EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a shortened version of a larger report.
See the full report for complete details.

MISSED CONNECTIONS

Locating equity in Toronto's transportation history

The Infrastructure Institute

University of Toronto | Infrastructure Institute

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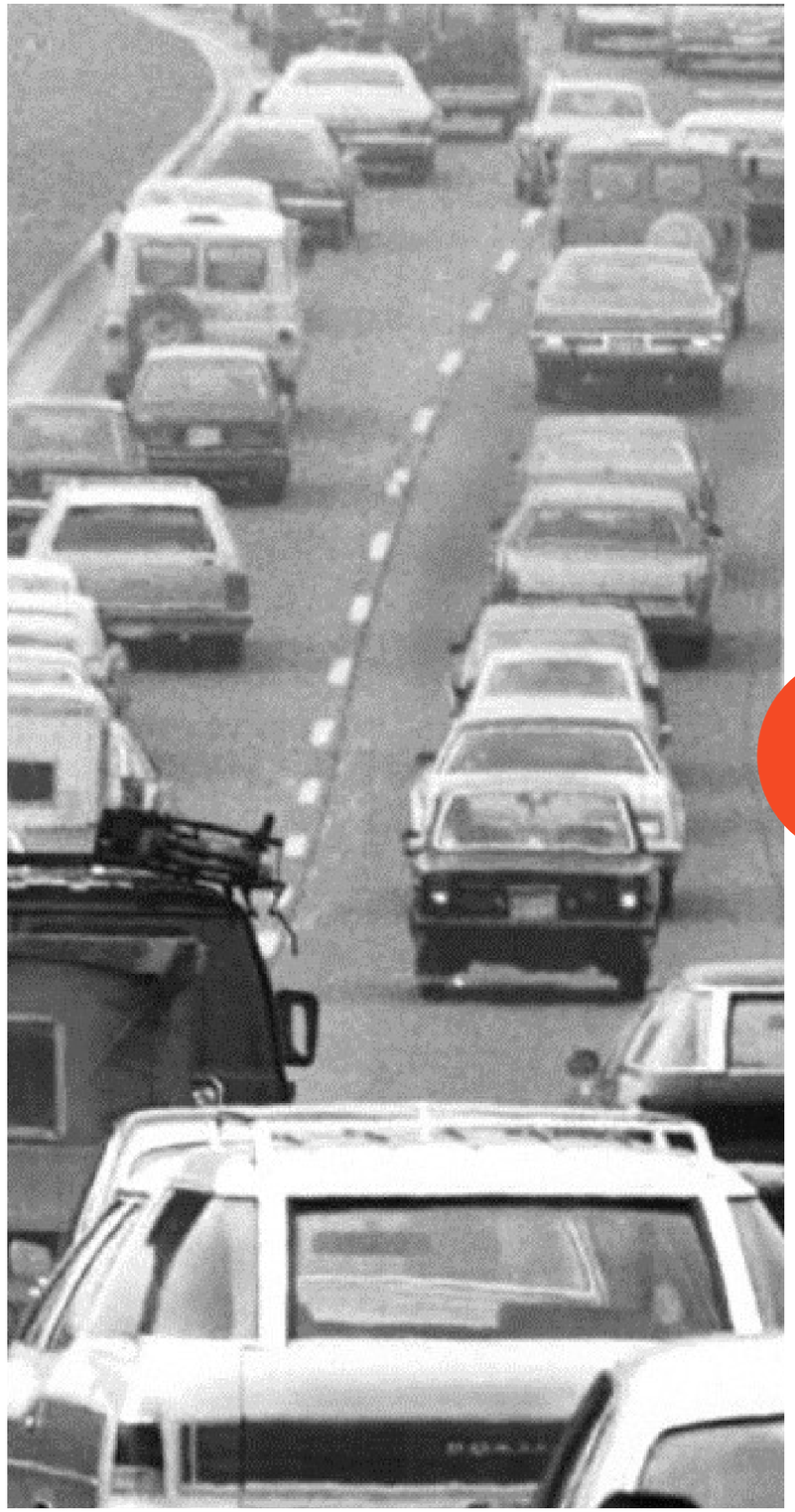
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Infrastructure Institute humbly acknowledges they operate on the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations, such as the Wendat, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee. We recognize and uphold the rights of Indigenous communities, acknowledging the ancestral and unceded territories of the Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples throughout Turtle Island. Tkaronto is home to a growing community of urban Indigenous peoples, including those from the Inuit, Métis and First Nations. We recognize that the Greater Toronto Area is covered by several treaties, such as Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Williams Treaties with seven First Nations, including the Chippewas of Georgina Island. We respect Indigenous teachings and commit fully to improving our relations with Indigenous peoples and acting on our responsibilities in Truth and Reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

OVERVIEW

This report investigates the state of transportation equity in Toronto through an exploration of the historical development of the city's transportation infrastructure and its impact on social and transportation outcomes across neighbourhoods. Our research seeks to answer the following questions: **How has equity played into transportation infrastructure development and decision-making, and consequently, what effects have these decisions had on the city's transportation equity?** Our findings demonstrate that despite abandoning the extensive plans for urban expressways which were a key driver of displacement and inequality in other North American cities, significant disparities in transportation access remain in Toronto. These disparities are especially prevalent in peripheral neighbourhoods with large low-income populations and communities of colour.

The report revisits approximately 60 years of Toronto's history, from the establishment of Metro Toronto in 1954 to the political debates surrounding Transit City in the early 2010s. Through extensive archival research, including over 250 documents and 120 news articles, our analysis shows that the story of transportation inequity in Toronto is primarily one of omission rather than commission. In other words, **while we usually associate inequity with built transportation projects, Toronto has a legacy of inequities created by projects that were never built.**



