

December 15, 2021

## **An open letter to the residents of the Royal Orchard community**

The Yonge North Subway Extension is a long-awaited project that will bring faster transit to more people across York Region and Toronto. It is a vital piece of the transit network that we are building across the region and will connect communities and people for decades to come.

We know that transit makes life better for the communities it serves. We also recognize the importance of community feedback when building transit projects the size and scale of the Yonge North Extension. We fully understand that people may have concerns and questions about our designs and the broader decision-making process.

We have recently introduced [updates to the project](#) that will result in deeper tunnels and a route that travels under significantly fewer residential properties in the Royal Orchard community compared to our early plans. We made those refinements in response to the feedback we've heard through engaging with municipalities and consulting with communities across York Region and Toronto over the past eight months. As we have listened, certain topics and questions have risen to the top of our discussions. Members of the Royal Orchard community have asked why the route of the subway extension has shifted off of Yonge Street in the northern segment of the line and how we will make sure that the new subway service does not become a disruption to the community.

This letter addresses the concerns and questions we have been hearing and shares how we will continue to work collaboratively with your community to ensure your neighbourhood stays a peaceful, quiet, and sought-after place to live. We will address the following topics in this open letter:

- Maximizing transit benefits
- Minimizing noise and vibration
- Property value and compensation
- Consulting with and supporting communities
- Station selection

### **Maximizing Transit Benefits**

In 2019, when Metrolinx assumed responsibility for the Yonge North Subway Extension, it became evident that the original project was approximately \$3.7 billion over the \$5.6 billion budget, that it did not fully maximize transit benefits for communities, and that it did not fit with the future long-term growth objectives of the region.

Metrolinx refined the project plans to deliver more transit benefits for the people of York Region and Toronto, while staying within budget. This change to the project is what is outlined in the [Initial Business Case \(IBC\) and addendum that were published in March 2021](#). One of the most significant refinements is the updated route, which places the northern section of the extension at surface level along the existing CN railway corridor, instead of tunneling all the way to Richmond Hill. The updated route curves away from Yonge Street and runs underground to the proposed subway tunnel portal south of Langstaff Road.

This approach will maximize the subway connectivity to other modes of transit such as buses and GO transit, while also optimizing the urban and city building developments at and around Richmond Hill.

***Why is it necessary to run the route of the subway to the existing railway corridor?***

The new route alignment ensures the better placement of stations to minimize the disruption to Richmond Hill Centre, while also maximizing the developments and growth within that community. The Yonge North Subway Extension has two stations at the heart of Langstaff Gateway and Richmond Hill Centre, an area that is set to become a vibrant regional hub where people will live and work.

The new route will create a multi-modal transit hub at Bridge Station, which connects the subway to GO train, GO bus, York Region Viva bus rapid transit and the local bus network. Bridge Station will be accessible from Highway 7 and will remove approximately 130 buses on the roadways per peak hour from travelling into Richmond Hill Centre. Our plan will bring the many people who will live near Bridge and High Tech stations within a 10-minute walk of rapid transit.

Building the subway at surface level along the existing CN railway corridor reduces the need for complex and costly construction of tunnels and underground stations. We will also be able to complete the project sooner than if the subway was tunneled the entire length of the route. It also protects for a future potential northern extension of the subway by better utilizing the existing railway transportation corridor.

***Why do your plans focus on future development? What about the people who live here today?***

Our plans focus on both future development and also on the people who live in these communities today. York Region has been planning for this growth for many years in response to the demand for more housing and employment opportunities in these communities. We are supporting those plans.

The Yonge North Subway Extension will enable 26,000 more residents and 22,900 more jobs to be within a 10-minute walk of a new station within the next two decades. This ensures that any growth is sustainable, because reliable rapid transit with convenient connections to the regional transportation network is the foundation for growth. It gives new and current residents the means to move and give them more options to move around with more choices and more opportunities.

## Managing noise and vibration

Residents in Royal Orchard have asked how we will make sure that the new subway services will not affect neighbourhoods through noise and vibration. We will implement a range of practical, modern railway technological solutions to address noise and vibration. These solutions were not available decades ago when most of the Greater Toronto Area's existing subway lines were built. These new solutions have been tested around the world, and recently, in Toronto to extend the western leg of Line 1 to Vaughan. We are pleased to be implementing this world class technology right here in your neighbourhoods.

