



And see.



THE BETTER WAY

MISSED CONNECTIONS

Locating equity in Toronto's transportation history

The Infrastructure Institute

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Written by
Yinnon Geva
Alexandra Lambropoulos
Isaac Mendita
Matti Siemiatycki

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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, the study reveals that Toronto's transportation inequities have primarily arisen from inaction and *omission*, rather than the *commission* of overtly harmful projects. In other words, **while we usually associate inequity with built transportation projects, Toronto has a legacy of inequities created by transit projects that were never built.** While some transportation projects did lead to direct displacement, the more pervasive issue is the systemic lack of investment in marginalized communities, leading to persistent inequities in access across the city.

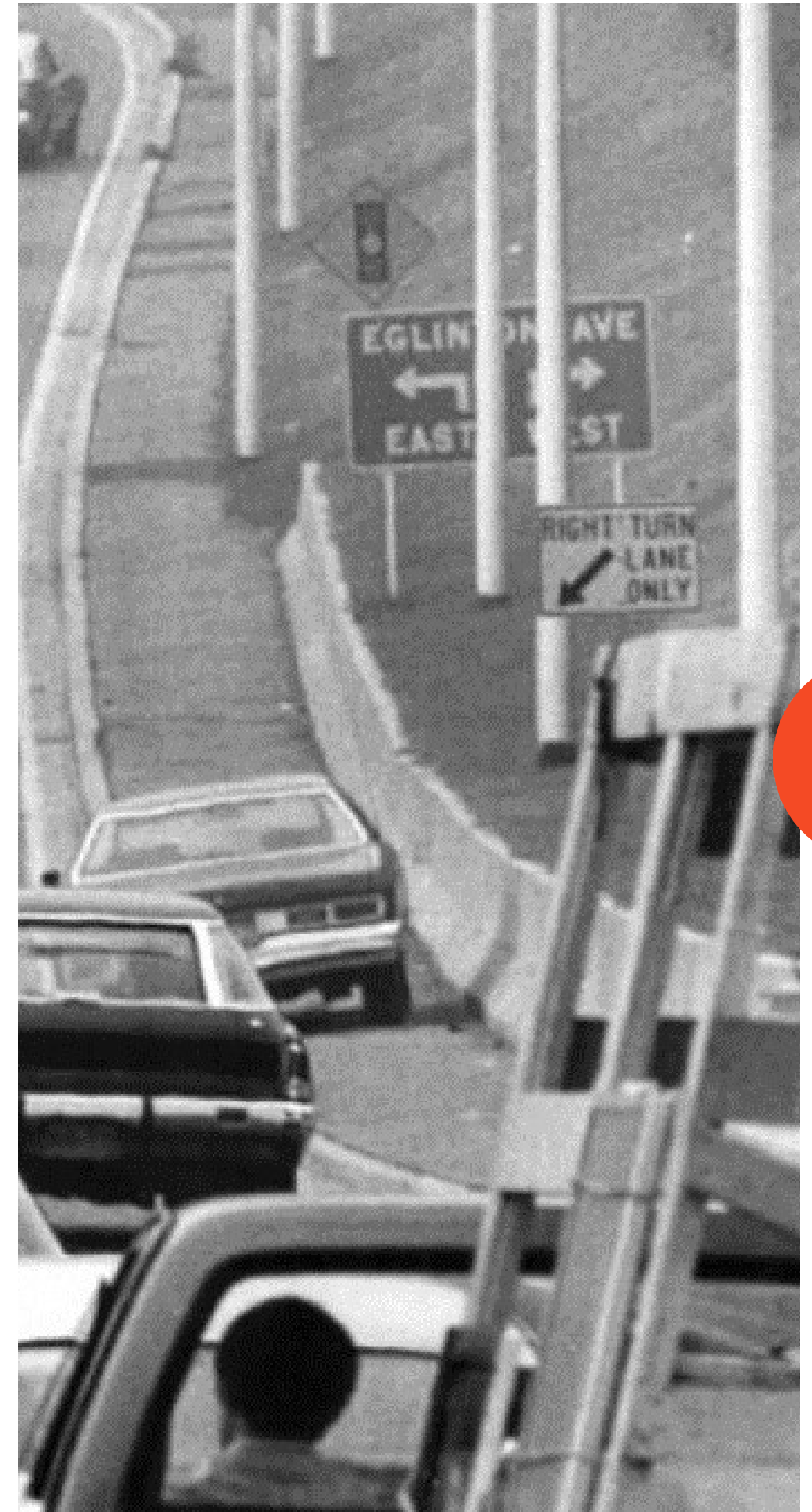
Key findings highlight how delayed and deferred investments have exacerbated these disparities. The report chronicles three critical periods in Toronto's transportation history:

1954-1971: Metro Toronto focused on major infrastructure projects, including a network of arterial roads to support new neighbourhoods. However, the car-oriented design of these developments set the stage for future service challenges.

1971-1993: Following the cancellation of expressway plans, the focus shifted to transit development. Despite ambitious plans, political and budgetary constraints led to repeated failures to address the needs of low-income, high-density areas.

2006-2012: The *Transit City* initiative marked a significant effort to align transit with spatial equity. However, it became a political battleground, and its implementation did not fully address the emerging concerns of gentrification and displacement.

The report concludes with an overview of the implications on the current transportation planning, investment, and policy in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and provides policy recommendations aimed at incorporating equity into every stage of the transit planning process. These include learning from Toronto's history of unequal and deferred investment and creating processes that improve access to transportation across all neighbourhoods.