Transit Timeline

1946 — Construction of the Subway Line 1 begins

1953 — Metro Toronto established

1954 — Subway Line 1 (Union-Eglinton) opens

1956 — Construction of the Gardiner Expressway begins

1958 — Construction of the Don Valley Expressway begins

1959 — Construction of Subway Line 2 begins

1960 — Metro Toronto Official Plan

1963 — Construction of the Spadina Expressway (Allen Rd.) begins

1964 — Don Valley Expressway completed

1965 — Gardiner Expressway completed

1967 — Apartment Development Control Policy

1968 — Subway Line 2 (Keele-Woodbine) opens

1971 — Spadina Expressway Stopped

1972 — *GO-Urban* Plans Released

1974 — *GO-Urban* plan cancelled

1981 — Construction of Scarborough RT (Line 3) begins

1985 — *Network 2011* Plans Released

1985 — Scarborough RT (Line 3) Opens

1988 — *Network 2011* cancelled

1990 — *Let's Move* plan released

1994 — Construction of Eglinton and Sheppard East (Line 4) Lines begins

1995 — Eglinton Line Cancelled, tunnels filled in

1998 — Toronto Amalgamation

2002 — Subway Line 4 completed

2007 — *Transit City* Plan Proposed

2010 — *Transit City* Plan Cancelled

2013 — Construction of Eglinton Crosstown begins

2017 — Construction of Finch West LRT begins

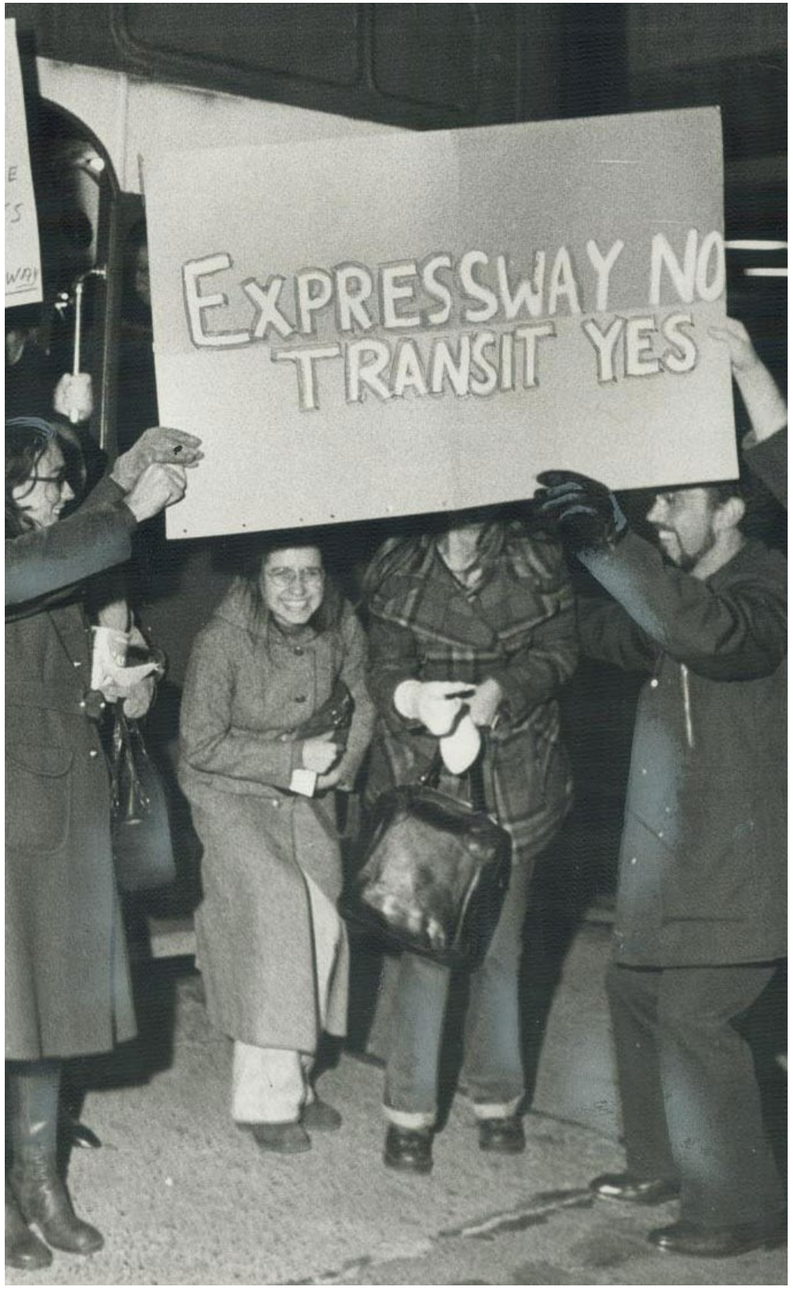


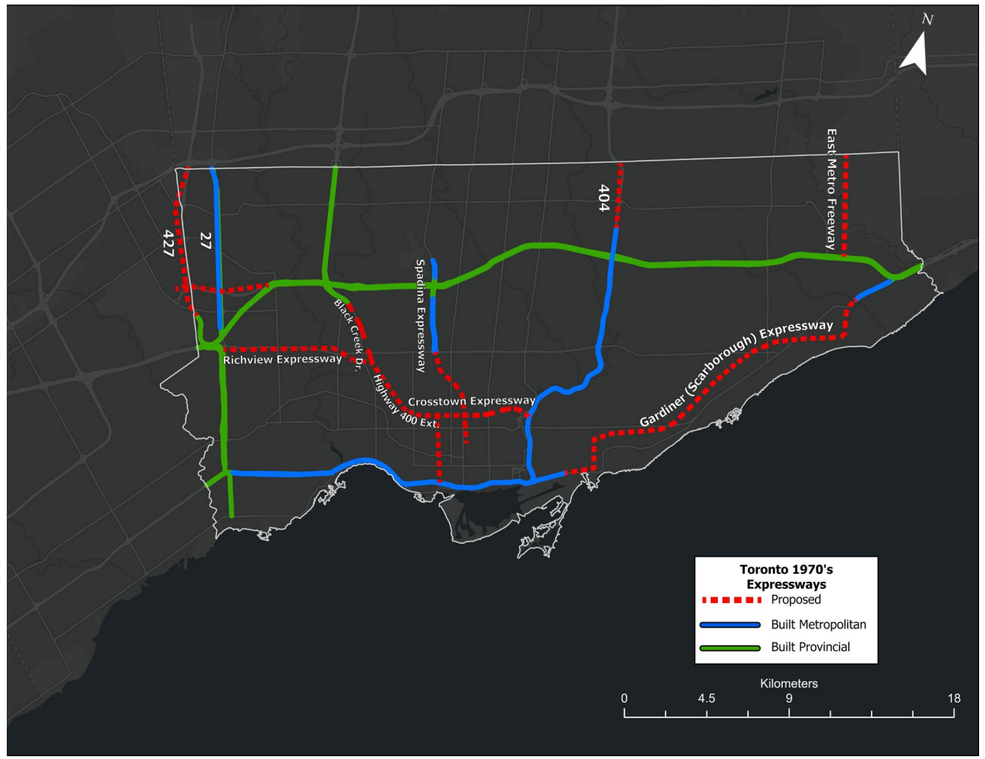
Figure 1 : Opponents of the proposed Scarborough Expressway arrive at The Star Forum by bus last night; practising what they preach on the desirability of transit over private cars[1]

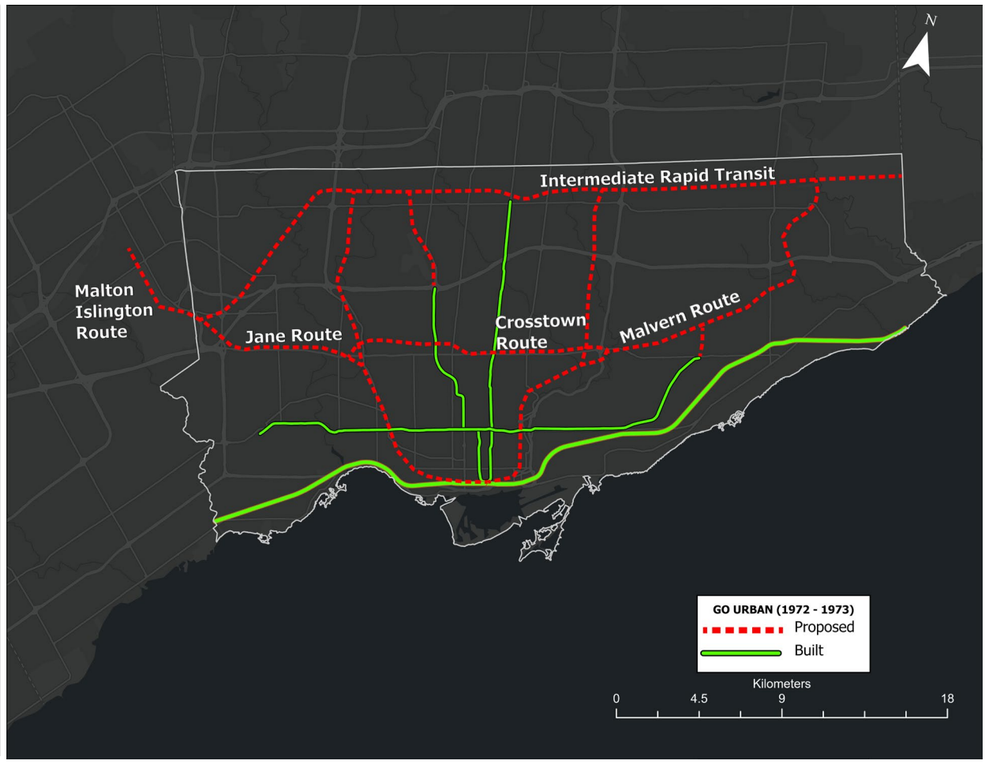
WHAT IS TRANSPORTATION EQUITY?

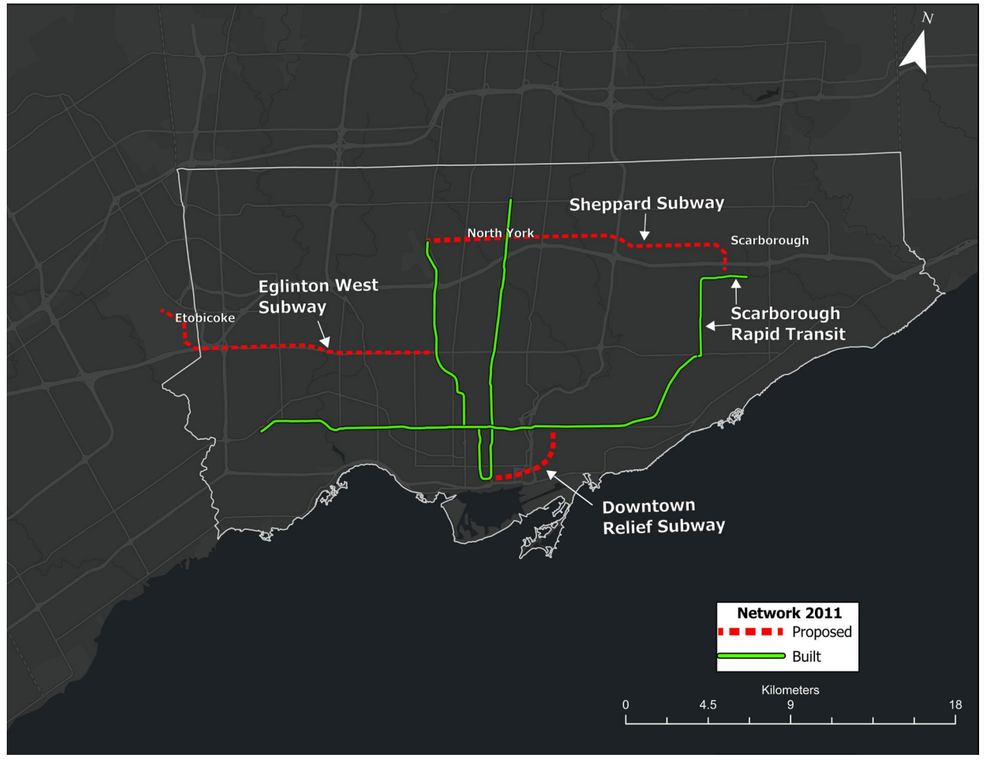
In transportation, equity refers to the fair distribution of transportation's benefits and burdens[2] across different groups of society, and more particularly, how policy interventions might minimize unfair distribution of these benefits and burdens. It encompasses environmental health, mobility, and importantly, accessibility: how easily people can reach desired destinations and whether transportation options support this goal.[3]

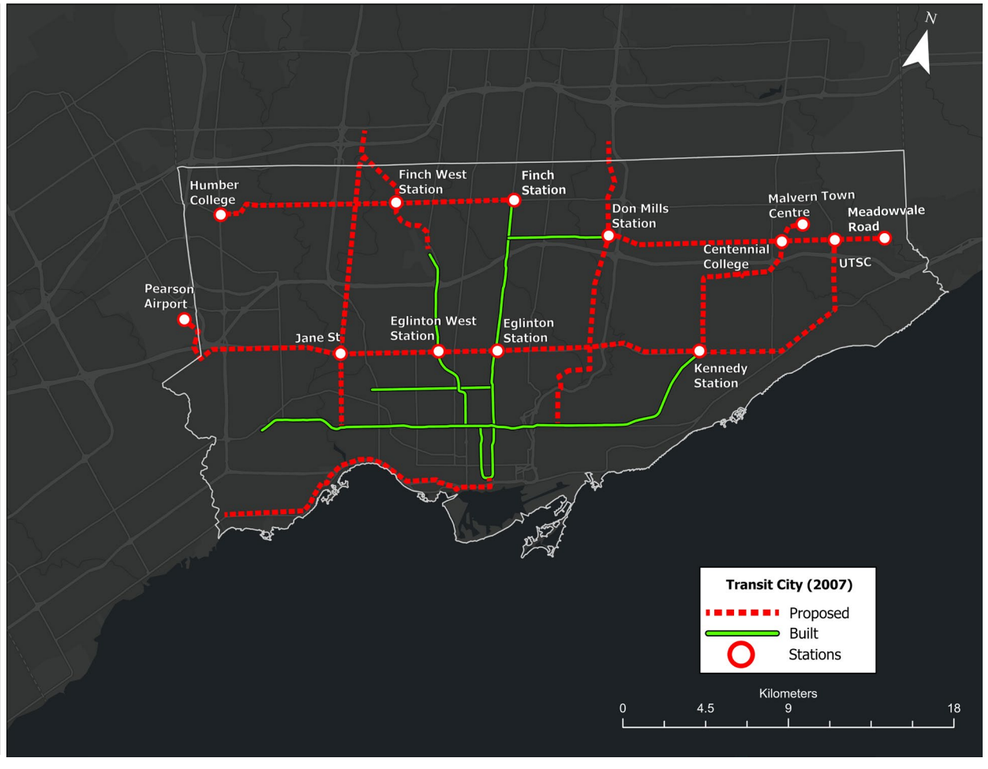
While equity is primarily a *distributive* concept, it includes considerations of a fair process, as the communities that have been most negatively affected have often been historically under-represented in decision-making.[4] For example, transit planning processes that have under-represented lower-income individuals (who rely on transit most) have contributed to poor accessibility in the US and in Canada, including in Toronto.[5]

