

Paul Moloney

The amount of soil from tunneling the Eglinton Crosstown transit line could fill the Rogers Centre to the roof.

Until recently, the project loomed as another headache for more than 900 residents who have been fighting plans for trucks to deliver commercial fill to their nearby communities from Toronto construction sites over the next 10 years.

But Toronto is studying another option — using the soil instead to build islands at the mouth of the Humber River, the same way the Leslie St. spit was built out of soil from downtown construction projects 40 years ago.

The city's water department proposed building the archipelago to deflect Humber River water away from Sunnyside Beach to make it consistently safe for swimming.

It would require up to 2 million cubic metres of soil. A staff report suggested Eglinton Crosstown could supply 800,000 cubic metres.

The transit project's environmental assessment estimates a total of 1.8 million cubic metres of excavated soil would be available. That's more than enough to fill the Rogers Centre, at 1.6 million cubic metres.

Keeping it in the city would be a relief to Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water said member Ian McLaurin, who has been fighting a site near his Port Perry home.

"That's not a bad spot for it," McLaurin said of the proposed location of the mouth of the Humber. "We don't want it up here."

Contamination of the soil from industrial pollutants is a concern, McLaurin said. So is the noise and dust of dump trucks, including tailgate banging after dumping a load.

"I could hear the banging from 2.5 kilometres away, over a hill and through a forest," he said.

Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water and other opposition groups want tighter controls, particularly on the Oak Ridges Moraine north of the city.

"My primary concern is that some of the soil getting dumped is contaminated with petroleum or industrial contaminants," he said.

In the case of soil from the Eglinton Crosstown project, an environmental assessment approved by city council in April will provide answers. But Toronto Water sees no reason to think the soil is polluted.

The soil will be coming from deep underground on a route that doesn't have a long history of heavy industry, said Lou Di Gironimo, general manager of Toronto Water.

"For the most part, it should be relatively clean," he said. "Usually, you find contaminants near the surface at old industrial sites."

Di Gironimo added that the islands would have perimeters built of rock and the excavated soil would be dumped in without coming into contact with the water.

### The Humber islands

Toronto is considering using the soil from digging the Eglinton Crosstown transit line to build islands at the mouth of the Humber River. The Humber islands could extend about one kilometre from shore and would help to improve water quality along city beaches. The Leslie St. Spit was built using soil from downtown construction projects.



The Humber Bay project has potential financial benefits: it would be a shorter trucking distance and the city could charge tipping fees to dump loads there.

“The islands could bring the costs down significantly because the distances for each truckload would be a lot shorter,” said Andy Manahan, of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

A consultant retained by the alliance said building the islands, including trucking in the soil, could cost \$54 million to \$84 million.

Di Gironimo said a chunk of the construction cost could be offset by tipping fees.

For example, 1.8 million cubic metres is 180,000 dump truck loads. If the city charged \$100 a load, tipping fees would bring in \$18 million.

Metrolinx, the provincial transportation agency that’s building the Eglinton Crosstown line, has yet to settle on locations to dump the excavated soil, said spokesperson Judy Pfeifer.

If the Humber Islands project were available and there was an economic benefit, “it could be adopted as the depositing location,” said Pfeifer, vice-president, strategic communications at Metrolinx.

City councillors in Toronto are wary.

“That’s a lot of trucks,” said Councillor Sarah Doucette (Ward 13, Parkdale-High Park).

Doucette said if the project goes ahead, she will insist the trucks take expressways rather than local streets to reach the site.

“I think all councillors would agree, let’s keep them out of the city, let’s have them on the highways as much as possible and only on local roads, at the very, very last minute.”

Councillor Gord Perks (Ward 14, Parkdale-High Park) said a previous attempt to improve Sunnyside Beach water quality didn’t work, which prompted officials to look at building islands.

“We now have to look at other approaches,” Perks said. “They may or may not be successful. There are issues about currents, there are issues about contamination and the quality of fill. There are a whole lot of issues to wrestle with before we decide to do this.”

Following the environmental assessment study, Di Gironimo is to report to council on the final shape of the islands; an implementation schedule; an estimate of trucking savings and summary of environmental and community benefits.