

Submission to the Committee on Social Policy of the Ontario Legislature, relating to Bill 171

To the Committee,

Unless the Province wants to create a source of on-going political embarrassment and negative news stories, Bill 171 must require Metrolinx to behave like a partner to the communities through which the Ontario Line will be built, and not an irresponsible bully.

I lived and worked three blocks from the Yonge-Eglinton intersection through much of the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, and I saw at first hand the devastation and needless disruption that their contractors produced in the process. I saw with my own eyes that they gave no consideration to the inconvenience and increased danger their construction created for the local residents, or the loss of business to the local businesses.

At one point, to go from the southwest corner to the northwest corner of that intersection, a pedestrian was forced to go around three sides of a square, waiting for lights in each direction. There was even a time when pedestrians had to walk several meters north, away from the intersection, to cross from the northeast corner to the northwest corner to complete that square.

Sidewalks disappeared, and pedestrians had no choice but to walk in the road, separated from traffic by a sparse line of orange cones. (See some of the video in the stories cited below.)

The intersection of Eglinton and Mt. Pleasant was at least as bad, and the roadways through both intersections were almost impassable, and certainly very hard on any vehicles – including emergency vehicles – traveling at even single digit speeds through these intersections.

Likewise, local businesses were devastated by the construction. (See, for example, news reports [here](#) and [here](#).) Sidewalks disappeared, and lanes of traffic ran right outside their front doors, with very little room for customers to enter or exit. Certainly customers did not find it attractive to visit any of the local merchants. Many small businesses were bankrupted by the construction, with chain stores among the only survivors.

Meanwhile, Eglinton, as a road, became a nightmare for anyone who lived near it, both because it became very difficult to use as a resident, and because motorists from elsewhere passing through the area would divert onto residential streets, traveling too fast, and in too many numbers for the designed purpose of the roads.

This is not just my opinion. In 2019, [CAA awarded](#) Eglinton East the status of “**Worst Road in Ontario**” as a result of the construction.

Moreover, this kind of massive disruption and casual disregard for the harm done to neighbours and neighbourhoods appears to be business as usual for Metrolinx. Residents and businesses in the Junction area of Toronto are finding Metrolinx’s construction there to be enormously disruptive as well. [See this [report](#) from CP24.]

Almost four years ago, my wife and I moved to Pape Avenue, just north of Riverdale. We were concerned when the TTC announced that they were working on plans for the Downtown Relief Line (“DRL”), that would travel along Pape in front of our new home. Yet, when we attended one of their information meetings, they were open, candid, and seemed to be forthright about what was happening, and when it would happen.

The same is not true of Metrolinx when they brushed the TTC aside, and took over the route planned for the DRL. They held two so-called “information meetings” that we are aware of, but at the one attended, they gave very little information, speaking only in vague, and sometimes contradictory, generalities, they refused to take questions, and they showed no interest in engaging in discussion with members of the community. Indeed, it seemed to us that the reason why they held the meeting was purely so they could say they had “consulted” with the community.

When I later discussed this with Toronto City Councillor Josh Matlow, who represented us at Yonge & Eglinton, he said he had stopped going to meetings held by Metrolinx as they were not conducted in good faith. The meetings existed only so they could say they had met with councillors. Their sole purpose was PR, pure and simple.

To sum up, Metrolinx **cannot be trusted** to build or operate the Ontario Line without vigorous oversight and enforceable accountability.

What I, my family, and a number of our neighbours would therefore ask of the Committee is:

- 1) That Metrolinx be directed, as one of their top two or three priorities, to minimize the social, economic, and safety effects on the residents and businesses along the route, **and be held accountable** for this.
- 2) That local residents and businesses **be given a seat** on any board or oversight body so that people most directly affected by the construction be kept informed of what's going on, and have a means to object and suggest alternatives that might be more workable.
- 3) That Metrolinx **be required to be directly responsible** for the actions of its contractors and their subcontractors. We have experienced, in our interactions with Metrolinx just last month as their survey and drilling crews worked outside our house, that Metrolinx hides behind these contracting arrangements by saying things like, "Well, you'd have to talk to the contractors about that. We're not directly involved."

This is merely a slick way of avoiding responsibility and accountability, and will serve no one's ends, not the Province's, not the City's, not the eventual users, and not the local residents and businesses. Moreover, Metrolinx's management of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT shows that poor coordination and control over contractors leads to major cost- and time-overruns, as well as disruptions that could have been avoided.

Unless the Province actually wants to earn a black eye for the incompetence of their delegated body, Metrolinx, and be forced to answer an endless stream of embarrassing questions in the media about cost overruns, endangered pedestrians, bankrupt businesses, the destruction of the Danforth-Pape business area, and irate local residents and business owners, **it will require Metrolinx to behave responsibly, and to be accountable for their actions, as well as the actions of their contractors and subcontractors.**

Metrolinx has proven by its actions that it cannot be trusted to police itself.

Thank you.

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