A key example of a burden resulting from transportation investment is displacement. While displacement is historically associated with highway projects, it is also more loosely related to investment in transit.[6] Rapid transit tends to increase land values along its path, and without mitigation efforts it can lead to gentrification, i.e., economic, cultural, or demographic change that pushes away lower-income residents.[7] Thus, contemporary practices such as transit-oriented development (TOD), which can improve accessibility and offer environmental benefits to communities, can still spur adverse effects if not accompanied by resources for affordable housing and meaningful community involvement.[8]









Overview of Toronto's Proposed Transportation Plans

KEY HISTORICAL PERIODS

Expressways and High-Rises: Building Metro Toronto (1953-1971)

"Here's another Metro accomplishment – Toronto traffic really moves. We're mobile, we don't have jams like the ones in other cities. And don't forget this – we've one of the finest public transit systems in the world"

- Deputy planning commissioner Voytek Wronski[9]

In the post-World War II era, Toronto's population grew at an unprecedented rate: from 951,000 in 1941 to 1.6 million in 1958. To meet the demands of this growth, the Province established Metro Toronto as a second-tier local government that would coordinate the planning and delivery of infrastructure in an area encompassing 13 municipalities, only half of which were built up. Tasked with shaping the built form of this other half, Metro Toronto's establishment marked a period of intense investment in housing and infrastructure development, including expressways and arterial roads to support new neighbourhoods.

While the 1960 Official Plan called for a "balanced approach" between providing roads for automobiles and expanding public transit, Metro's focus was on building its proposed expressway network, leading to the demolition of homes and the displacement of a few hundred residents in South Parkdale and Corktown for the construction of the Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley Parkway's (DVP) Eastern Avenue Overpass, respectively. Land was also expropriated and demolitions planned for the Spadina Expressway, the 400 Extension, and the Crosstown Expressway. Newspaper columns of the period highlighted the futility of solving congestion through car-oriented planning, but the Metro Planning Board believed that expressways offered a net benefit of improved mobility in a

1953 - 1971

growing metropolis. While the building of a grid of arterial roads in the City's outskirts went largely uncontested, the expansion of the network into the historic core was met with growing public opposition, culminating in the famous *Stop Spadina* campaign which successfully halted the construction of the southern stretch of the Spadina Expressway in 1971.

The expanded water, sewer and road infrastructure in the City's outskirts enabled the development of new, high-density housing which was more efficient to service and offered more affordable options to new residents. By the early 1960s, 64% of all new units in Toronto were in multi-family buildings. But staunch opposition to high-rise development from single-family homeowners who cited concerns over shading, congestion and the influx of lower-income residents contributed to the pattern of placing apartment buildings along arterial roads, on the margins of single-family neighbourhoods. While Metro was aware of the "ill-effects" this posed for high-rise residents, including noise and air pollution as well as road safety concerns, it considered these to be outweighed by the convenience of access to the arterial network by automobile. In its *1966 Study of Apartment Distribution*, Metro recommended gradually increasing density around transit stations, but judged that residents of peripheral apartment clusters would continue to rely on cars to access destinations. The authors did not question the socio-economic character of the future apartment residents and their potential access to a private vehicle. As plans for expressways traversing through these areas were later cancelled and rates of car ownership became far lower than predicted, service challenges mounted for residents of these high-rise suburban clusters. Metro's focus on car-oriented infrastructure in this early period, combined with the marginalization of renters and stigmatization of high-rise apartments, set the stage for future transportation and development mismatches that would leave communities underserved for decades.

Key developments/plans explored during this period were:

- **The Gardiner Expressway**
- **Don Valley Parkway (DVP)**
- **The Spadina Expressway**

1953 - 1971

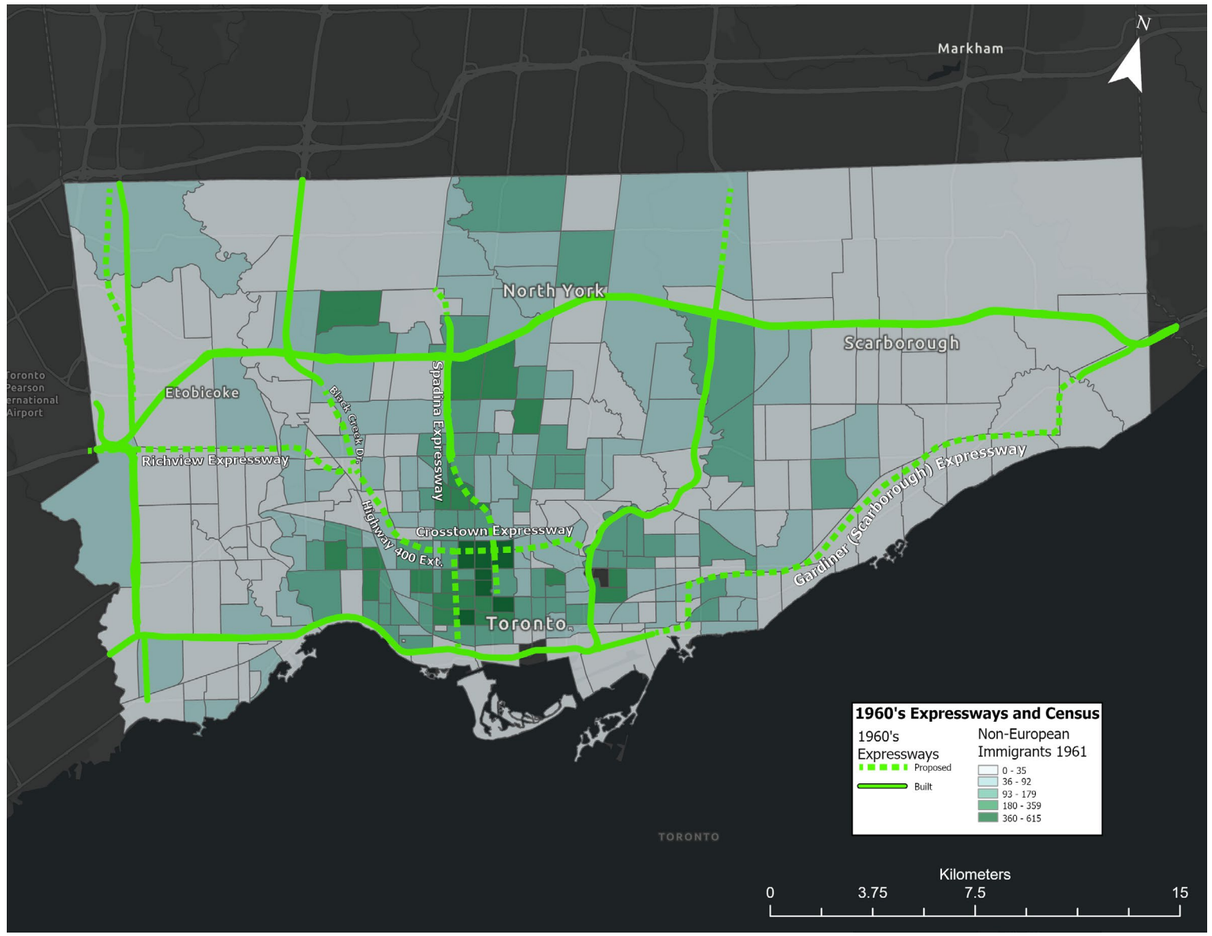


Figure 2 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1961 and proposed 1960 expressway plans. The map depicts a concentration of non-European immigrant populations in downtown Toronto where several of the proposed expressways were to be located.