INEQUITIES BY OMISSION

Introduction

Chapter 01



INTRODUCTION: INEQUITIES BY OMISSION

Transportation is a fundamental part of urban life. It allows people to reach daily destinations such as employment, education, and shopping, and provides access to a variety of opportunities that can define the well-being of individuals and communities, such as healthcare, entertainment, and social services. Conversely, lack of access to safe, predictable, affordable, and efficient transportation can hinder a community, leading to stagnation and disadvantage. Some transportation infrastructure, however, can be beneficial for one community while having the opposite effect on others. Highways are an archetypical example: in many cities in the US (and some in Canada), highways built to improve downtown access for suburban, often white, commuters, led to mass displacement and enduring damages to low-income communities, predominantly communities of colour. In other cases, money was allocated to

build and operate major rail rapid transit systems that served wealthier commuters to downtown, while local bus systems were under-resourced.

The legacy of highways was one of the major drivers of the development of a field of study and practice known as **transportation equity**. It provides tools to evaluate and quantify the effects of transportation and apply them to current conditions and proposed plans. In the rich literature of the field equity is commonly understood as a fair distribution of benefits and costs. Intuitively, this may sound the same as equal distribution. Yet in the realm of policy—and in cities more broadly—there is never an equal starting point.

Transportation policy is equitable when it provides safe, affordable, and reliable modes of transportation, especially for those who need it the most, while also minimizing unfair exposure to congestion, pollution, and disruption.

Transportation equity applies to all modes of transportation, including access, affordability and safety for pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, motorists, and the movement of freight. To advance transportation equity today, we must understand not only existing inequities but also the historical conditions that produced them. Much of the existing research focuses on the US context, where it has uncovered stark inequities, including demographic disparities in displaced populations, lost wealth, worsened accessibility, and car dependency issues, all of which inform current policies that seek to rectify present-day inequities. We aimed to determine if, and to what extent, this history applies to Toronto. If it does not, we sought to explore how marginalized populations were considered (or not) in Toronto's transportation decision-making history.

Transportation has always been a major

challenge for Toronto, both in terms of congestion and in terms of public transit (both subjects were a central topic of debate even in the early 20th century). But in a historical perspective, Toronto seems to have evaded the fate of other North American cities. Plans to build expressways throughout downtown were famously blocked in 1971 after a heated campaign. Direct displacement due to highway development did happen, but at a relatively small scale and without the explicit racially motivated malice. Yet the city suffers from stark disparities in transportation access between neighbourhoods, which often correlate with income disparities and racial composition. In other words, if transportation did not directly create disparities, it seems it did little to mitigate them.

Facing the current state of the city, this report revisits Toronto's history to identify **if and how the consideration of marginalized communities featured in transportation infrastructure development and decision making, and consequently, what effects these decisions have had on equitable outcomes from the city's transportation system**. The study covers a period of approximately 60 years, starting with the establishment of the upper-tier

municipality of Metro Toronto in 1954 and ending with the political debates around *Transit City* in the early 2010s. The research team uncovered over 250 archival documents from the City of Toronto Archives, over 120 news articles from the Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail, and multiple other plans, documents, and reports from the Toronto Reference Library and the University of Toronto Libraries. Using the rich literature on Toronto's planning and political history, we offer a perspective that reorients the historical narrative around the legacy of transportation equity.

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**. Indeed, there were some notable cases of direct displacement, but they are the exception, rather than the norm. A deeper look reveals how delayed and deferred investment in marginalized communities has become a systemic equity issue. The failure to provide fair access to all of Toronto's neighbourhoods, especially by public transit and safe pedestrian infrastructure, is a result of other aspects of inequity that have plagued the city,

such as the marginalization of renters, stigmatization of high-rise apartment buildings, fiscal conservatism, and constant struggles between levels of government.

The following chapters provide an overview of this narrative:

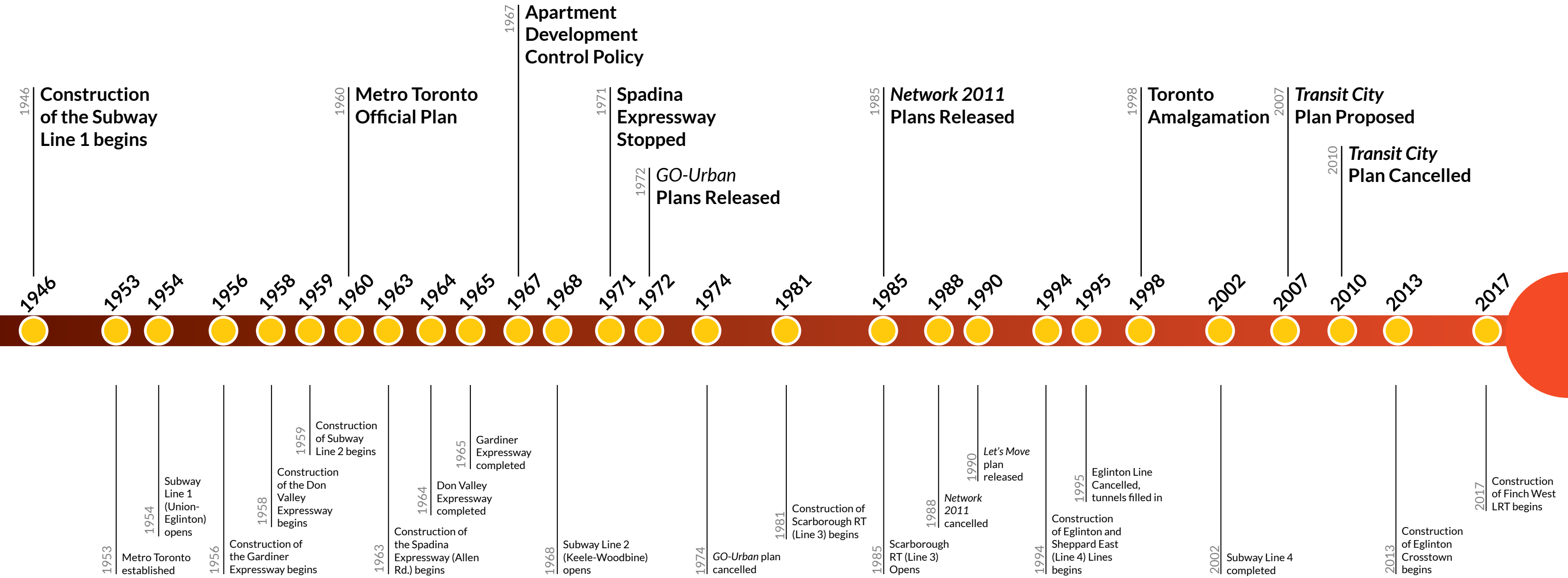
- **Chapter 2** explains what transportation equity is, based on the scholarship in this field, and discusses Canada's legacy of expressway construction and displacement.
- **Chapter 3** outlines the years 1954 to 1971, in which Metro Toronto addressed the city's rapid growth through major planning and infrastructure projects. A new network of arterial roads was designed and partially built to serve the many new neighbourhoods of single-family homes and apartment high-rises.
- **Chapter 4** covers the years 1971 to 1993, in which the pace of infrastructure development in Toronto slowed significantly. After Metro's expressway plan was famously opposed and cancelled, its focus shifts to expanding transit. As the city becomes increasingly racially diverse and polarized, a series of transit plans are aimed at underserved

