

Phil Verster

Phil.Verster@metrolinx.com

(416) 202-5908

December 20, 2021**An open letter to the residents and communities of Riverside and Leslieville**

The Ontario Line will bring 15.6 kilometres of new subway service to Toronto that will make it easier than ever to live and work in this dynamic city. With 15 new stations and connections to subway, LRT, GO train and streetcar lines along the way, it will bring much-needed relief from congestion and create new pathways that will help people choose transit first.

The city needs a stronger, more resilient transit system to support the growth it and the broader region will experience over the coming years, and projects like the Ontario Line are critical in meeting that need in communities like Riverside and Leslieville.

We understand that building a new subway line through Canada's largest city is no small feat. That is why we are engaging and consulting with communities about the changes the Ontario Line will bring and working together to see how we can deliver it in a way that maximizes benefits and minimizes impacts to people to the greatest extent possible.

The Ontario Line will operate within the existing Metrolinx-owned GO rail corridor through Riverside and Leslieville, where infrastructure upgrades were already planned to support expanded GO train services. In addition to the many travel benefits this approach will bring, it will also allow us to reduce our construction footprint in the community, lower noise levels and create new green spaces. Streamlining Ontario Line and GO operations in this rail corridor is a key driver of these benefits, but this above ground approach has emerged as one of the key areas of concern for some in the community.

This letter intends to ease those concerns by factually outlining how we are taking a community-first lens when it comes to delivering the Ontario Line and GO expansion plans in Riverside and Leslieville. We will address the following topics with this in mind:

- Maximizing customer benefits
- Lowering noise levels and creating new green spaces
- Protecting and strengthening tree cover
- Reducing construction impacts
- Prioritizing safety
- Consulting with and supporting communities

Maximizing customer benefits

Running the Ontario Line at the surface, within the existing GO rail corridor, will give customers faster and easier journeys because they will spend less time getting to the trains from the street, and from the trains to their end destination. This will make it easier to connect between the Ontario Line and the popular streetcar and GO train lines that run through this area of the city.

Take East Harbour as an example – an underground station here would have to be buried more than 38 metres to get below the neighbouring Don River, which is as deep as a nine-storey building is tall. Four flights of escalators would be needed to get to and from ground level, adding 4.5 minutes to the time it would take customers to connect between services.

Why is it so important to have a surface-level connection at East Harbour?

A surface station will provide quick and easy connections between the subway and GO train network that will be critical in relieving congestion at Union Station. We expect this new interchange station will result in a 14 per cent reduction in rush-hour crowding at Union Station, equal to 14,000 fewer people passing through Canada's busiest transit hub during the peak travel hour. Longer transfer times between an underground Ontario Line station and a surface level GO station would result in fewer customers making the switch and reduce much-needed congestion relief at Union Station.

Why is it better for the Riverside/Leslieville station (at Queen Street) and the station at Gerrard Street to be at the surface?

Locating stations above ground through these areas will make it easier for more customers to transfer from streetcars and GO trains while still providing them with a fully accessible experience that is shielded from the elements. Major infrastructure in the area, Enwave pipes and the midtown interceptor sewer, would require a very deep tunnel if these stations are to be underground, which would again result in longer journeys for connecting to and from the Ontario line. Further, tunneling underground north of East Harbour would create significant construction disruption and possibly the permanent closure of certain municipal roads.

Lowering noise levels and creating new green spaces

The upgrades we will make to the rail corridor as a result of Ontario Line and GO Expansion plans will better shield Riverside and Leslieville from train noises than today, while also allowing us to create new green spaces for community members to enjoy.

We recently released a study through our Lakeshore East Joint Corridor Early Works Report that showed how the new noise walls we will build along the rail corridor from Eastern Avenue to Pape Avenue will result in noise levels that are lower than they are today in most areas of Riverside and Leslieville. For example, noise from passing trains at Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre will have an average daytime reduction of 7.8dB over current conditions. In addition, pass-by noise from an Ontario Line train is estimated to be 60dB, which is 20dB quieter than the limit set by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). This

noise and vibration study looked at the cumulative noise levels from all sources within the rail corridor - the Ontario Line as well as GO, VIA and freight trains. For more information about sound levels along the corridor, please visit our online sound demo at <https://ontariolinesoundstudio.ca/>

How high will the noise walls be, and what will they look like?

The noise walls will be a minimum height of five metres to provide maximum protection from the sounds of the rail corridor. They will extend atop new retaining walls that will replace the current sloped embankment and surrounding fences along the corridor.

For the purpose of our studies, we assumed all sections of the noise walls would be transparent, but we are encouraging community feedback on that approach. Even though we elected that transparent noise walls would be effective at reducing noise levels in most areas in the community, we know that opaque noise walls are even better at blocking sound. Taking this conservative approach to estimating noise levels gives us confidence that, no matter what material we choose in consultation with the community, we will have an effective solution in place.