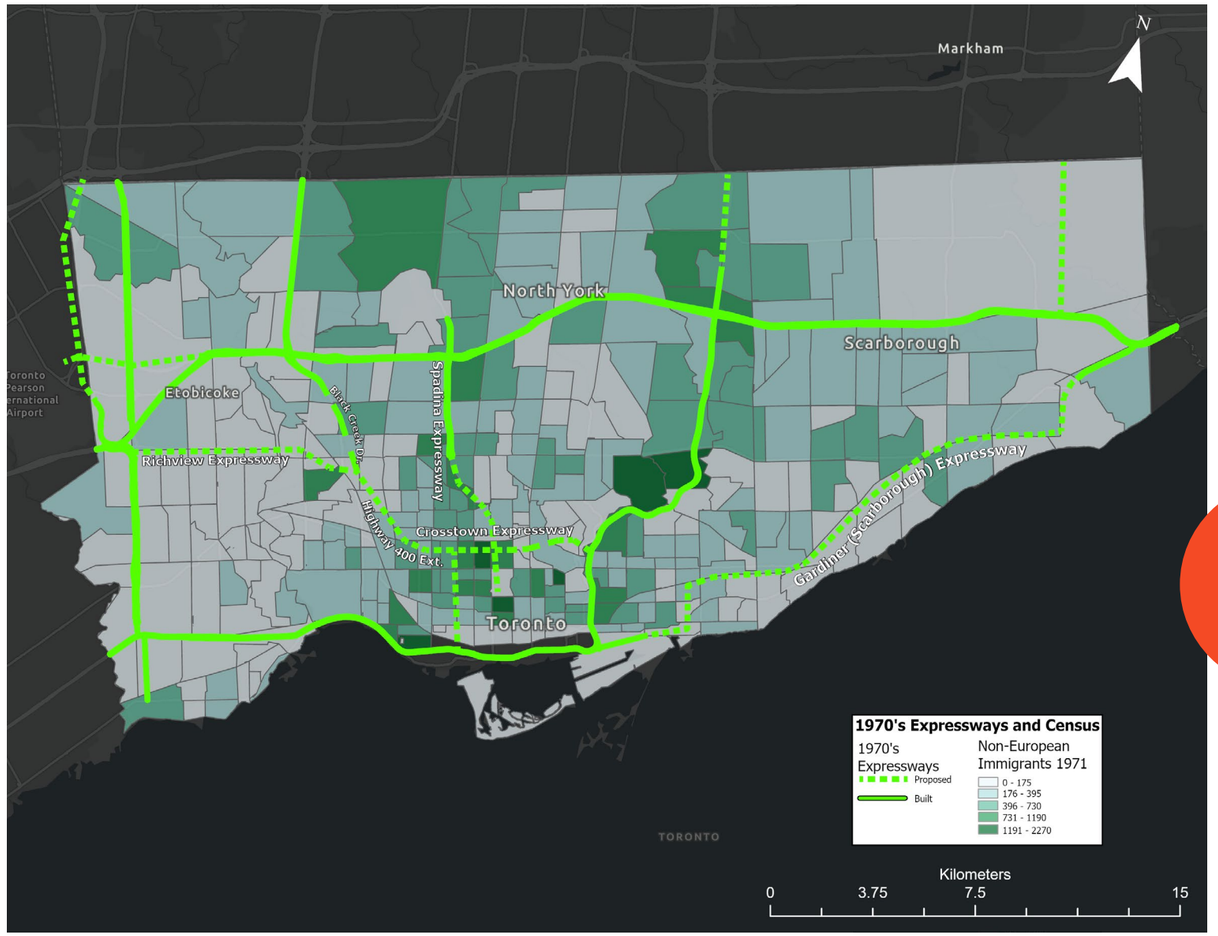


Figure 3 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1961 and the proposed 1970 expressway network. The map illustrates how sections of the proposed plan (particularly the Crosstown, Spadina, Gardiner (Scarborough), and Highway 400 Extensions) would have intersected with several pockets of ethnically diverse communities.

1953 - 1971

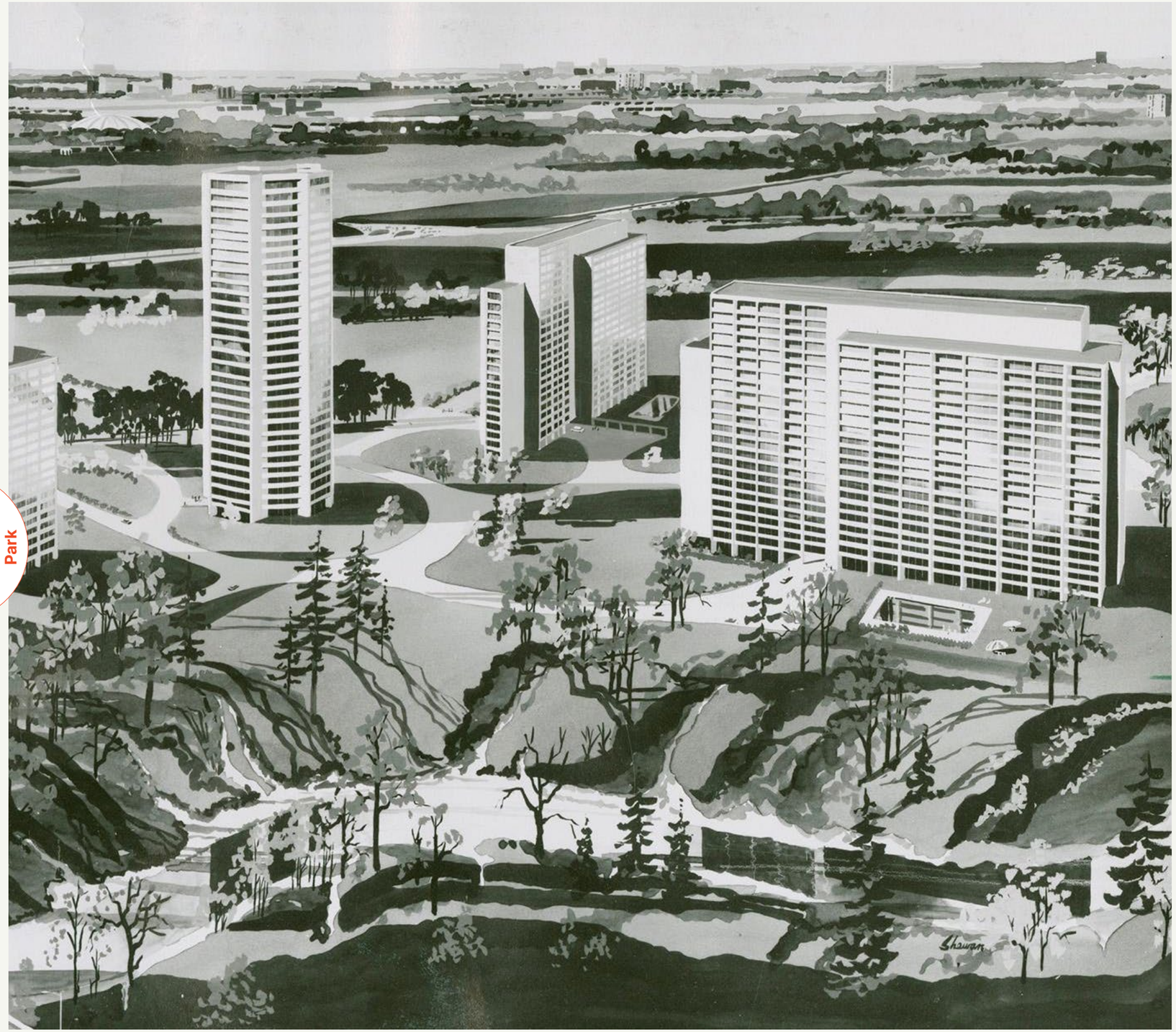


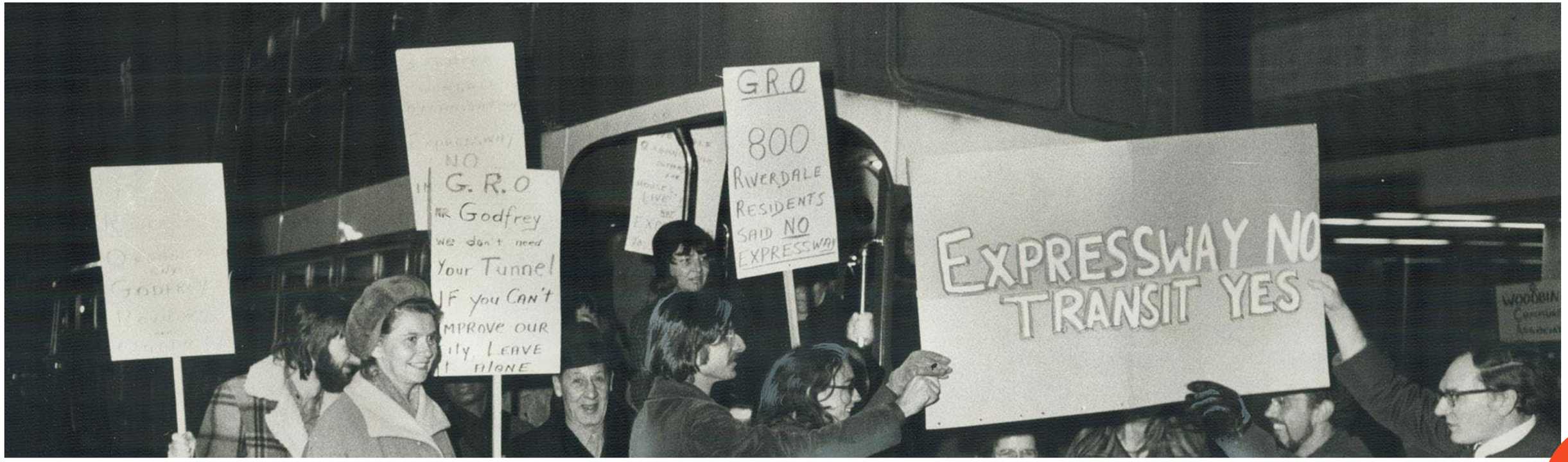
Figure 4 : Renderings of Flemingdon Park, 1965[10]

Case Study: Flemingdon Park

Then: Flemingdon Park, along with Don Mills and Thorncliffe Park, exemplified Toronto's modernist master-planned neighbourhoods, bringing the concept of a "new town" from Europe to Canada and became a lab and model for tower-in-the-park developments.[11] Constructed rapidly, the first phase opened in 1961,[12] and much of the neighbourhood was completed by the late 1960s. With 8% of its units as public housing, it became an immigrant hub, housing residents from 72 ethnic backgrounds by the 1980s.[13] Unlike other immigrant tower neighbourhoods in Toronto's periphery, Flemingdon Park's proximity to the city centre and major arterials like Eglinton and Don Mills avenues was not leveraged for transit connections, with both *Network 2011* and *Transit City* plans falling short.

Now: Today, the area is transforming with the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown and Ontario Line, raising concerns of potential gentrification, similar to those in neighbouring Thorncliffe Park over planned "Transit Oriented Communities".[14]

See the full report for the complete details.



DELAYED, DEFERRED, CANCELLED: UNFINISHED TRANSIT PLANS (1971-1993)

"I would like to see two miles of subway built a year ... But it has not yet been achieved and doesn't appear imminent by the end of this century"

-TTC Chair Ralph Day [15]

By the 1970s, public discourse reflected growing awareness of transportation inequities, with opponents of expressways arguing that they served the relatively rich while offering nothing to those without cars. Following the cancellation of expressway plans like *The Spadina Expressway*, transit development became the focus in Toronto. In response, the City increasingly introduced community planning measures and prioritized medium density, mixed-use, and mixed-income development.[16] This was a stark rejection of Metro's top-down planning culture and development priorities.[17] Aversion to density now brought suburbanites and urbanites together. Simultaneously, most of the land designated for housing within Metro's jurisdiction was now being built up and the focus of development moved to the suburbs. The combination of factors led to a sharp decline in the city's population growth rate. Yet Toronto's population was changing, as more non-European immigrants were arriving in Canada and settling in Toronto's car-oriented inner suburbs.