communities, but their needs are repeatedly put in second place to political and budgetary constraints.

- **Chapter 5** zooms in on the years 2006 to 2012. In this tumultuous period, the city once again sought investment in transit after a lost decade of recession and austerity, only to see transit becoming a political battlefield. During this period, historical inequities were brought to the foreground of the political and public discourse, but plans did not necessarily fully address them, or the new concerns relating to transit induced gentrification and displacement.
- **Chapter 6** examines the implications of key historical themes to today's accelerated, top-down investment in transit by the Province, pointing to some lingering and new equity concerns.
- **Chapter 7** concludes with final policy recommendations.



Transit Timeline



WHAT IS TRANSPORTATION EQUITY?

A Brief Literature Review

Chapter 02



WHAT IS TRANSPORTATION EQUITY? A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

In transportation, equity refers to the fair distribution of transportation's benefits and burdens across different groups of society, and more particularly, how policy interventions minimize unfair distribution of these benefits and burdens.¹ This approach emerged as a rebuke of traditional transportation planning cost-benefit analysis methods that applied to travel variables only, e.g., by measuring how a new road reduces total or average travel times.²

A notorious example of the traditional approach is the development of highways in the 1950s and 1960s in North America. Planners and decision makers justified highways for their contribution to average commute times but overlooked—often, deliberately—the detrimental effects on access for communities living in the proposed paths.³ These were disproportionately communities of colour, who were displaced *en masse*. In Toronto and other Canadian cities, the combination of poor and uneven access to transportation with trends in recent decades of suburbanizing poverty has contributed to pronounced social exclusion, as increasingly

vulnerable residents of auto-oriented areas face increasing barriers to reaching and participating in daily activities.⁴

In recent years, transportation scholars have developed tools to incorporate equity into planning, often using *accessibility* as its primary measure.⁵ Accessibility refers to how easily people can reach desired destinations and whether the variety, affordability, proximity, frequency, and speed of transportation supports this goal.⁶ The benefits of transportation can be measured by available resources, such as transit stops, access to opportunities such as employment, healthcare, education, and recreation, quantifiable outcomes such as ridership numbers, or user satisfaction.⁷ There are also negative measures that refer to unfair exposure to the *burdens of transportation*, e.g., levels of air and noise pollution, hazardous walking environments, or measurable outcomes such as collision rates.⁸

A fair allocation of transportation resources (e.g., a new transit line) can also take into consideration existing gaps between populations and direct new investments to historically underserved communities. This is known as *vertical equity*.⁹ For example, a vertical equity approach would aim to reduce exposure

to pollution in neighbourhoods along highways. Vertical equity can manifest as uneven geographic distribution¹⁰, for example when suitable employment opportunities are inaccessible to the individuals that need it most¹¹. Examples include transit systems that favour white-collar commuters to downtown over other types of travel: commuting to low-wage employment (often the only option for immigrants or people of color), or trips related to “invisible” domestic labor primarily done by women.

Displacement is another potential adverse outcome of transportation investment. While it is historically associated with highway projects, it is also more loosely related to investment in transit.¹² 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.¹³ Thus, contemporary practices such as transit-oriented development (TOD), which are intended to 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.¹⁴

Importantly, displacement can manifest in long-term and sometimes intangible processes that do not easily register quantitatively. These include harming a community’s sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, anxiety over expected displacement, or social exclusion from new public and commercial spaces.¹⁵ Most displacement modelling fails to account for this resulting in underreporting.¹⁶ For example, Little Jamaica and Mount Dennis, two neighbourhoods along the future Eglinton Crosstown line in Toronto, have experienced both rising land values and changes to their retail composition.¹⁷

While distributive justice is a major concern of transportation equity, it also encompasses questions of fair process and the importance of involving communities that have been historically under-represented in decision-making.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ Several municipalities in the USA have attempted to address procedural equity by providing grants for community-based transportation plans,²⁰ or using geospatial tools that provide statistical insight for impact assessments.²¹

Situating equity in Canada’s transportation history

As transportation equity studies tend to be US-centric, our historical analysis of Toronto begins with situating Canadian urban history in relation to that of the US.

In the US, transportation-induced displacement is closely associated with the Federal Highway Act, which injected billions in investment into highways that cut through the heart of American cities. The highways had a dual, and explicit purpose: to improve accessibility for new suburban communities, and stimulate “urban renewal”, i.e., demolish low-income neighbourhoods and relocate their residents to modern public housing projects.²²

Resistance to this process happened in real time. It managed to stop some projects,²³ and achieve systemic change after the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Since then, the US has incorporated federally mandated equity and environmental justice frameworks that apply to the US Department of Transportation (US DOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHA), and Federal Transit Administration (FTA).²⁴ These regulations apply to local and regional authorities, but have not significantly remediated most

of the damages caused by highways, nor led to meaningful improvements in public transit.

