



Split decision on Gardiner teardown: Poll

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Column: On the Poll

Waterfront Toronto has launched the plan to tear down part of the Gardiner Expressway, and a poll of Torontonians finds it's going to take a serious sales job to convince voters it's a good idea.

A new Leger Marketing/Toronto Sun poll found 48% of people in the GTA disagree with knocking down the waterfront highway between Jarvis St. and the Don Valley Parkway, while 41% approve of the concept. Another 11% are undecided.

Initial estimates are it would add another two to three minutes to the commute through the area, although based on these numbers, it appears many people don't believe the math.

There's also a large question about cost. Initial estimates are \$300 million, but that number is a long way from being confirmed.

The poll backs up what Waterfront Toronto has heard casually since unveiling the plan last month. CEO John Campbell has said opinions are firmly split on this element of the massive plan to reshape the shoreline.

The poll on the Gardiner is one element of a larger study on traffic in the GTA.

Let's face it: Toronto's vehicle congestion is bad and it's only getting worse. Several solutions have been tabled recently, such as introducing tolls on all major highways or a new gas tax, with the underlying idea being the money would be put toward improving the GTA's transit infrastructure and relieving gridlock -- all without having to raise property taxes.

A study released earlier this year by economist **Harry Kitchen** of Trent University urged governments to institute tolls on all major 400-series highways in the GTA and Hamilton area, as well as other "major arterial highways deemed appropriate," such as the QEW, Don Valley Parkway, and the Gardiner Expressway.

The report estimates a toll of just 7 cents per km of travel would fetch about \$700 million annually to help alleviate congestion and beef up transit.

So what do GTA residents think? Two words: No way.

A Leger Marketing poll found a preponderance (73%) disagrees with the proposition, with over half (57%) indicating such tolls would have an impact on how and when they drive in the city -- especially those who rely on these roads to get to work instead of public transit.

SINKING GRIDLOCK

Kitchen's study threw the kitchen sink at gridlock. The study also suggested instituting a fuel tax for the area, indicating a levy of 6 cents per litre would generate hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

Again, however, when asked about it, most respondents (65%) did not agree with this plan either -- particularly those who do not rely on public transit to get to and from work every day.

Of course, this really isn't all that surprising considering gas prices in the GTA cleared \$1.30 a litre this past week and aren't expected to drop any time soon.

So what should be done? Clearly something, that much is for sure, especially considering the fact most people working in the GTA drive to work rather than take public transit. If the city waits much longer, riding a bike may become the better way.

Waterfront Toronto is considering tearing down the Gardiner Expressway, between Jarvis St. and the DVP, as a way of improving the waterfront. Is it a good idea?

41% Agree

48% Disagree

11% Undecided

To what extent do you agree Toronto's major highways should be toll roads?

73% Disagree

23% Agree

4% No opinion

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Illustration:

- file photo by Mark O'Neill, Sun Media
- Waterfront Toronto is looking to tear down this part of the Gardiner Expressway. A new poll shows Toronto is split.

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