However, ambitious transit plans that would provide much-needed service

to these neighbourhoods like the *GO-Urban* and *Network 2011* repeatedly failed due to political and budgetary constraints. The *GO-Urban* (1972) plan proposed a suburban streetcar network using new transit technology. However, the focus on proprietary technology over practical service led to its failure. The only output, the Scarborough RT line, suffered from mechanical problems. *Network 2011* (1985) proposed a phased development of transit lines, prioritizing a fiscally conservative approach that would avoid debt or tax increases. However, this delayed necessary investments in underserved areas and political strife further hindered the plan's implementation, leading to a focus on highways and park-and-ride facilities instead of expanding rapid transit.

Key developments/plans explored during this period were the:

- **The Scarborough Expressway**
- **Highway 400 Extension**
- **GO-Urban**
- **Network 2011**
- **TTC 1983 Long Range Plan**

Figure 5 : Promotional renderings of GO-Urban's vehicles running in a suburban setting

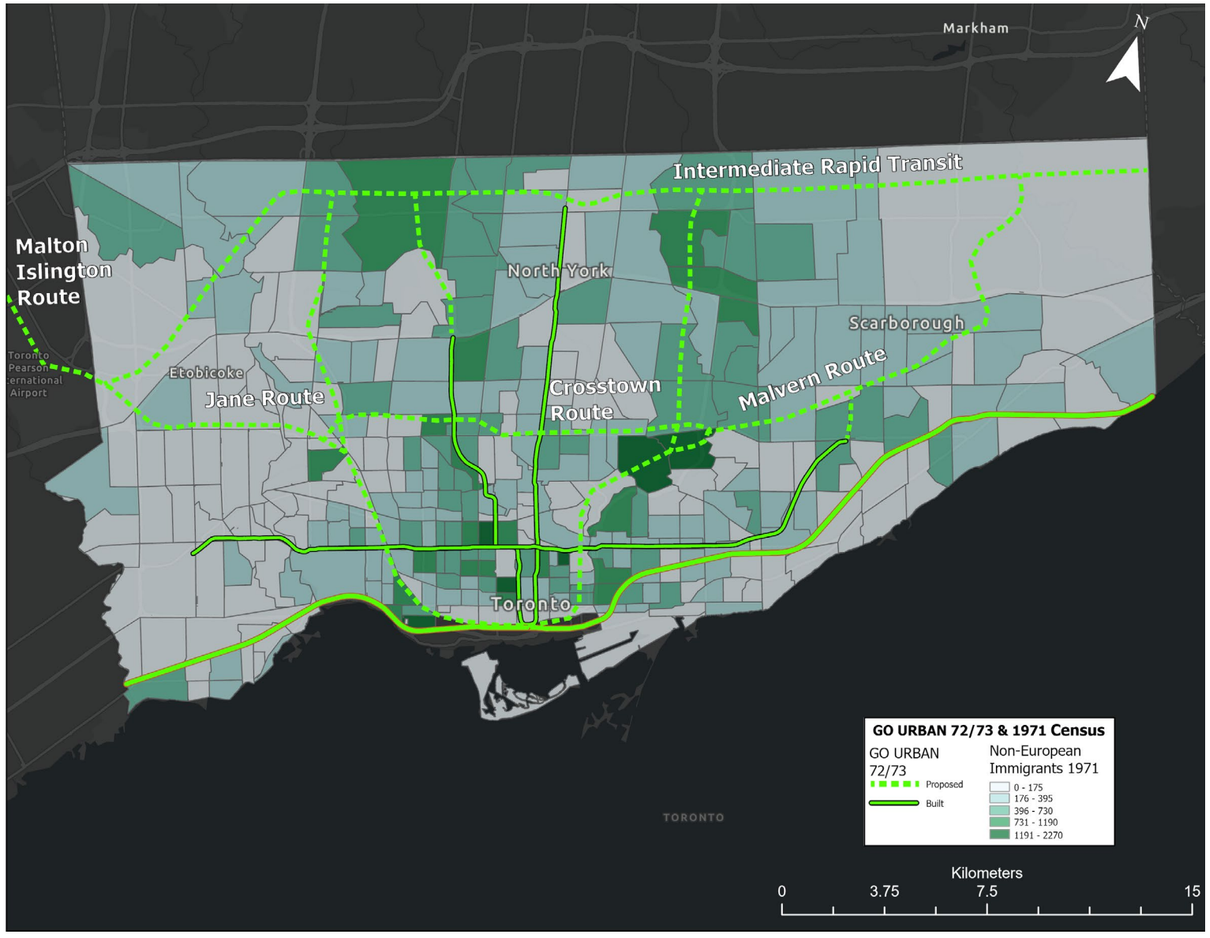


Figure 6 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1961 and proposed 1960 expressway plans. The map depicts a concentration of non-European immigrant populations in downtown Toronto where several of the proposed expressways were to be located.

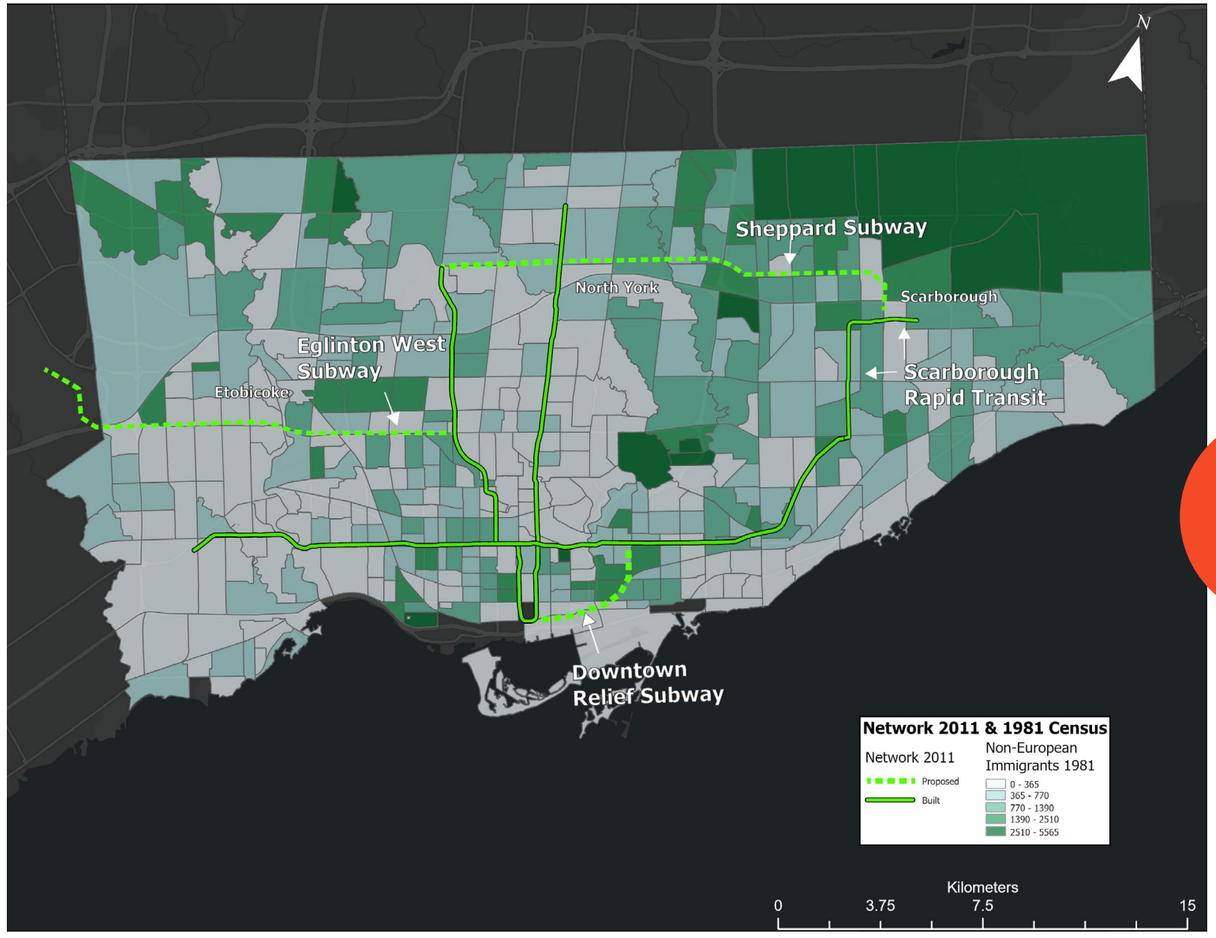


Figure 7 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1981 and Network 2011. The map illustrates how the proposed Network 2011 lines would have connected several ethnically diverse communities to the existing subway network and the rest of downtown Toronto, particularly the proposed Sheppard and Downtown Relief subway.

1971 - 1993

Figure 8 : Land banking in Scarborough: Houses in Malvern sell for $15,000 to $20,000, with leasing arrangements for the land[18]

Case study: Malvern Community

Then: The story of Malvern, in Toronto's far northeast, highlights the challenges created by the city's misaligned land use and transit policies for peripheral neighbourhoods. Planned for affordable and public housing, Malvern followed a car-oriented design typical of Toronto's post-war suburbs, with high-rise apartments amidst single-family homes. Despite its remote location, Malvern's proximity to employment and rail corridors made it a suitable candidate for rapid transit, but multiple transit plans since 1969 failed due to perceived low density.

Now: This lack of transit contributed to high unemployment and stigmatization of its racially diverse community, creating a cycle of marginalization.[19] Today, Malvern is hopeful for an LRT connection via the Eglinton East LRT, though this investment is still uncertain.

See the full report for the complete details.

LEFT BEHIND IN A GLOBAL CITY: THE TRANSIT CITY DEBATE

"A day will come, and fairly soon, when we should learn which of these schemes are actually worthwhile and which, though sounding good, contribute little or even draw attention and resources away from more deserving routes."