Canada, too, has seen major expressway projects between the 1950s and 1970s, but on a smaller scale. Accordingly, the legacy of highway-induced displacement is also less pronounced. Still, some notable cases show striking similarity to the US narrative.

In Ottawa, the 1950 official plan involved massive infrastructure development and urban renewal, which required clearing the LeBreton Flats district and displacing 5,000 to 7,000 residents.²⁵ In Montréal, Jean Drapeau's plans for the 1967 Expo and 1976 Olympic Games involved massive expressway development through neighbourhoods such as Little Burgundy, resulting in the demolition of 850 homes, despite local resistance and protests.²⁶

The displacement of Africville in Halifax represents one of the most explicit cases of race-based inequities in Canada's transportation history. Located on the southern bank of Bedford Basin near the waterfront, Africville was home to former enslaved people, Jamaican Maroons, and Black refugees from the War of 1812.²⁷ The area suffered from willful neglect by the municipality, leading to inadequate infrastructure and roads, and environmental racism, with city disposals

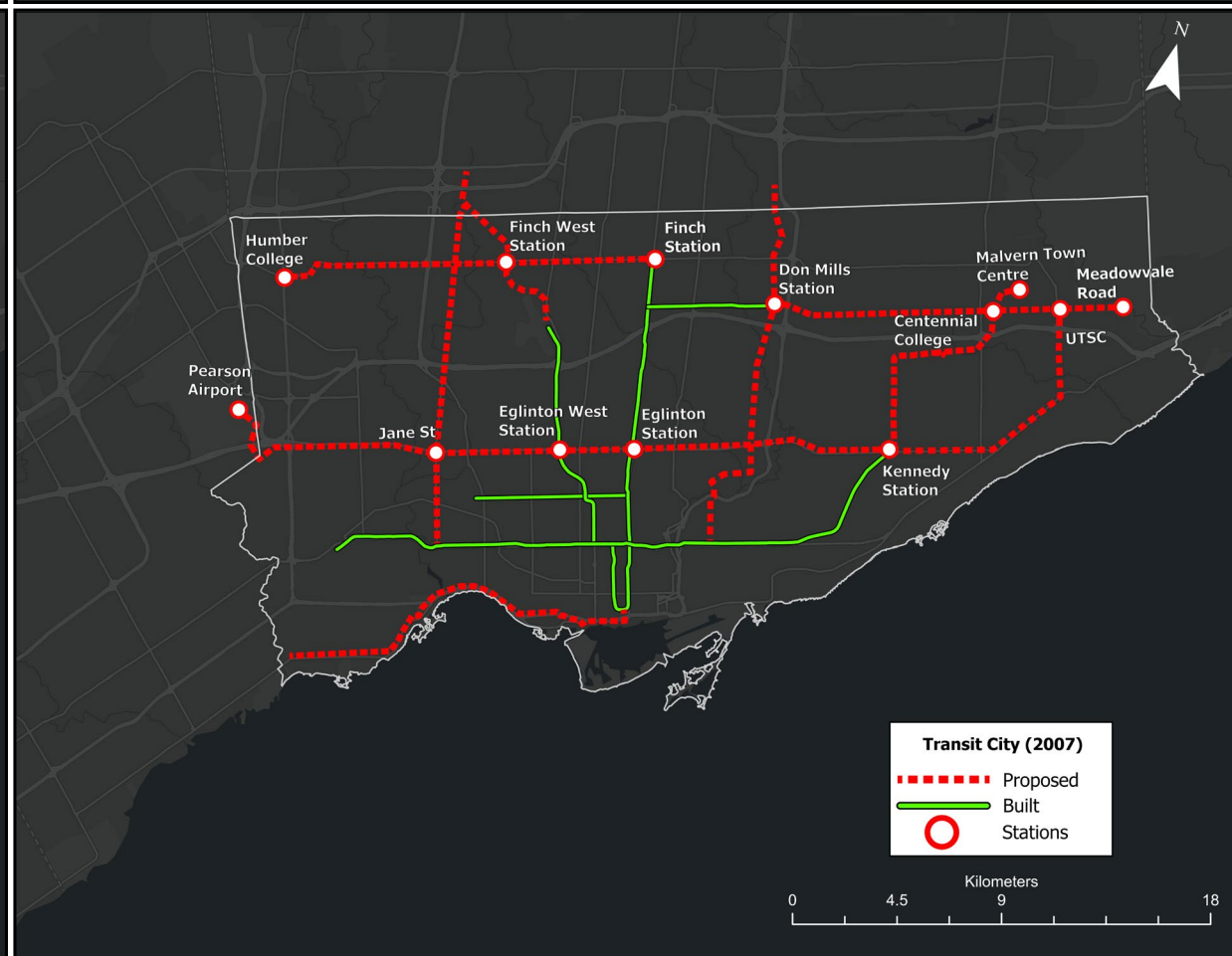
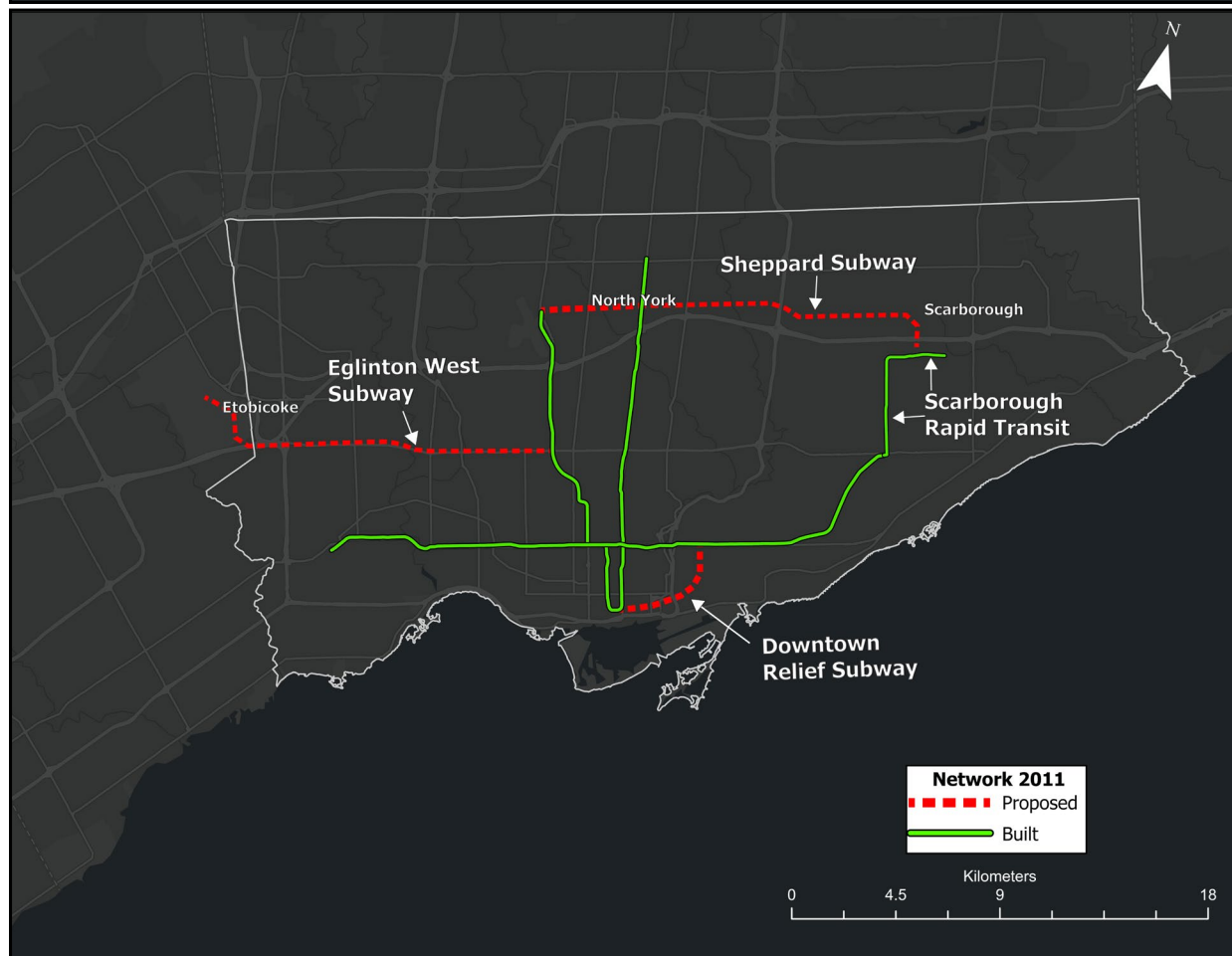
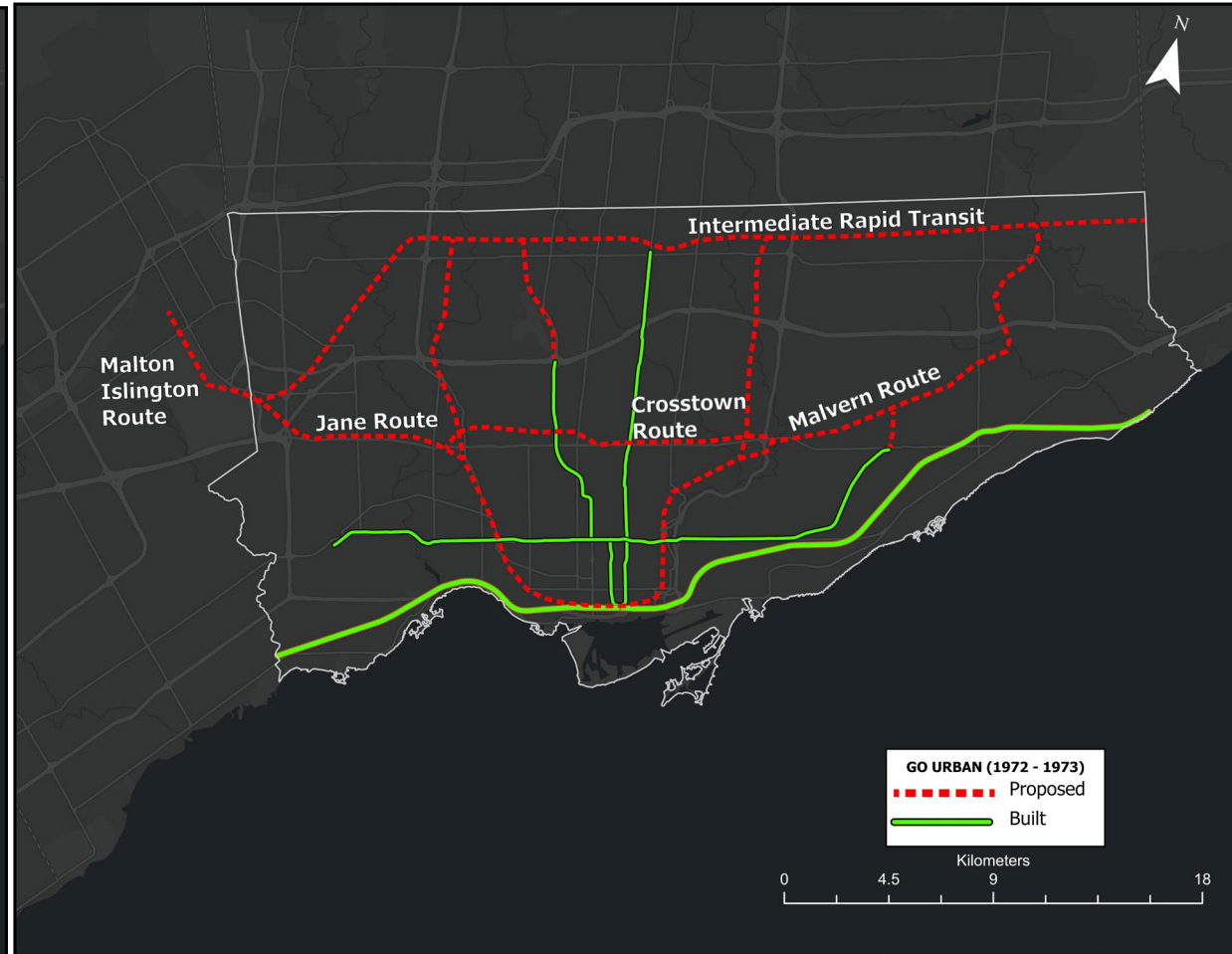
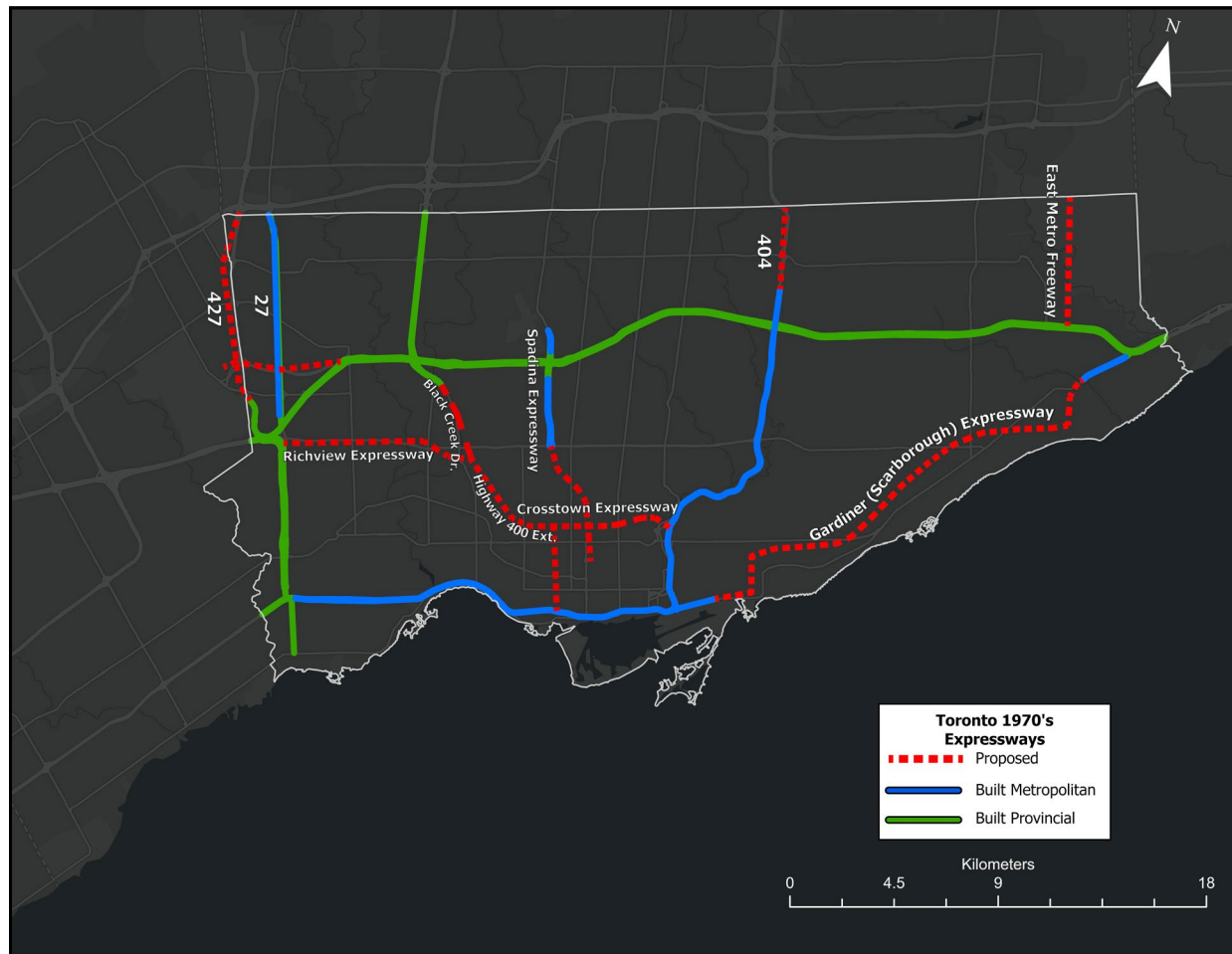
and industrial sites being placed nearby. Eventually, the residents of Africville were forcibly relocated in 1962, as the city initiated redevelopment plans that included a four-lane expressway that was never built.²⁸ Between 1964 and 1970, Africville's 400 residents were displaced.²⁹ The site is now occupied by ramps for the A. Murray MacKay Bridge, private housing, a dog park, and the Fairview Container Terminal.