How will you make sure the new walls are a positive addition to the look and feel of the community?

We are consulting with community members on how to design these walls and the areas around them to create welcoming, attractive spaces for people to enjoy for years to come. The feedback we gather through these consultations will help guide our plans and inform further design discussions at future consultations.

How is it possible that you will create more green space as you add noise and retaining walls within the rail corridor?

The new retaining walls will take up less room than the current sloped embankment that is surrounded by a fence, which is what surrounds the rail corridor today. This is even with the addition of the new tracks required for Ontario Line and GO Expansion. We will effectively move the physical boundaries of the rail corridor closer to the tracks and create more usable space in neighbouring parks. Once the Ontario Line is complete, each of the four park spaces in the area will be larger - McLeary Playground, Jimmie Simpson Park, Bruce Mackey Park and the Gerrard-Carlaw Parkette. In total, there will be nearly 2,600 square metres of added green space lining these parks, which is roughly equal to the size of 10 tennis courts or almost two NHL-sized hockey rinks.

What else are you doing to keep rail operations quiet?

All the Ontario Line trains will be electric, as will most of the GO trains, which are significantly quieter and cleaner than diesel trains used today. Additionally, Ontario Line trains will be automated (or "driverless"), which will reduce the noises that can occur from human error when braking or accelerating.

We will also install “continuously welded rail” for our tracks, which is seamless – with no joints – and results in smoother and quieter operations. We will be looking at a wide array of other proven solutions as we recruit teams of experienced, highly qualified experts to deliver the Ontario Line and GO Expansion projects.

Protecting and strengthening tree cover

Building the Ontario Line and delivering on GO Expansion will require some tree removal, mostly in the joint corridor. Metrolinx understands the importance of tree cover in the city, which is why we always keep removals to a minimum and plant more trees than we remove. For every tree we remove, we will plant three new ones. Since 2020, Metrolinx has funded and coordinated the planting of more than 24,000 native trees and shrubs.

We work closely with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to repurpose the trees we need to remove in sustainable ways, and we will be partnering with Humber College to mill the wood from suitable trees for other reusable purposes.

How will you protect trees in parks and other community spaces?

We are completing a thorough tree inventory and arborist report for the Riverside and Leslieville area, and we expect to have a draft to share with the community by early 2022. The studies we are completing are helping us learn more about what kinds of trees are next to the rail corridor, and how healthy they are. They will look at whether or not trees are invasive, diseased, or dead, and will inform our plans for protection or removal. To maintain important tree cover in the community, we will work with property owners to plant three new trees for every one we remove.

What will you do about the trees you need to remove from your rail corridor in Riverside and Leslieville?

To safely accommodate new electrification poles and wires for expanded GO services and new Ontario Line trains, we will need to remove most trees within this section of our rail corridor starting in 2022. To make sure we don’t lose valuable tree cover in the city, we will plant three new trees in nearby areas for every single tree we remove.

For example, further east along the GO train corridor where it travels near Small’s Creek, we have determined that some removal of trees will be required in order to build the necessary infrastructure to support expanded GO train service. At this location, we will plant 2,000 native new trees – which will far exceed the number of mostly invasive trees that we need to remove.

Reducing construction impacts

Running Ontario Line trains within the existing rail corridor that Metrolinx already owns through Riverside and Leslieville will result in fewer construction impacts when compared to tunneling alternatives.

Tunneling and excavating is complex, time-consuming and very impactful to surrounding neighbourhoods. In places where we can avoid it, we can drastically cut down on construction impacts to surrounding properties and finish the work sooner.

Why will being above ground reduce the amount of construction areas in Riverside and Leslieville?

As many community members know, there have been longstanding plans to expand GO train services on the Lakeshore East line, which is located within the rail corridor in these communities. Streamlining both Ontario Line and GO Expansion plans within the existing rail corridor also reduces the footprint of construction work that would have otherwise been spread out into multiple sections of the neighbourhood.

By containing our work to the existing rail corridor and, with our plans fitting within the existing footprint, we are significantly reducing the amount of property we need to accommodate near-term construction and long-term operations, not to mention avoiding considerable impacts to local traffic. Otherwise, major excavations and neighbouring construction laydown areas would be needed to build Ontario Line stations and the emergency exit buildings between them.

We will also use construction methods that will allow us to stage most of our work from within the rail corridor and we will access the corridor off of main streets in the area - Queen, Dundas and Logan. This will help us avoid impacts to park space and quieter community streets as we carry out important rail corridor upgrades for the Ontario Line and GO Expansion projects.

Have you looked at underground alternatives brought forward by the community?