-Steve Munro[20]

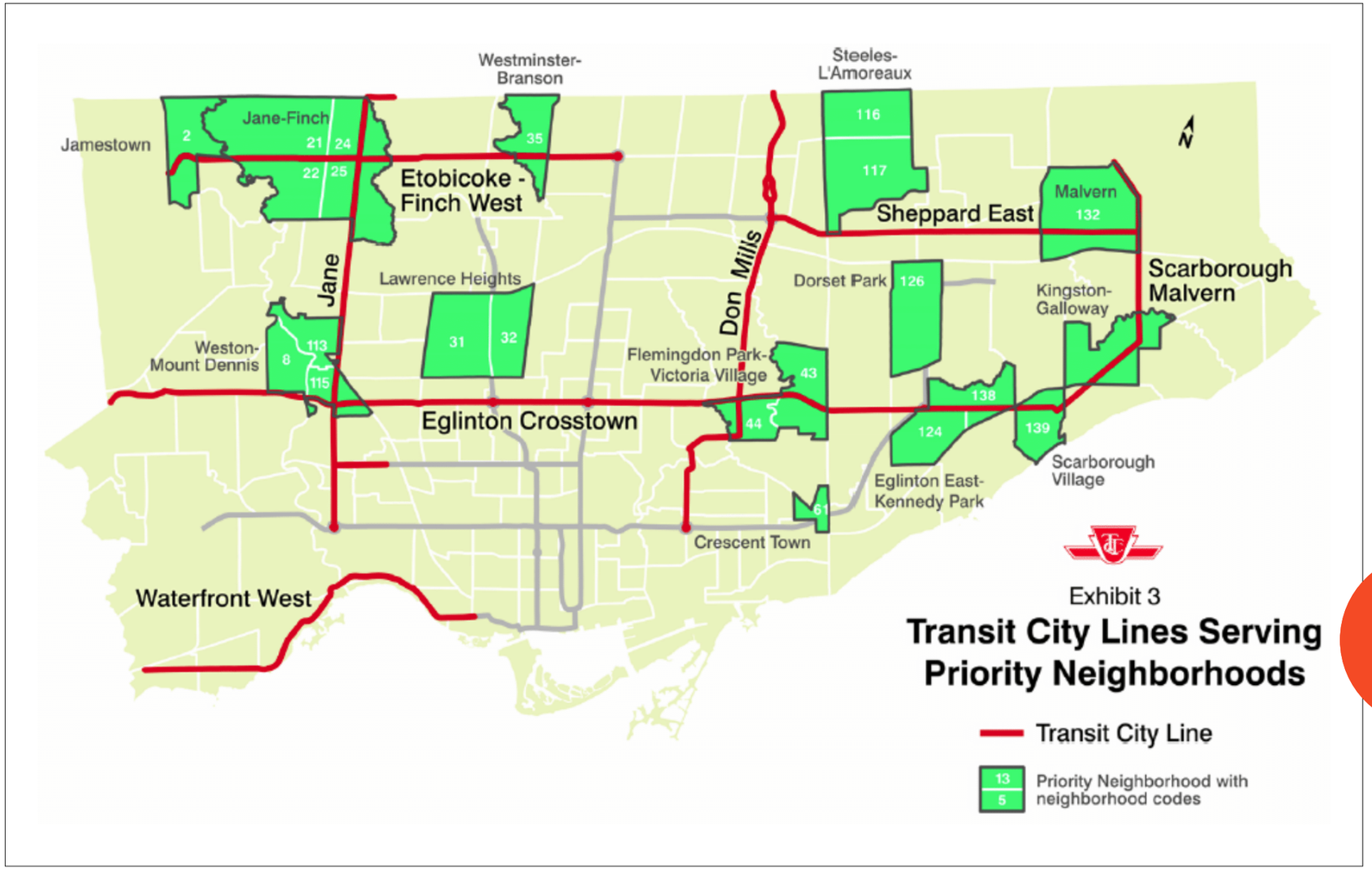


Figure 9 : Map of Transit City Lines Serving Priority Neighbourhoods.[21]

In 1998, Metro Toronto and its six municipalities were amalgamated into a mega-city. Faced with new political responsibilities and challenges, the city's leaders set their aspirations on becoming a competitive "world city" through efforts such as waterfront redevelopment and an Olympic bid.[22] But Toronto was facing widening socio-economic gaps, fueled by changing immigration patterns, growing economic pressures, the rising suburbanization of poverty, and the erosion of provincial and federal social policies. For example, between 1990 and 1995, the share of low-income neighbourhoods in the city jumped from 32% to 46%.[23]

Transit City (2007) was born as Toronto was emerging from ongoing financial and political burdens and re-imagining itself as a global city. It was the most expansive plan in 40 years which aimed to connect underserved areas with 120km of Light Rail Transit (LRT) lines. It explicitly aligned transit with spatial equity goals, aiming to serve the city's 13 'Priority Neighbourhoods' (now referred to as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)) identified by the *Strong Neighbourhood Policy*.

2006 - 2012

These areas comprised overwhelmingly of inner-suburban neighbourhoods with large concentrations of apartments and poor services, including transit. However, the plan faced political battles, legal investigations, and funding cuts, resulting in several iterations (Transportation City and OneCity) and incomplete implementation. Additionally, concerns about transit-induced gentrification and displacement were not fully addressed.

Key developments/plans explored during this period were the:

- **Transit City**
- **Transportation City**
- **OneCity**

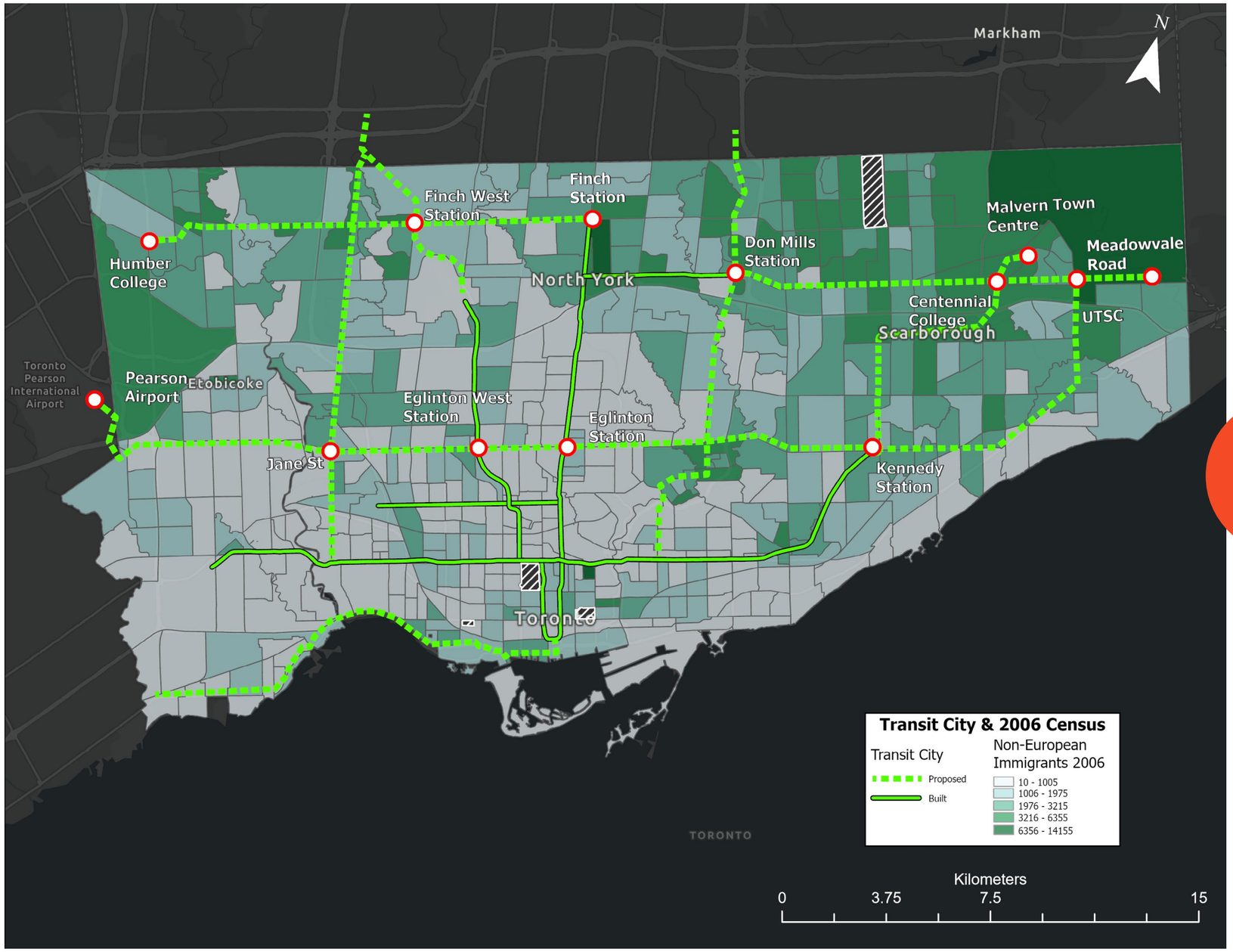


Figure 10 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 2006 and Transit City. The map illustrates how the proposed Network 2011 lines would have connected several ethnically diverse communities to the existing subway network and the rest of downtown Toronto.