In Vancouver, construction of the Georgia and Dunsmuir Expressways involved the demolition of neighbourhoods, including the majority-black Hogan's Alley, which the city's elites portrayed as a "disease" to the city.³⁰ The neighbourhood's residents were displaced and the adjoining Chinatown in the 1970s was isolated by the new viaducts, which the City of Vancouver now aims to remove as an act of repair and reconciliation.³¹

These cases highlight two major aspects of the history of transportation equity in Canada. First, while expressway development was not an overarching and federally subsidized effort, it nonetheless led to localized instances of displacement. Second, the racist and classist undertones (and sometimes, explicit objectives) of transportation-induced displacement were evident in Canada just as they were in the US. As the next chapter shows, the first

expressways and subway lines in Toronto indeed caused some displacement, but not necessarily in low-income areas. However, on a longer term, they have contributed to the decline of some road-adjacent areas and to the growing income and race polarization of the city.





Overview of Toronto's Proposed Transportation Plans

EXPRESSWAYS AND HIGH-RISES

Building Metro Toronto

1953 - 1971

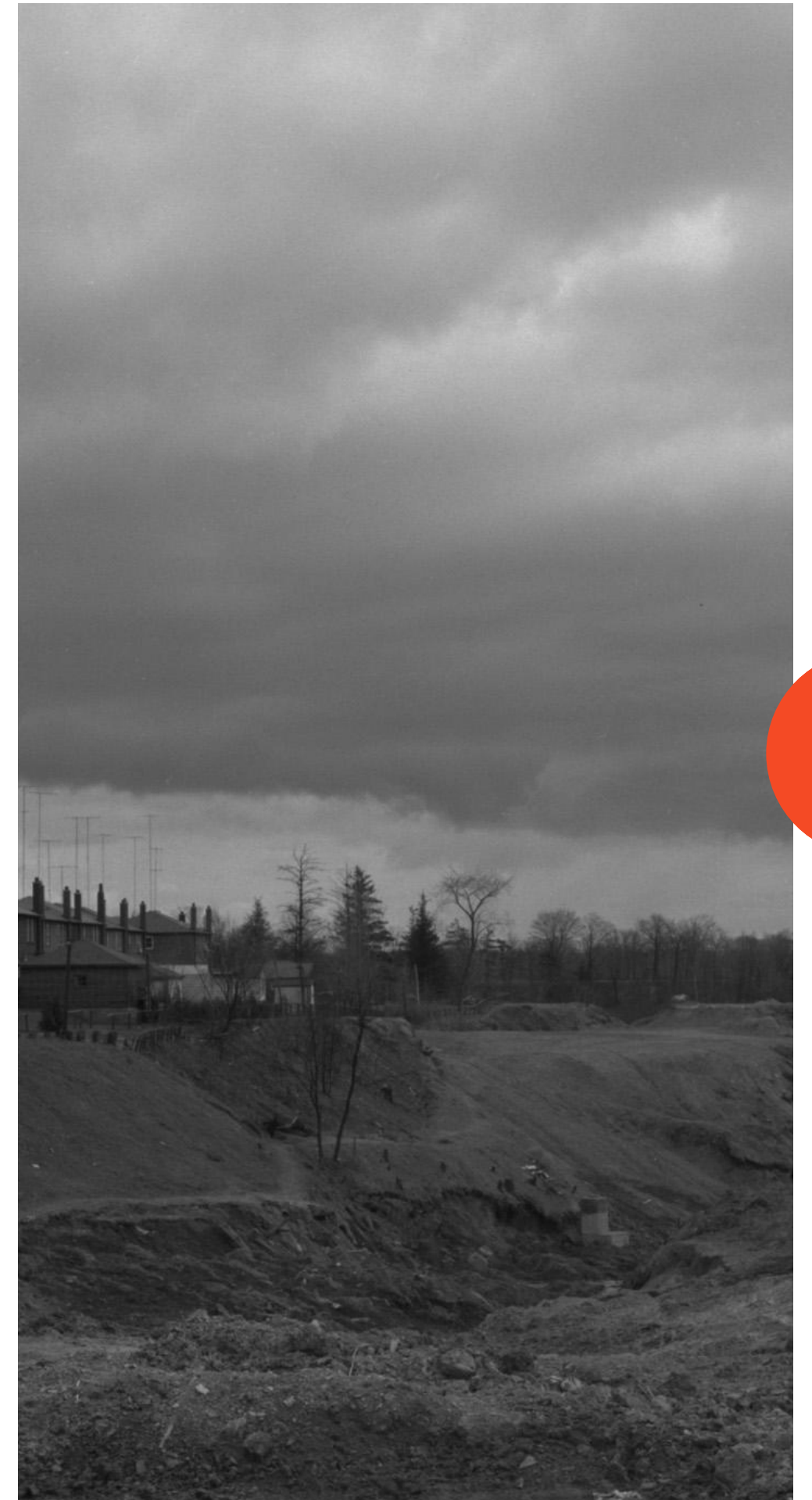
Chapter 03

EXPRESSWAYS AND HIGH-RISES: BUILDING METRO TORONTO

“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 ³²

- Amidst rapid post-war growth, a new upper-tier municipality of Metropolitan Toronto was formed. Metro leads the master-planning of new neighbourhoods, including high-rise apartment buildings, and a new network of high-capacity arterial roads and expressways to serve them.
- Public opposition to expressways eventually led to the cancellation of the Spadina Expressway. But similar anti-development sentiments have pushed apartment buildings to the margins of single-family neighbourhoods, next to arterial roads.
- The new high-rise development is almost exclusively car-oriented, setting the stage for future service challenges.



Toronto Boom to Speed Up

Area	Population (in thousands)				Growth		
	1931	1941	1951	1958	1931-58	1958-80	
Canada	10,337	11,507	14,009	17,048	64%	26.650	56%
Ontario	3,432	3,788	4,598	5,603	69%	9,620	66%
Metro Toronto							
Planning area	852	951	1,195	1,623	90%	2,800	73%
Pct. of Canada	8.2%	8.3%	8.5%	9.5%		10.5%	
Pct. of Ontario	24.8%	25.1%	26.0%	28.0%		29.1%	

Figure 1 : Toronto's population growth³³

In historical studies of Toronto's planning, the establishment of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (henceforth, Metro Toronto) is seen as a defining moment that shaped the GTA in the decades to come³⁴. Metro Toronto produced unprecedentedly detailed plans for housing and infrastructure, including transportation, and pushed for the implementation of major projects, namely the metropolitan road and expressway network. This effort, reflective of what is known as post-war modernist planning, was pursued under the belief that professional planners can provide comprehensive solutions to cities' problems using scientific approaches, in a top-down manner. Yet Metro's approach to

equity, which focused on universal, "color-blind" service provision overlooked local voices and needs.

