
Suddenly there were no further official announcements regarding the implementation of the ravine strategy, or about the vision to build a super park to protect and conserve the ravines for all. It is commonly acknowledged that travel and transportation are one of the largest sources of

climate pollution and The City of Toronto is making great strides towards a green and clean electrified public transit system. But building a diesel train parking and storage facility in the Lower Don Valley watershed is neither green nor clean. It constitutes an unconscionable return to the bad old days when City planning was premised on the cheap, the expedient, the quick and dirty. Today Toronto shows the scars of short-sighted and ill-advised City planning: one of our 2 most spectacular natural assets, our waterfront, is blighted by highways, high-rises and overpasses. One of Toronto's last remaining natural assets is the spectacular ravine system, unique in the world and it needs to be protected.

We now live in a post-Covid world, the nature of which no one can yet truly predict. No one can say if commuters will return to the office in significant numbers or when. What everyone now surely understands, however, is the imperative to conserve and protect our green and natural spaces for people now and in the future. Toronto has an opportunity to save its last remaining significant natural asset by rejecting the truly egregious proposal to dump a massive 35' tall concrete layover in fragile wetlands and wildlife habitat that is the Lower Don Watershed. Metrolinx has failed to fully inform the public about its plan for the Don Valley. It has failed to justify rushing the construction of this commuter diesel train layover when there remains much uncertainty regarding ridership levels and given that it entails the sacrifice of Toronto's own valid and worthy plans for the protection of our ravines.

I call on City Council and mayor Tory not to bend to the expedient of short-term solutions and to prevail upon Metrolinx to work with the City of Toronto to find a better solution to this transit system requirement.

Shane Dunworth-Crompton



Deputation #4: Brian Phillips

Hello. My name is Brian Phillips. I have owned and operated worldSALON in the Saint Lawrence Market neighbourhood for 33 years and I live in ward 14. I'm speaking here today on behalf of wonscotonachtrail.ca , a group of citizens opposed to the diesel train parking lot Metrolinx plans to construct. We think instead, this rail line would make an incredible walking trail akin to the HighLine in New York City. This scenic trail would start behind the Loblaws on Laird Avenue, traverse down through Leaside, over the Half Mile Bridge by the Brickworks and into the Riverdale Park area. Wonscotonach Trail would be an opportunity to bring more awareness to this ancient trail used 11,000 years ago by First Nations people and an important access point into the valley for an underserved community in Thorncliffe.

Years ago, while training for the New York City Marathon, I came within twenty feet of a majestic buck on the Don Trail, with a full set of antlers. It was springtime and the sun was coming up behind him, so he was in silhouette and his breath was illuminated. After a minute he sauntered into the Helliwell Hill Wetland to eat march plants and drink. The fifty years of stewardship in the Don Valley to bring a wasteland back to health became clear to me in this moment. I was so full of gratitude and vowed to do what I could to protect this valuable resource.

We are spending over a billion dollars to naturalize and beautify the mouth of the Don River to create an environment for citizens to get out and enjoy health and wellness activities and two kilometres up the river, lovingly restored parkland with groves of hawthorn, spruce and habitat for hundreds of species will be paved over for a diesel train parking lot. When asked about the Don Branch line, which transit experts have identified as a viable alternative, Metrolinx is silent.

We have an opportunity now to build a legacy park in walking distance of downtown Toronto, like Mount Royal in Montreal and Stanley Park in Vancouver. In this time of COVID and climate change all citizens would embrace this dream. We must not allow Metrolinx to destroy this dream by introducing industry back into Wonscotonach Park.

Thank you.

Brian Phillips

Deputation #5: Val Masters

Hello, and thank you Dr. McKelvie, Mr. Pasternak, Mr. Colle, Mr. Layton, Mr. Minnan-Wong, and Mr. Perruzza. My name is Val Masters, my pronouns are they/them/theirs, I live in Ward 14, Toronto-Danforth. I came to voice my opposition to Metrolinx's plan to build a diesel train layover in the Don Valley. Countless people have worked to restore this ecologically sensitive zone. This green space means too much to our communities to needlessly sacrifice it. There are other locations where the layover can be built, locations that do not pose the significant environmental and engineering challenges that this site poses.

Dr. McKelvie, I want to appeal to you specifically as a fellow geoscientist. Housing diesel trains - or electric trains if Metrolinx decides to electrify - in a floodplain is dangerous. Housing diesel trains - or electric trains if Metrolinx decides to electrify - in a floodplain is dangerous. Metrolinx's flood risk map shows that large parts of the layover lie in the 100-year, 50-year, 25-year, 10-year, and even 5-year storm flood zones. The facility boundary lies within a few meters of the 2-year flood zone. A 1 in-10-year event has a 96% chance of occurring in a 30-year timespan. Even with the facility being raised up above the 100-year flood level as is planned, there is still a 26% chance it will flood in a 30-year timespan. Climate change will increase flooding frequency and intensity, and this project will increase the impermeable material surface area in the valley, making flooding worse - according to Metrolinx's documents, the impact will be "significant". I would like to point out that the flood of July 2013 in the Don Valley was the most expensive flood disaster in Ontario history at a cost of \$1.03 billion dollars. A GO train was stranded in that event, and it took 7 hours to ferry everyone out. As a result of that experience, I think that Metrolinx should be planning to avoid future flooding disasters, instead of making them more likely, and more costly - cost which is incurred by the taxpayers.