Metrolinx has looked at community proposals for underground alternatives and to bring the Ontario Line above ground further west of Leslieville, before reaching East Harbour; however, this would have resulted in permanent street closures and significant property impacts to homes and businesses during construction. In addition to adding up to two years of additional construction time and increasing project costs by more than \$800 million, [this approach](#) may also make it very difficult to build the Leslieville Station, a key interchange with streetcars.

Prioritizing safety

We prioritize safety on all our projects. That is why our plan to run the Ontario Line through the joint rail corridor in Riverside and Leslieville has safety considerations at the forefront.

What safety standards are you following for the Ontario Line?

We have worked with the Canadian Standards Association, Canada's premier standards development organization, to develop the Canadian Method for Risk Evaluation and Assessment for Railway Systems. This framework mirrors best practice from the European

Union's highly respected and widely adopted Common Safety Method for Risk Evaluation and Assessment, and it will be used for delivering the Ontario Line.

At the same time, we have created the Independent Safety Assessor for Railway Systems Accreditation Program in partnership with the Standards Council of Canada. The council, which is a Crown corporation, has a mandate that includes developing standards and strategies to support sustainable development and the health, safety and welfare of the public. Independent Safety Assessors accredited through the new program will play a vital role in upholding safety during the design, construction, and operation phases of our projects, and will evaluate the Ontario Line project against the newly created risk evaluation and assessment mentioned above.

Consulting with and supporting communities

Community consultation is central to the success of transit projects. Since we released our first business case for the Ontario Line in July 2019, we have held dozens of public town halls and many targeted discussions with community leaders, advocacy groups and individual community members to explain our proposed plans in Riverside and Leslieville and to gather important local insights as we advance designs.

The feedback you have given us has been critical in shaping our plans, which include creating more green space in community parks, reducing noise from passing trains to levels that are lower than today's in many areas, and avoiding impacts to surrounding properties by keeping the vast majority of construction work within our existing Metrolinx-owned rail corridor.

How are you expanding your approach to consultation?

Our approach to community engagement and consultation has included virtual open houses, dozens of meetings with community groups and stakeholders, delivering thousands of community notices and flyers to residents and businesses and several community pop-up events to provide information and project updates to the community.

Most recently we have held community consultations on potential design approaches we could include for the new retaining and noise walls we're building, along with ideas for how we can landscape the areas around them to create new and inviting public spaces. We will be creating even more opportunities for community members to share feedback on design elements as we advance plans with them.

We are very pleased that our community office at 770 Queen Street East has now been open for a few months. Staff are available six days a week to answer questions, provide updates and, eventually, support residents, businesses and other organizations through construction.

How are you conducting environmental assessments for this project?

Before we start any construction for any part of the project, we consult with many parties and communities on related environmental assessments to make sure we are doing all we can to avoid or minimize the project's impacts.

The environmental assessment process for the Ontario Line largely follows the existing Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP) that we use for all of our other projects. The Ontario Line regulation follows a very similar approach to the TPAP, with requirements for similar studies and reports including noise and vibration, air quality, natural environment and cultural heritage. The key difference is that the Ontario Line process has added flexibility and allows the use of a multi-stage approach that supports different phases of construction.

In addition to reducing the risk of delays by allowed a phased construction approach, the Ontario Line environmental assessment process provides ample opportunities to consult with community neighbours and Indigenous Communities. We have already consulted on and finalized four environmental reports for the Ontario Line under this process, and we recently released two more for public feedback - one for the early works planned at East Harbour, and another for the early works planned for the GO rail corridor that runs through your communities. Once we finalize these, we will issue a report in early 2022 that encompasses the whole line and considers findings from all the previous reports. We look forward to consulting with you as we work together to finalize these important assessments before construction begins.

How will you support businesses and local organizations through construction?

We will ensure local businesses and organizations remain accessible throughout construction and beyond. We will work with each one to provide them with customized, tailored supports that ensure they remain sought-after destinations in your community.

Containing most of our construction work to the rail corridor that we already own means we can ensure neighbouring businesses and community institutions remain in operation during and after construction, such as Fontbonne Place, the Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre, the Bonjour Brioche café, Saulter Street Brewery, and more.

We will communicate about any impacts to local streets well in advance and set up local construction liaison committees well before any work starts to ensure we have robust plans in place to keep people and goods moving.

Moving forward

Our commitment is to continue to work closely with residents, businesses and local organizations on how to best bring Ontario Line plans in Riverside and Leslieville to life. We take our responsibility to consult very seriously because we understand how connected people feel to the places they live, work and play. This will be an ongoing process, and we are committed to keeping an open, two-way dialogue going so we can continuously strengthen and improve our plans.

We remain very excited about the many benefits the Ontario Line will bring, and we look forward to working together to make the vision of a more connected, integrated city a reality.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Phil Verster', written in a cursive style.

Phil Verster
President and CEO