

DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

July 24, 2008

Environmental assessment of plan to raze section of Gardiner Expressway begins

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Toronto has approved an anticipated \$11 million environmental assessment to examine the proposed removal of a portion of the Gardiner Expressway.

“Undertaking an environmental assessment of removing the Gardiner is a first step towards reconnecting Toronto to its lake, improving north-south routes, and strengthening transit-first approaches,” said John Campbell, president and CEO of Waterfront Toronto.

The assessment could take up to four years to complete and both Waterfront Toronto and city officials will undertake a year-long examination in setting the scope of the study. This first step will also determine urban design principles and undertake a request for proposal process to hire an environmental consultant to lead the project.

Terms of reference for the assessment will be developed with input gained through public consultations.

The Gardiner Expressway proposal calls for tearing down the Gardiner east of Jarvis Street and replacing it with an eight-lane boulevard. Ramps would be added to create access to and from the Don Valley Parkway, with a possibility of widening lanes at Richmond and Adelaide streets. Preliminary cost for the project is pegged at \$300 million with a four-year construction period.

“From a personal perspective, I am concerned that taking down that portion of the expressway may cause traffic chaos,” said Andy Manahan, executive director, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

Creating a possible gap in Toronto’s expressway system is a concern, said Manahan, but he is interested in seeing what comes of the assessment and public consultations.

Part of the environmental assessment process will include examining all alternative solutions, development of an approved design, a construction management plan and an environmental management plan.

A comprehensive study of both regional and local traffic impacts is also expected.

Toronto councillors also approved a separate environmental assessment to look at the proposed replacement of the spiral York-Bay-Yonge ramp with a straight one. The city estimates a \$25 million to \$30 million cost with this project. This amount would cover design, demolition and construction costs, plus create a park on the site. The environmental assessment could take up to 18 months and construction would occur over two years.

The Gardiner proposal “also moves us closer to enabling the new communities and developments underway in East Bayfront and West Don Lands to become true waterfront communities,” added Campbell. “And it means we are all working towards making Toronto and its waterfront, more beautiful.”