I also know that Metrolinx's plan to truck in soil to replace the, quote "geotechnically unsuitable" soil currently in place means that this structure will be expensive to build and prone to erosion, which will further degrade the environment due to sedimentation of the waterway and wetlands.

I suggest that Metrolinx take the time to do the necessary geotechnical and environmental impact studies, and re-evaluate post-Covid Go Transit ridership to determine if this project is in fact necessary at all. As a Crown corporation, Metrolinx has a duty to let taxpayers know exactly how our money will be used, and should conduct genuine community consultation to hear our concerns.

Thank you very much for your time Councillors, I will be observing your voting on this issue.

Val Masters

Citations:

“Is flooding in Toronto a concern?” (2014) N. Nirupama, Costas Armenakis, and Myriam Montpetit. *Natural Hazards* 72:1259-1264. DOI 10.1007/s11069-014-1054-2

“Geotechnically unsuitable” quote from the Metrolinx New Track and Facilities TPAP Final Environmental Project Report, chapter 7, page 49 (from March 5, 2021, revision 02)

Preliminary Stormwater Management Assessment Reports for the Don Valley Layover Facility are outlined in the Metrolinx New Track and Facilities TPAP Final Environmental Project Report, Appendix H. Don Valley section starts on page 109 of the 166 page document. Flood map on page 125.

Metrolinx states that “part of the site under existing condition remains within the floodplain and further investigation and analysis will be required during detailed design, as well as consultation with TRCA and the City of Toronto, to mitigate flooding risks” and that “the proposed Don Valley Layover Facility development will increase the industrial use of the site resulting in substantial increased discharges [of runoff water]. As shown in Table 4-2, the theoretical increase in flows resulting from the Don Valley Layover Facility development is significant when considering future climate changes, therefore, measure for the quantity, quality and water balance will be required to verify those post-development condition during detailed design.” - Appendix H Preliminary Stormwater Management Assessment Report, 4.3 Development Impact on Drainage & Proposed Measures (Footprint Impacts) p.25 (141/166 in PDF)

Deputation #6: Catherine Berka

Dear Councillor McKelvie and Members,

The six of you have a very important responsibility - that of balancing infrastructure and environment. These decisions are almost always difficult to make. The City spent considerable money and effort with input from thousands of individuals to develop the Parkland Strategy. But it is far easier to write such documents (along with Ravine and Biodiversity Strategies) than to operationalize them. It is largely up to this committee to see that this happens - that we taxpayers do not pay for greenwashing in our City.

One of the loopholes in our park protection bylaw exempts infrastructure projects. That Premiere Ford, uses this loophole to build a fossil fuel burning service station in our largest “central” park is unconscionable, and a slippery slope since infrastructure can be defined as buildings, roads, power supplies, highways, streets, roads, and mass transit...where will building infrastructure in our parks end if we do not fight this? Will the Don Valley become Union Station East?

From the City’s Parkland Strategy - *“Toronto’s park system will expand and improve as the city grows to ensure that parkland is accessible, functional, connected, and resilient.”* And that we should work to *“preserve the most valued features and elements of the parks system.”* This particular project runs counter to every one of these principles.

The Don River Valley is truly central to Toronto. It is THE single best candidate for a legacy park, It could be stunning - natural and iconic with the magnificent 38 km Don stretching from our waterfront up past the 401. It could be built almost entirely by social capital and private funding. It can also provide access to underserved communities in the downtown core. When this City grows vertically in the millions of square feet being developed at Toronto’s Portlands and Corktown, where is the park space for these people? The Don Valley is the only park large and accessible enough to serve as our Central Park. Are we really going to ask taxpayers to purchase swaths of parkland off Bay Street, or University Avenue to accommodate densification?

The other unique feature of this location is The Prince Edward Viaduct. When one drives south on the DVP we see this iconic bridge, our urban forest, with the Toronto skyline in the background. If this facility is built, we will instead see a monster of a diesel train storage facility, enclosed by a 35 foot, 1 km long retaining wall from that same vantage point.

If these reasons alone are not enough to condemn this diesel facility, I’m not sure what is. The Don River Valley has been carefully de-industrialized, and restored over more than half a century by dedicated conservationists and stewards.

Yet here we are seemingly unable to do anything about it - resigned to building fossil fuel infrastructure to support urban sprawl outside of the GTA.

Last month the International Panel on Climate Change announced “Investing in new fossil fuels infrastructure is moral and economic madness”. So instead of Parkland Strategy, Ravine

Strategy, GreenTO, Resilient TO, we in Toronto are defining madness by allowing fossil fuel infrastructure. In our parks no less.

The moment that this diesel facility gets built is the moment that all Torontonians will shake their heads and wonder why they didn't stop this, but at that moment, it will be too late. When we attempt to buy parkland in the downtown core and find we cannot afford it, our heads will have fallen off from all the shaking. Bad design and planning will cost us more in the end.

Metrolinx claims that no other locations meet their criteria but there is ALWAYS a plan B. Transit experts have identified two. We need to press Metrolinx to do what a world class city would:

- 1) Park trains outside of parkland.
- 2) And build a legacy park.

Building fossil fuel infrastructure in one of the City's grandest locations is MADNESS and your committee and Council should do everything possible to stop it.

Catherine Berka