

More Haste; Less Speed – Presentation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

(I have incorporated the photographs I showed during the presentation in this slightly expanded version. Depending on how this is being displayed it may be necessary to page down where the size of the photographs causes breaks.)

Hello, Madam Chair Kusendova, Members of the committee. My name is Amanda Bankier. I live at Fontbonne Place, 791 Queen Street East, just west of the Queen Street railway bridge and next to the embankment.

I understand that representatives of Fontbonne ministries spoke with you yesterday, and I should like to add that in the seventeen years I have lived in their building I have been impressed by the breadth and quality of their outreach ministries.

Their provision of rent geared to income apartments for middle-aged single women with health or housing challenges was lifesaving for me. I am an insulin-using diabetic with peripheral neuropathy. This complication causes substantial difficulties with balance, muscular function, dexterity, and sense of touch, as well as a type of pain that can only partially be compensated for by medication. I normally use a wheeled walker; in situations where it cannot be manoeuvred I can move short distances using two canes. Some of the other residents have equally difficult problems, most of us are older, and no one here is in a position to pay market rent.

As it stands, our building is in close proximity to the trains on the embankment.



The southeast corner of the building is approximately 10 m from the base of the embankment. This photograph, taken in April 2012, shows what a GO train on the track nearest the edge of the embankment looks like from the second storey when it is passing. You can see the rail below the car is right at the edge of the top of the embankment.

The second photograph was taken in November 2009 in Fontbonne Place's community garden, and shows the appearance of a similar train when you are standing at the foot of the embankment.



These photographs, taken in the early Spring and late Fall show the trains clearly since the foliage on the self-planted trees is light or absent. The placement of the trains on the embankment and its proximity to our building of course have not changed in the intervening years.



We have been able to benefit from the opportunity of gardening in parts of the property, mostly on the side of Strange Street next to the embankment. Two weeks ago I took a picture of a branch of one of the three University of Saskatchewan cherry bushes that I planted about nine years ago. Over the small parking lot behind the flowers you can see the base of the embankment directly behind the red car.



Looking back down Strange Street, two days ago, behind the lilac bush I planted in 2016, you can see the City of Toronto dental clinic which is another important amenity located in Fontbonne Place. The ramp leading up to the entrance of the clinic is less than ten meters from the base of the embankment. The trees are already showing the thicker foliage that helps to screen some of the noise and most of the visual effect of the passing trains. These trees, of course, will all be destroyed if any work is done on the embankment.

Here, and in the heavily built up section of the city where it is being planned to run the Ontario Line above ground there will be great impact on many facilities providing opportunity for recreation and living space for vulnerable populations, such as seniors. To carry out the plans, whatever they may finally be, the expropriation of green spaces and living spaces will seriously degrade the quality of the communities. Any errors made in the process would be devastating and expensive. Even in the minor work currently being done for soil testing and other factors can lead to unfortunate consequences if it is done without proper communication with residents and municipal government.



I intended to take my elderly car to shop for necessary items after I finished the previous measuring and picture-taking, but I found this situation with materials related to the drilling projects obstructing the access to my car parked in a handicapped spot with an easily visible sign. To use the car I need to be able to bring my walker up beside it, which was impossible under the circumstances. These photographs show more details of the problem, including the damage to some of the flowers of an iris plant I have had for five years now.





Fortunately, I was able to reach out to Leanne Kloppenborg of Fontbonne ministries who coordinated with the office of our local councillor, Paula Fletcher, who got through to Metrolinx. Once the connection was made they removed the obstructive items promptly. This emphasizes the importance, of providing easily accessible communication to individuals and ensuring the project managers communicate successfully with local governments. A number of provisions in the Bill seem likely to decrease this necessary communication.

