

## Should the eastern Gardiner Expressway be torn down? No

By Murtaza Haider Opinion  
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Toronto mayoral candidate and former city chief planner Jennifer Keesmaat has promised she would demolish the elevated eastern section of the Gardiner Expressway (if elected). This is the section running from Jarvis St. to the Don Valley Parkway.

Although traffic is often bumper to bumper on this thoroughfare, this is a vital connection for drivers both heading downtown and bypassing the city. Replacing the Gardiner with an eight-lane surface boulevard would wreak havoc on our arterial roads and would be a nightmare for pedestrians trying to cross the street.



The Gardiner Expressway between Jarvis and Carlaw Sts. in 2015. (MARCUS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR)

The city's [own report](#), commissioned as part of the environmental assessment of the future of the east Gardiner, revealed the boulevard option would contribute close to three million hours more of vehicle travel each year, affecting hundreds of thousands of commuters.

The future of the east Gardiner and accessibility to Canada's largest employment hub must be based on evidence and facts. Maintaining the east Gardiner is by far the preferred alternative if the goals are to increase mobility, enhance pedestrian safety, reduce tailpipe emissions, improve access to the waterfront, and fairly distribute the costs and benefits.

Proponents of tearing down the elevated Gardiner have misrepresented traffic engineering studies the city commissioned to compare the congestion implications of the two options: “hybrid” (reorienting sections of the east Gardiner to free up land for development), the option preferred by Mayor John Tory; and “remove,” which would replace the 1.7-km elevated section with a boulevard.

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The reports are unambiguous in concluding that compared to the status quo of maintaining the east Gardiner as is, the hybrid option will result in 1.1 million hours of additional vehicle travel, imposing \$23 million in annual congestion costs.

The boulevard option fared worse — it would increase commuting in the downtown area by three million hours each year, imposing \$60 million of additional auto user costs. Already, traffic congestion is estimated to cost the region \$6 billion per year, according to the Toronto Region Board of Trade.

Keesmaat, in a recent press conference, claimed that traffic “will continue to flow well on a ground-level boulevard.” The reports commissioned while she was chief planner tell a different story.

She further claimed that tearing down the east Gardiner would save \$500 million. That’s essentially a pie-in-the-sky statistic if one were to understand the assumptions and inputs used in the cost analysis that generated these hypothetical savings.

This figure is likely based on estimates produced earlier by city staff and should not be taken literally. City staff cautioned that the estimates were “high level order of magnitude” numbers for “comparative purposes only.”

Furthermore, the \$500 million difference in cost estimates is projected over a 100-year period for life-cycle costs.

These supposed savings do not include the congestion costs imposed on drivers. Once congestion costs are accounted for, the “savings” from the boulevard option disappear.

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Even more important is the question of equity where the costs for replacing the highway with a boulevard will be imposed increasingly on relatively low-income suburban drivers who live in areas where public transit is not a viable alternative to reach or pass through downtown. In comparison, the benefits will largely accrue to downtown landowners.

The fundamentals of transportation engineering should not be sacrificed for esthetics. The three million hours of additional congestion will generate more, and not fewer, tailpipe emissions as the proponents of the boulevard option have wrongly been stating.

Toronto's top mayoral candidates have different views on the future of the east Gardiner but this should not become a suburban vs. downtown wedge issue. A seamless link from the Don Valley Parkway to the Gardiner is critical to Toronto's economic health.

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