We have already taken several local leaders and people to observe, first-hand, how noise and vibration is [reduced to nearly imperceptible levels above the Line 1 tunnel of the subway extension](#) inside the York University Schulich School of Business building. We will achieve the same in Royal Orchard. We are investing in the same railway technology where trains run on tracks that are dampened and where the passing of a train in the tunnel is comparable to an average whisper. We will do everything we can do to make sure people who live along the subway extension barely notice the subway services.

Subways around the world, including in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), travel underneath homes, opera houses, condominiums, and businesses all the time. In addition, the tunnels along the Yonge North Subway Extension will be deeper underground than in many areas of Toronto's existing subway network.

### ***Won't having the subway under our neighbourhood cause excessive noise and vibration in our homes and schools?***

No. Noise and vibration are created where the train wheels interact with the tracks, and we are investing in modern railway track technology that dampens both the noise and vibration created at this point from train operations. This will ensure that there are no significant differences between levels of noise and vibration experienced in the Royal Orchard community today and what those levels will be when the subway extension is in service.

In the shallowest section of tunnels that will run below single-family homes and a local school, our current designs have the bottoms of the tunnels at a minimum depth of 21 metres (19.5 metres to where the train wheels interact with the tracks). This will result in the train wheels interacting with the tracks at a sufficient depth to further keep noise and vibration levels nearly imperceptible.

All the detailed studies and community consultations we are leading will help us make sure we get this right. One of the modern solutions available to us is called 'floating slab' track. This method has been proven to work on many subway lines around the world, including the recent extension of TTC's Yonge-University Line 1 into Vaughan. It involves attaching the tracks to concrete slabs that 'float' above the subway tunnels on thick rubber pads that absorb vibration from passing trains.

## **Property value and compensation**

We know living near transit is a big draw and benefit for homebuyers and that creating new transit connections positively affects neighbouring property values. We also understand that homeowners may wonder if their property values will be negatively affected if the subway runs underneath their property. We strongly believe it will not, given our substantial noise and vibration mitigations.

As a totally separate matter and unrelated to noise and vibration mitigations, Metrolinx will compensate those property owners for the right to occupy the subsurface space under their property. That compensation is determined to the pricing and valuation methods prescribed by the Expropriations Act (1990).

### ***What compensation am I entitled to if the Yonge North Subway runs underneath my property?***

Our approach to compensation for subsurface rights under a property is treated the same way as if we were taking a portion of a front or back lawn. That property has value and will be compensated for that value. Our property team will work closely with residents on developing a valuation, at our cost, and compensating residents accordingly. Our preferred approach is through amicable negotiations and settlement and we would only start an expropriation process, if it is necessary, to protect project timelines.

### ***How will this process to agree on compensation for operating under my property work?***

Metrolinx will enter into direct, one-on-one discussions with each homeowner that will have the subway run under their property. Through those discussions, Metrolinx will work with owners to procure an independent valuation, at our cost, of the property interest and make an offer accordingly.

Should an amicable deal not be reached, owners have a right to appeal under the Expropriations Act (1990) to the Ontario Land Tribunal for a judgment as to fair compensation.

## **Consulting with and supporting communities**

Meaningful consultation and regular engagement with communities along the route of the Yonge North Subway Extension is key to the success of this transformative transit extension. Since sharing the updated project plans in March 2021, Metrolinx has hosted five public virtual open houses, given six presentations to municipal and regional councils, initiated a community table in the Royal Orchard community, conducted community walks with residents and met in person and virtually with many stakeholders.

The Metrolinx Community Engagement team has established a regular presence along the route, distributing over 1,500 notices and informational postcards to businesses and residents over the last few months, meeting with property managers and identifying potential space for a permanent community office.

Following the exploration of options, Metrolinx puts forward achievable plans which provide optimal transit solutions. Once we know the optimal solution for a new transit line, we reach out to those communities to consult on the details of how the project will be designed and delivered, and how we will solve for any potential disruptions or concerns.