2006 - 2012

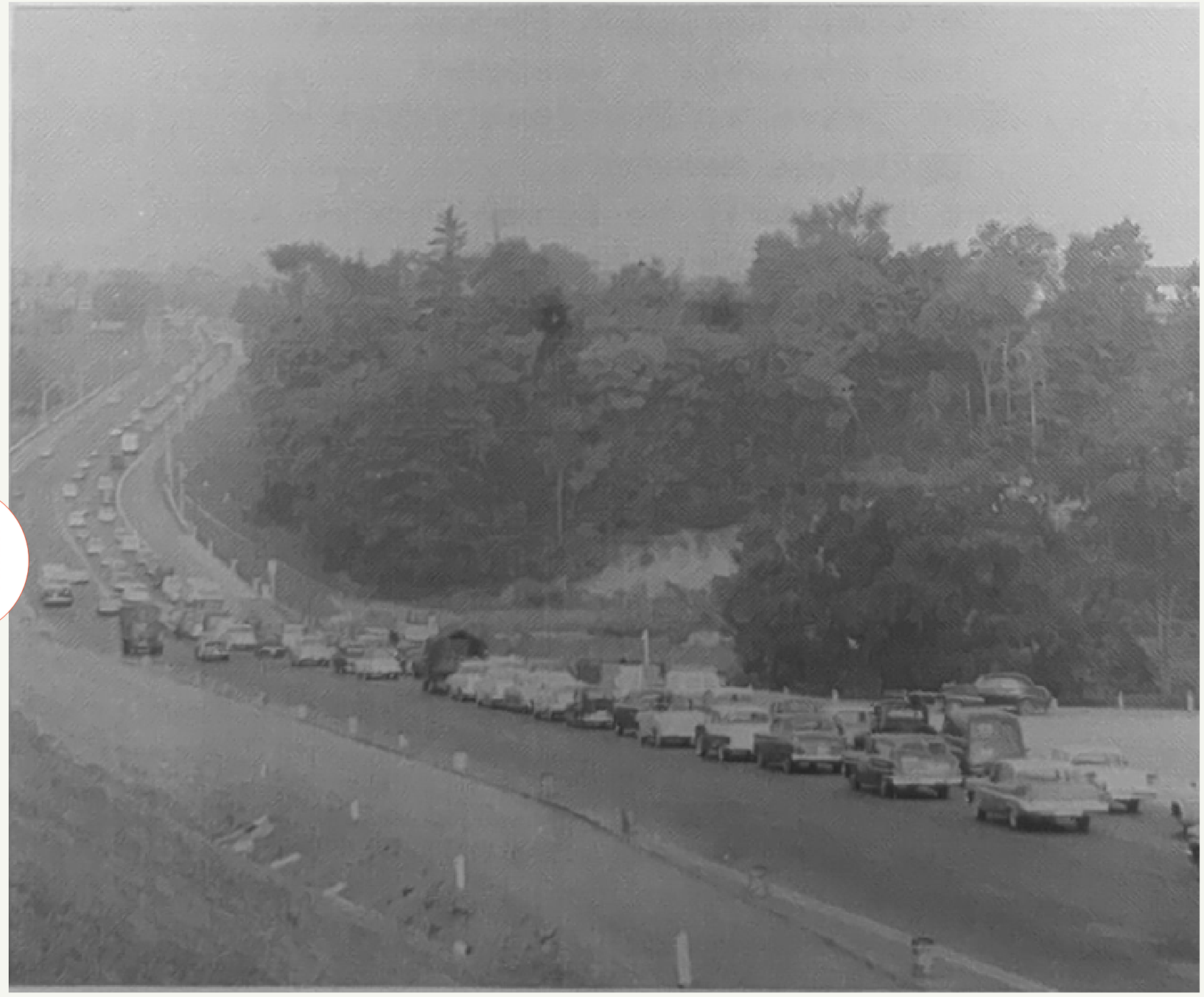


Figure 11 : Roads Department Biennial Report (1957-1958)[24]

Case study: The Eglinton Corridor

Then: Since the 1950s, Eglinton has been identified as a crucial east-west corridor connecting the two edges of the city to its centre. Transportation priorities for Eglinton shifted over the years, from completing the road network in the 1950s, to various intermediate and rapid capacity transit proposals from the 1970s onwards.

The Eglinton corridor was a key element in Metro Toronto's arterial network, but planners were concerned with mitigating "ill effects" to adjacent homes from the growing congestion and development.[25] Preserving residential property values was key consideration in decision-making, as any changes would require "reimburs[ing] Eglinton Avenue property owners for any loss in the resale value".[26]

Now: Over the years, the discourse around the effects of transportation on the communities along the street has changed, from preserving neighbourhood character and property values, to seeing transit as a way to tackle under-investment, to the lack of compensation or protection against displacement,

especially in Little Jamaica and Weston Mount Dennis area. The ongoing construction on Eglinton has sparked various community and city-led funds and studies on the cultural, economic, real estate, and community development opportunities along the corridor.

> This situation highlights a significant tension: not only can delayed transit feel like denied transit, but when it finally arrives, it risks only benefitting newcomers rather than the existing community due to displacement and gentrification of both commercial and residential tenants. This sentiment, repeatedly expressed by Eglinton corridor residents, government officials, and in municipal assessments over the years raises important questions about who gets included in the future of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC).[27]

See the full report for the complete details

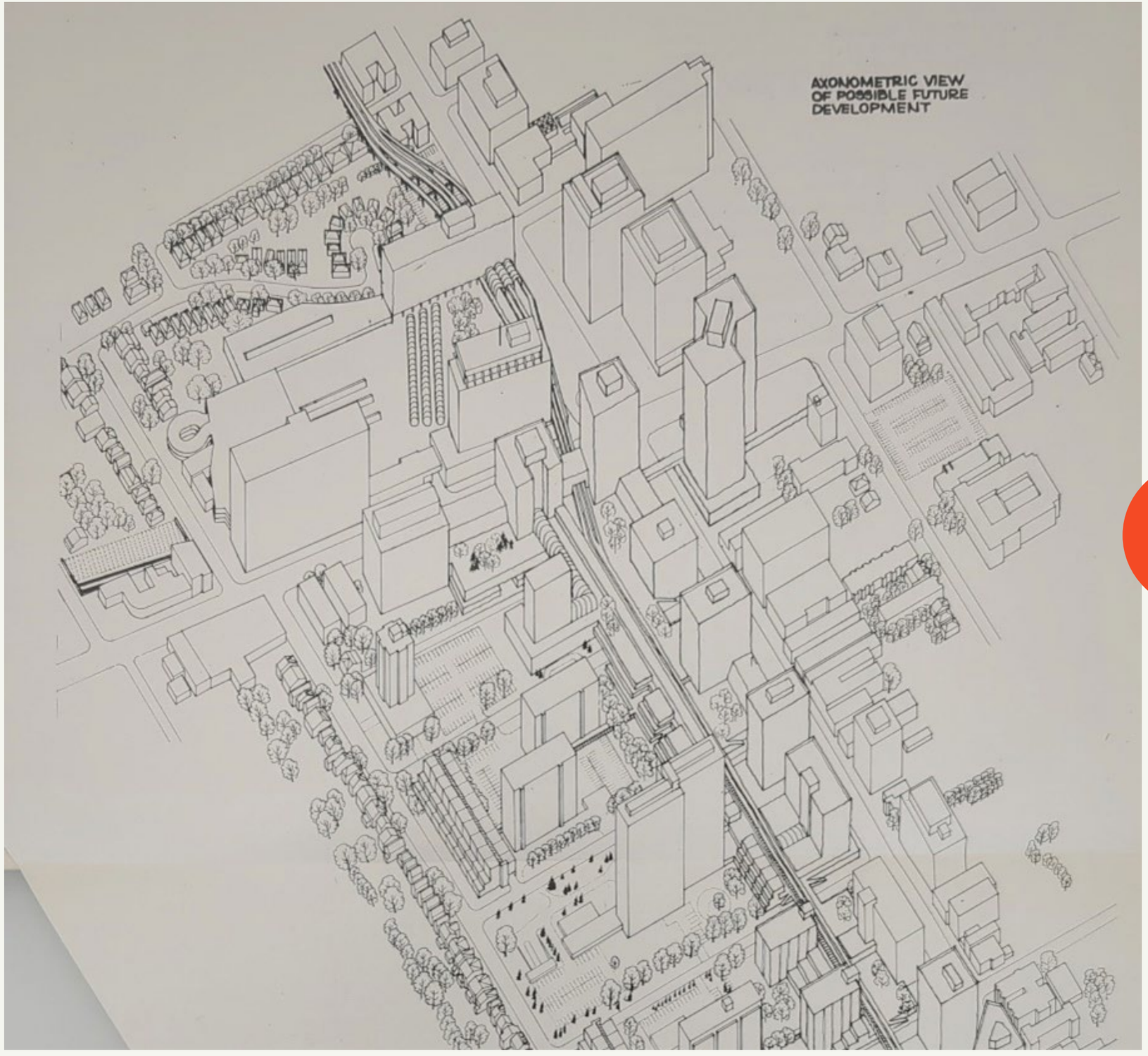


Figure 12 : Image from a study of GO-Urban's impact on Eglinton, focusing on minimizing disruption to adjacent single-family neighbourhoods, Performance & impact of the alternatives, year 2000[28]

“TRANSIT DELAYED IS TRANSIT DENIED”: LESSONS LEARNED FROM TORONTO’S HISTORY?

Toronto today is grappling with multiple equity challenges, many of which are the legacy of previous transportation decisions. A simple comparison of projects demonstrates the true costs of inaction *(see Table 1)*. Notably, the cost of one kilometer of transit lines, be it an LRT or a subway, has increased by orders of magnitude over the past decades. These numbers also don’t include the economic and social costs for residents of neighbourhoods without rapid transit, who for decades have experienced lower access to opportunities, fewer mobility options, and longer travel times, among other transportation inequities.

However, Toronto is now experiencing a transportation building boom, spurred by rapid population growth and housing pressures. Premier Doug Ford’s 2019 Subway *Transit Plan for the GTA* has introduced new and revived several old transit lines, moving from concept to construction rapidly. Yet, these developments come with their own set of challenges and lessons to be learned:

