

## UPCOMING DATES

### MARCH

- 25 Board of Health, 9:30 a.m.
- 26 General Government Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- 27 Infrastructure & Environment Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- Design Review Panel, 12:45 p.m.  
- CANCELLED
- 28 Economic & Community Development Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- Preservation Board, 9:30 a.m.

### APRIL

- 2 North York Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 3 Toronto & East York Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 4 Scarborough Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 5 Planning & Housing Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- 8 Etobicoke York Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 9 Executive Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- 17-19 Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 22 CreateTO, 2:30 p.m.
- 24 Design Review Panel, 12:45 p.m.
- 29 Board of Health, 9:30 a.m.
- 30 Economic & Community Development Committee, 9:30 a.m.

### MAY

- 1 General Government Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- 2 Infrastructure & Environment Committee, 9:30 a.m.



## ■ CITY STAFF TO INVESTIGATE FEASIBILITY OF TURNING DECOMMISSIONED RT CORRIDOR INTO LINEAR PARK

# STUMBLING UPON SERENDIPITY



Lana Hall

**T**oronto city council has adopted a motion asking staff to explore the possibility of converting portions of Scarborough's decommissioned rapid transit (RT) corridor (formerly Line 3) into a linear park, a project that could serve the community both as a cultural attraction and as much-needed pedestrian and cycling infrastructure for Scarborough residents.

The member's motion, introduced by ward 23 Scarborough North councillor **Jamaal Myers**, asks staff to explore the feasibility of adapting the Scarborough RT assets no longer in use for a new linear park and active transportation corridor. It also requests that staff evaluate the possibility of commercial and residential development along the corridor, and that the City undertake a public engagement

process focused on "human-centred design excellence," which could include inviting academic, architectural and design expertise through a design competition model. Staff research should also include investigating potential funding options for the project, including through the **Canada Infrastructure Bank**.

The staff report, Myers says, should evaluate similar projects, such as the High Line in New York, the Beltline in Atlanta, Cuernavaca's Railway Linear Park in Mexico City, and the Potrero Yard Modernization Project in San Francisco.

Since the post-derailment closure of the Scarborough RT in August 2023, the **City of Toronto** and the **Toronto Transit Commission** (TTC) have scrambled to find an alternate transportation mode for commuters before the

Line 2 subway extension in Scarborough is completed, which will likely be in 2030 (See: "Transit Plans Going Off the Rails", *NRU Toronto*, Friday, August 25, 2023). A portion of the RT right-of-way will be used as a temporary busway until that completion of the subway extension.

But as early as 2013, Toronto city council was exploring the potential adaptive reuse of the right-of-way and six RT station assets that made up the Scarborough RT when contemplating the SRT's future decommissioning, says Myers' motion. Converting the corridor into public space would offer a unique opportunity for residents in Scarborough, an area of the city that desperately needs more pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

"Scarborough residents have

CONTINUED PAGE 3 ■

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# STUMBLING UPON SERENDIPITY

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

the longest Toronto Transit Commission commutes, the least amount of biking infrastructure and the highest rates of pedestrian deaths in the City,” reads Myers’ motion. “This linear park will help residents to safely and conveniently gain expanded year-round access to jobs, affordable housing options, culture and entertainment, shopping, green space and other neighbourhoods along the existing corridor.”

Using the corridor as a park or walkway would allow pedestrians to walk safely from the forthcoming Scarborough Centre subway station to the Scarborough Town Centre or the Scarborough Civic Centre. “There has to be some sort of a connective walkway there,” Myers told *NRU* in a previous interview. But re-using the RT right-of-way, which spans more than six kilometres, could also present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a unique cultural and community attraction, linking the Scarborough Town Centre with surrounding streets, other trail networks, and potentially even the Meadoway, a reclaimed hydro corridor to the southeast.

“It would create a distinctive feature and sense of place for Scarborough, which you couldn’t find anywhere else in Toronto,” **Walk**

**Toronto** steering committee member **Dylan Reid** told *NRU*. “And that would really make Scarborough Town Centre somewhere that has a very specific intriguing feature.”

But not everybody is convinced by the adaptive re-use proposal. “We’re being sold an undefined vision based on a shiny object observed from a [distance],” said Ward 21 Scarborough Centre councillor **Michael Thompson** at the city council meeting on March 21, Thompson also noted that despite 95 per cent of the RT corridor running through his ward, he had yet to be consulted on the idea. Thompson warned council that the project may be more legally complicated than presented, and that it would require landowners with properties abutting the corridor—including **Oxford Properties**, which owns Scarborough Town Centre—

to be consulted. He also questioned whether the cost of the feasibility report would be prudent, given the City’s budget deficit.

The opportunities to create a linear park of this size, however, are few and far between. While parks of this length are not usually part of a City’s planning process, they can provide an unexpected opportunity to support the growth of communities around them by acting as a central feature, traversing multiple neighbourhoods and naturally becoming gathering spaces for people who live near them, says **DIALOG** partner and chair **Antonio Gómez-Palacio**.

“Most cities have never been planned to have big, long green corridors. It happens through serendipity,” he says. “... The people who live along the corridor have very much gravitated to the stations and the areas around it, so there’s already been, to a certain extent, the city-shaping dynamic around those corridors. If they stop being utilized for the transit purposes ... it’s a real shame, and they either get

abandoned or get split up and decommissioned.”

Gómez-Palacio is hopeful the RT corridor project will move forward, but says the City will need to put in effort to ensure it stays a priority amid an influx of higher-profile infrastructure projects that may dominate the City’s resources.

“It’s going to require resources and investment ... and it’s not one of those projects that necessarily will rise up into the prioritization of the day-to-day activities of council, and it should,” he says. “It’s a huge opportunity ... it’s once in a generation that these communities will stumble upon an opportunity of this nature.”

Myers’ motion, as amended after consultation with Thompson, asks staff to investigate the feasibility of converting the RT corridor, including researching the costs of removal of elevated portions of the SRT, reporting back to council by the end of the fourth quarter in 2024. 🌸



Image of the High Line in New York City, a linear park on the site of a former rail line. The project was cited as an example in a recent member’s motion introduced by City of Toronto ward 23 Scarborough North councillor Jamaal Myers, who has requested staff look into the possibility of transforming the decommissioned Scarborough RT corridor into a linear park and active transportation corridor. If adapted for these purposes, the corridor could serve as a cultural attraction, while providing Scarborough residents with badly-needed pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

SOURCE: NEW YORK CITY DEPT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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