The updated project plans we shared last spring were just the first step of a planning and consultation process that includes frequent conversations with communities. There will be many more opportunities to share feedback and answer questions. As we move forward together on the project, we will work together to continue to maximize the benefits and outcome for the community.

### ***What is Metrolinx doing to address specific concerns about tunnelling through the Royal Orchard community?***

We have taken the comments from the community and elected leaders on board and we initiated a detailed technical review that improves on our initial designs. This new design allows us to tunnel even deeper and under fewer homes in the neighbourhood. These adjustments shift the route of the subway to travel under 20 homes and 15 yards, half as many as the 40 homes and 23 yards the previous route would have travelled under.

In the coming months, we will also offer an immersive, interactive noise and vibration simulation that will let you hear for yourself what it will sound like when a subway train passes below homes. These audio and video demonstrations are based on our recordings of existing sound levels inside homes in Royal Orchard and will bring to life how our proposed modern noise and vibration solutions will make future subway operations nearly imperceptible. We're looking forward to sharing more details with the community.

### ***What about other route options that would avoid tunneling under Royal Orchard altogether?***

We have looked at all the options to avoid tunneling under Royal Orchard and none of those give better transit benefits. Given that we can reduce noise and vibration from subway service to a nearly imperceptible level, tunneling under Royal Orchard is the best transit solution.

In addition to the various route options we looked at in our initial business case analysis, we recently completed a further detailed review of a proposal from the community for an alternative route that would stay along Yonge Street before curving to travel along the northern boundary of Holy Cross Cemetery towards the railway corridor.

We studied this proposal from every angle but in the end, we were faced with three major obstacles that led us to conclude the proposal is not an improvement over our current plans:

- **Significant cost increases:** If we adopt the proposal from the community, significant cost increases would be required and will also reduce the local development opportunities.
- **Complex construction:** The proposal from the community keeps Bridge Station in the same vital location but places it partially underground, which would make the station more complex and more costly. It would require reinforcing the foundation of the

Highway 407 and Highway 7 bridges, and tunneling under the existing culvert that supports Pomona Creek.

- **Technical constraints from tighter turns, steeper inclines and slower train speeds:** In order to reach the existing railway corridor, the subway tracks would need to be curved much tighter than the current TTC standards, which would mean trains will have to travel along those parts at slower speeds, with longer travel times for riders. This proposal from the community would also hinder the ability of the Langstaff Gateway urban growth centre to realize longstanding regional and municipal growth objectives because the proposal essentially splits the development into two parts and would place development restrictions on the envisioned growth.

## Station Selection

We know that everyone along the Yonge North Subway Extension will benefit from less traffic congestion and better access to transit, thanks to local and regional connections to each station along the route.

We use a business case analysis to evaluate which stations will bring the most benefits to our projects. This includes predicting how many people would use each station and looking at how many new riders each station would attract to the line each day. Our studies also consider how the distance between each station will affect ridership. Through these comparisons, we get a better understanding of how much the community would benefit from each station. We also consider how complex it would be to build each station and how much it would affect nearby properties and development planned in the future. The four stations already selected are High Tech, Bridge, Clark, and Steeles.

These four stations are included in the latest plans for the project and our published business case work shows the analysis for these choices. Steeles, Bridge and High Tech stations will significantly improve access to frequent rapid transit, providing easy connections to local and regional travel options that will help people move around the GTA and beyond. Clark Station will offer riders seamless connections to the planned extension of the Viva Orange bus rapid transit line, which serves communities along Highway 7.

### ***Will Royal Orchard Station be included in the final plan?***

We are working with the Province and York Region to determine the feasibility of a station in the Royal Orchard community.

## Moving forward

We are thrilled to finally move the project forward and we've heard from many people across the region who share in this excitement.

As we work to improve and refine the project even further, we remain deeply committed to working with residents and businesses to share information, answer questions and gather feedback. Each conversation we have, whether one-on-one or with larger groups, will help us

make sure the Yonge North Subway Extension is the best possible fit the for neighbourhoods it will serve.

Kind Regards,

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

**Phil Verster**  
President and CEO