There are also serious safety concerns. The Ontario Line trains must travel frequently and rapidly in all weathers to serve the purpose of a subway relief line, but unlike a subway are likely to fall onto buildings, streets, or people if they derail. If effective measures are taken to ensure safety a great deal of extra expense will be involved, and the claim that the approach of building above ground will be significantly cheaper than the original plan for the subway relief line seems unlikely to be borne out. The technology for building subways deep underground, although expensive, is well-established, and extensive studies and consultation were done for it. I participated in

some of the online consultations and was reassured by the determination to check out all the plans before they were implemented. A Bill designed to allow extensive parts of construction to proceed before planning is completed is disturbing, and will require thought and amendment if it is to avoid important and expensive mistakes. The Bill needs to include provisions to improve communications, making contact methods easy, clear, and universally available, and to provide more detail to residents before things start. The City of Toronto, and neighbourhood organizations including Business Improvement Associations should be consulted and accepted as partners in any ongoing work. Standards must be set and made completely clear to all contractors to ensure that the impact of all work on residents is minimized.

As carpenters know very well, haste makes waste. They measure twice and cut once to avoid disastrous errors. Knowing all the things that could go wrong with this above ground plan, I wonder why a return to a plan that would not involve using yet another incompatible set of vehicles and running into all kinds of as yet unknown problems is not being considered. At the very least, amending this Bill to ensure cooperation and consultation with organizations and individuals affected is bound to make the process proceed more smoothly and less expensively.

I would like to add that before I moved here I lived for about fifteen years at two addresses in Flemingdon Park. The Ontario Line may provide a single link to downtown transit for that area. However, to effectively improve access for the residents of the area as a whole it will be more important to improve the coordination of buses and other local transit in an area that is heavily fragmented by multiple ravines and the Don Valley. The parks in these low-lying areas are a beautiful asset, which I deeply appreciated when I lived there since I was still able to walk long distances using just a cane, walking, for example, from the south end of Don Mills Road through Taylor Creek Park and Warden Woods to Warden and St. Clair, and taking transit home; and similarly walking from the Science Centre to the Edwards Gardens, or down the Don Valley to the Bloor Street Viaduct. When I was there there were four major bus routes and some local community buses and I and other residents wished for a greater frequency and better coordination of the services, which then would have provided access to both of the downtown subway lines more smoothly. Carefully thinking out methods for setting up express bus lanes would provide better access at rush hours much more cheaply than extensive building projects to provide only two stops in the area for what looks more like a tourist amenity than an actual solution to the needs of commuters.

The unquestionable need for better transit in Toronto will not be satisfied by a rush to get started regardless of complications involved. Building this transit needs to be done as effectively as possible for long term results, not just minor savings of money and time that could lead to the need for expensive revisions in the near future.

I was asked by Peter Tabuns in the question period to expand on the effects of either losing my home to expropriation or living with the effects of construction and operation of an above ground version of the Ontario Line.

Clearly, with the current housing situation in Toronto, there is nowhere for us to go if we lose our homes. Applicants for what rent-geared-to-income housing exists have to wait for years, and market rent for an accessible apartment ranges from three-quarters of my monthly income to far more than the entire amount. Because of the severe worsening of my illness that results from stress, I do my best not to think about this, and sometimes I even succeed.

Even if some creative way could be found to leave the building intact, the noise, vibration, and degradation of the air during construction, and the effect of the massive increase of train traffic on the embankment thereafter would have severe health effects on any vulnerable populations, including the mostly elderly and some chronically ill residents of our building. For me, the one thing that reliably produces improvement in the various effects that interfere with my daily living is managing to have a reasonable period of sound sleep. Because I am often kept awake at night by the pain that is not entirely controlled by my medication, I sometimes have to try to sleep during the day, which can be made difficult enough by ordinary daily noises. My apartment is on the side of the building away from the closest passage of the trains, but I can hear them pass to the south of us, especially when the trees are bare. At the current frequency there is usually time for me to fall asleep in between their passages. That would change with the level of operation projected for this project. During construction, noise and vibration could be expected to be continuous for months at least, and perhaps for years. I cannot think of any accommodations I could make that would let me survive that. This is another thing I try not to think about. As they say, try not to think about a purple cow.

Thank you for your consideration.

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