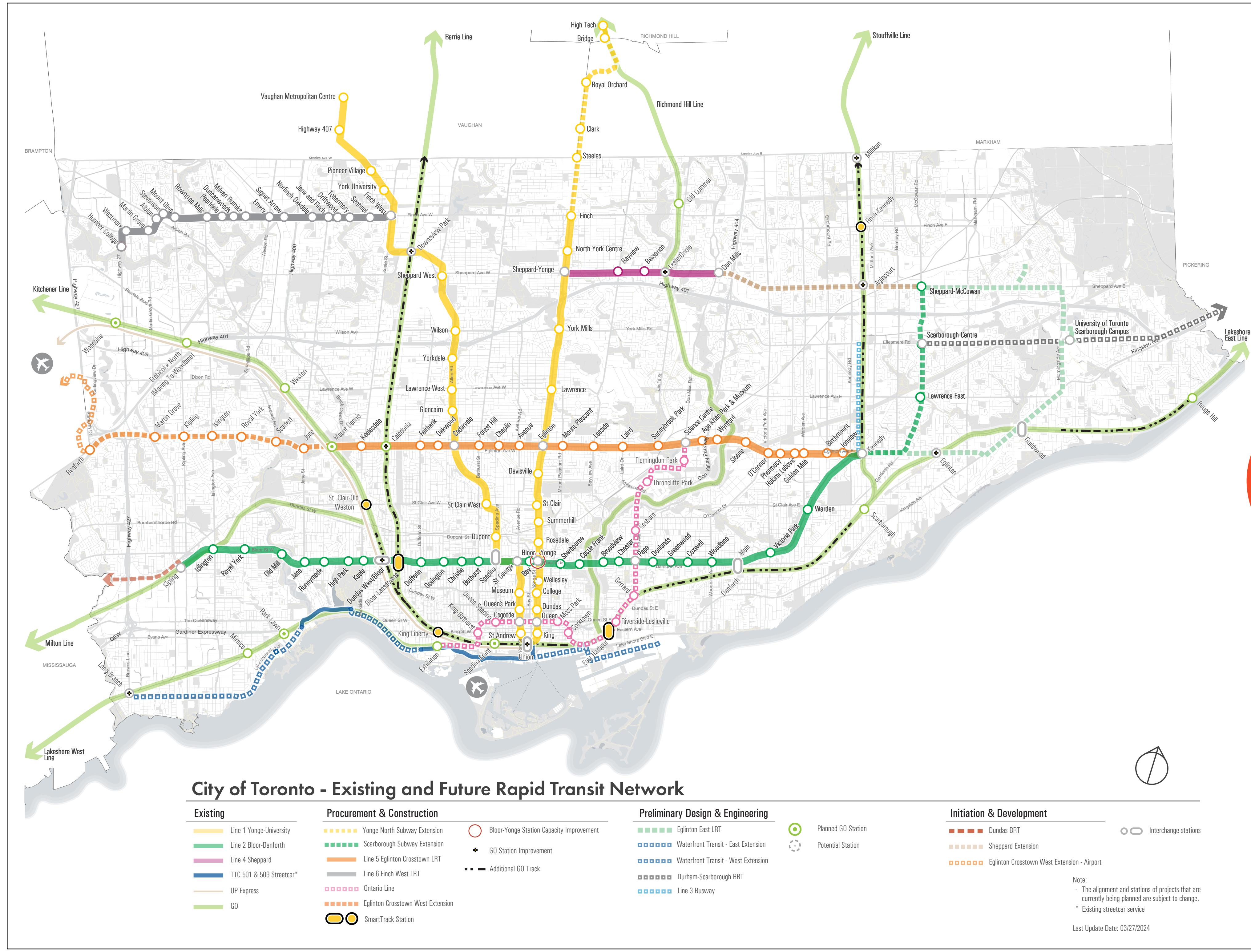


Figure 13 : City of Toronto - Existing and Future Rapid Transit Network.[29]

1. Toronto's transit planning has historically been fragmented, with frequent conflicts between municipalities and levels of government, often at the expense of social needs.
2. The Province's current top-down approach and shift from fiscal conservatism to aggressive investment have accelerated transit development, but often at the cost of meeting local priorities in underserved areas. This shift has disrupted long-term planning, increased costs, and raised concerns about project timelines and local priorities, particularly in Scarborough.
3. The lack of coordination between transportation, housing, and land use planning has historically contributed to inequity. Current transit investments risk repeating these issues without robust policies to preserve affordable housing and support low-income communities.
4. Toronto's planning has frequently been driven by elite interests, marginalizing low-income, Indigenous, immigrant, and communities of colour. This under-representation continues to impact transit planning, necessitating more robust engagement to ensure diverse needs are addressed and Indigenous rights are upheld.
5. Despite investments in transit, Toronto remains car-oriented. Recent projects have avoided taking away road lanes and continue to prioritize driving, with the Province's expressway investments and bike lane removals further entrenching this car-centric approach.

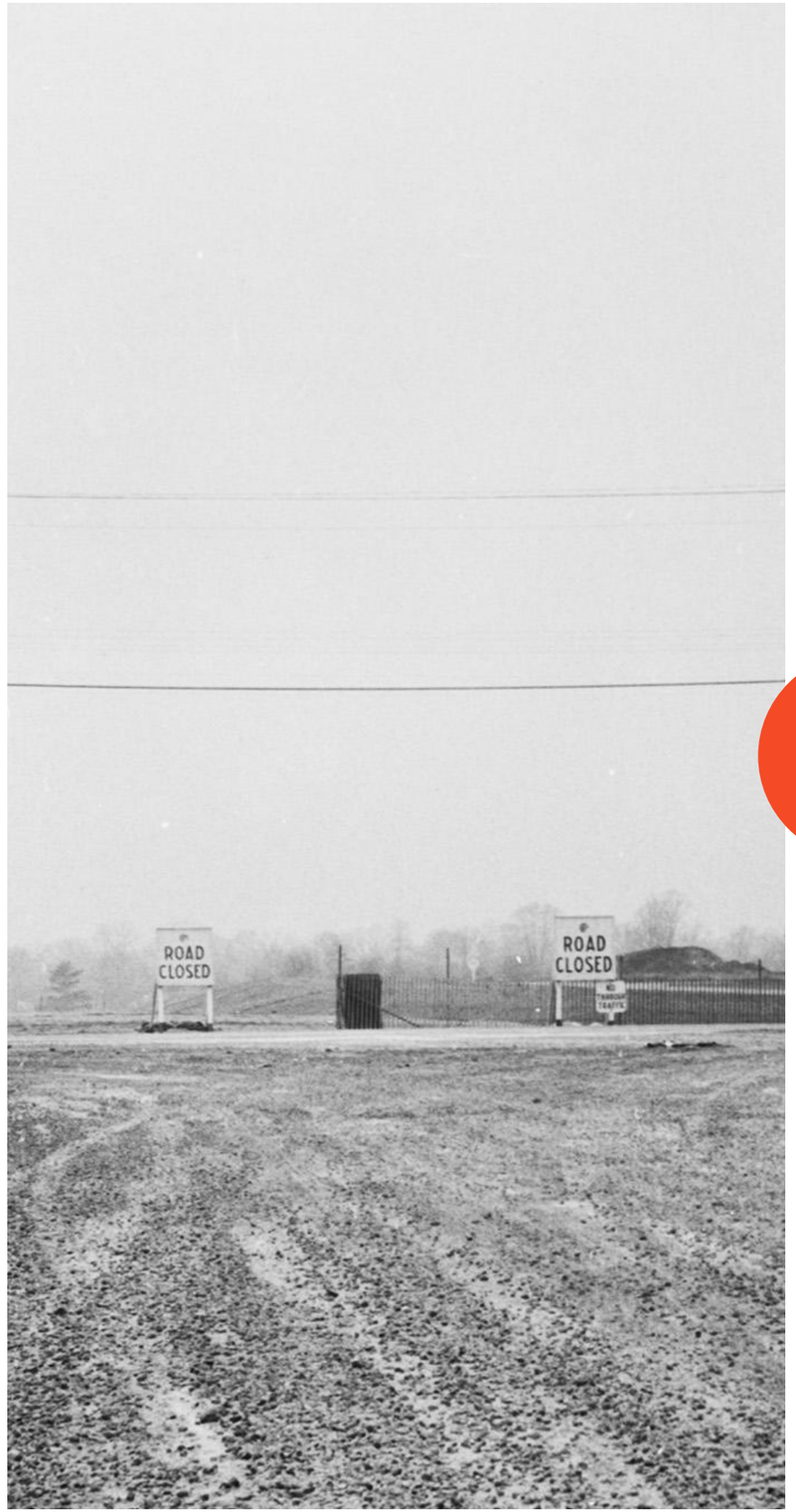
Plan	Year	Track length, in km	Projected cost in $m, adjusted to 2024 dollars	Projected cost per km, in $m, adjusted to 2024 dollars
Line 1 (Union-Eglinton)	1954	7.4	366	49.5
GO Urban	1972	90.3	5,622	62.2
Network 2011	1985	39.5	6,917	175.1
Transit City	2007	54.4	11,755	208.1
Transportation City	2011	58	16,706	288.0
Finch West	2024*	10.3	2,500	242.7
Eglinton Crosstown	2024*	19	12,810	674.2
Ontario Line	2024*	15.6	27,200	1,743.6

Table 1: Costs of transit plans, *adjusted to today's dollar value. Projects marked in (*) are under construction.*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout its history, Toronto's transportation network has been consistently vulnerable to political whims and fiscal thrift, even as evidence and awareness of social need grew. This pattern has left future generations to pay the price. Today, inequities of the past are at risk of being reproduced as unprecedented investment in transit expansion will improve accessibility but threatens the residential and commercial stability for residents and business owners in historically underserved neighbourhoods. Confronting Toronto's history of unequal and deferred investment is a first step, but learning from this history also means creating policies and processes that incorporate equity at every stage of the transit planning process. This involves the following:

- **Recognizing that transit is simultaneously mobility, land use and social policy**
- **Change the culture of representation in decision-making**
- **Coordinate planning, housing, land use, and social policy to match transit investment with protections against displacement**
- **Ensure quantitative and qualitative methods are used in measuring impact of transportation decision-making**
- **Integrate equity metrics and include key performance indicators (KPIs) at every stage of the transit project process**
- **Equity is not a one-size-fits-all approach; it must be responsive to the specific context**



ENDNOTES

[1] Metropolitan Toronto, 1959

[2] Fainstein, 2010; Pereira & Karner, 2021

[3] Karner et al., 2024

[4] Amar & Teelucksingh, 2015; Karner et al., 2018

[5] Hertel et al., 2015; Karner et al., 2018

[6] Zuk et al., 2018

[7] Delmelle, 2021; Doucet, 2021; Easton et al., 2020

[8] Delmelle, 2021

[9] Toronto Star, 24/10/1963; p. 3

[10] Unknown, 1966

[11] Stewart, 2007

[12] Globe and Mail, 1961

[13] Peters et al., 1986e

[14] Bowden, 2024

[15] Toronto Daily Star, 1971, p.A33

[16] White & Punter, 2023

[17] Sewell, 2009

[18] Toronto Star, 1973

[19] Monsebraaten, 2019; Rajeswaran, 2018

[20] Munro, 2012, par. 20

[21] Toronto Transit Commission, 2007b

[22] Kipfer & Keil 2002

[23] Hulchanski, 2010

[24] Metropolitan Toronto, 1959

[25] MoBurnie, 1958; Lawson, 1958

[26] City of Toronto Planning Board, 1958, p. 7; Director of City Planning, 1958

[27] City of Toronto, 2010a; City of Toronto, 2010b

[28] Eglinton transit development corridor, 1974

[29] Government of Ontario, 2024

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