Metro's ascendance should be understood in the context of Toronto's rapid post-war growth. Its population grew from 951,000 in 1941 to approximately 1.6 million in 1958, and 2 million in 1969. The wartime boost to the city's economy also continued well into the 1950s. Managing this growth was challenging given the history of miscoordination between the region's dozens of municipalities and between them and the provincial government. Institutional gridlock meant that the city had been shaped primarily by private initiative and had been suffering from infrastructural

deficiencies, including road congestion, from the early days of the automobile.³⁵

To address these challenges, the Province established Metro Toronto as a second-tier local government with responsibility over both planning and infrastructure development in an area encompassing thirteen municipalities. At the time, only half of Metro Toronto's jurisdiction was built up. It was up to the new municipal government, and particularly the new Metropolitan Planning Board, to shape the built form of the other half, which mostly comprised peripheral areas in the "inner suburbs": Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough.

A major priority for Metro was to match new housing development with appropriate infrastructure. The focus in housing was on prescribing relatively high densities through a mix of single-family and high-rise housing, which was more efficient to service and offered affordable options.³⁶ Metro also allowed development of new neighbourhoods only when water, sewer, and road infrastructure were available.³⁷

1953 - 1971

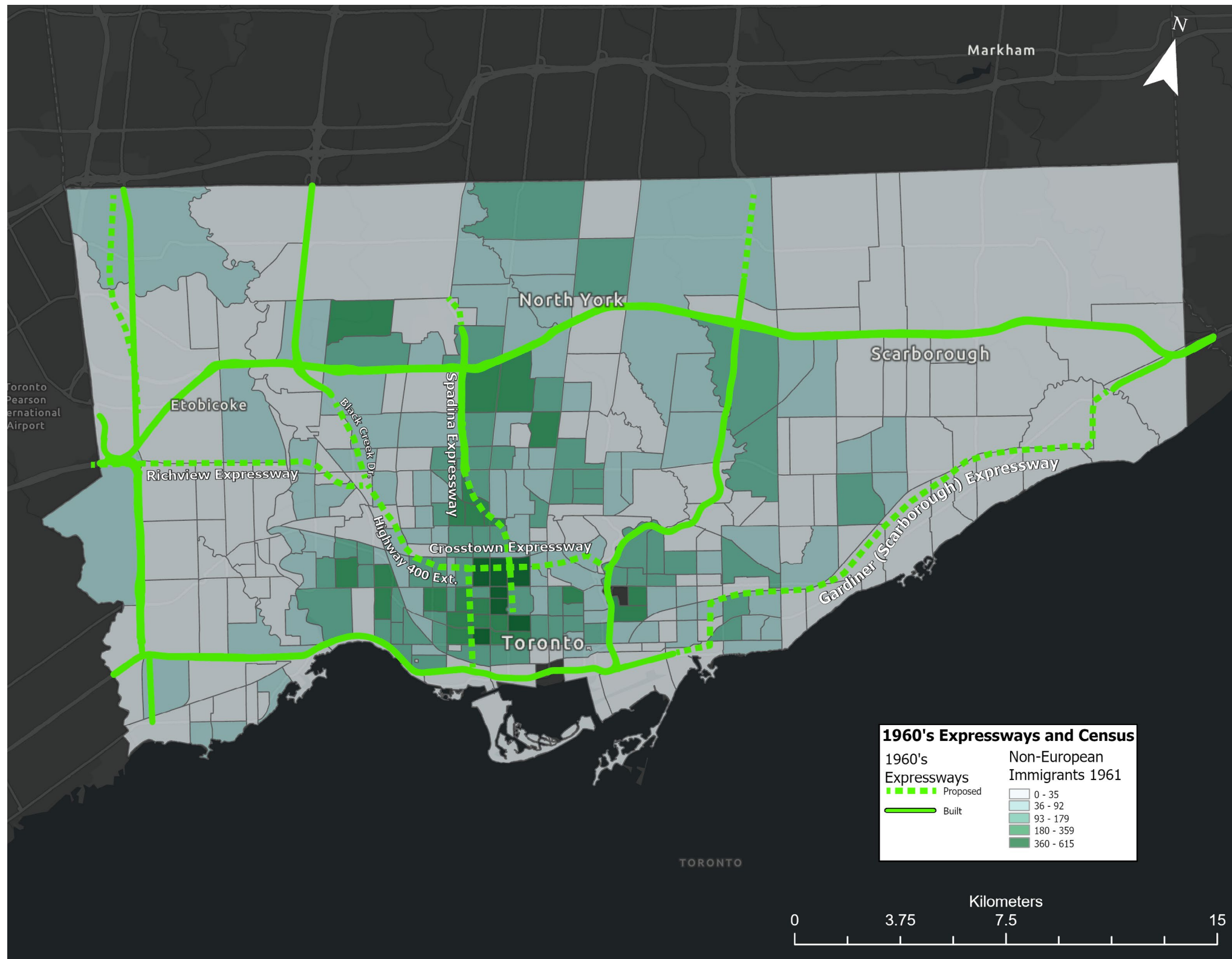


Figure 2 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1961 and proposed 1960 expressway plans. The map depicts a concentration of non-European immigrant populations in downtown Toronto where several of the proposed expressways were to be located.

Metro’s “balanced approach” to transportation

Transportation planning played a major role in supporting the new neighbourhoods. Metro opted for what the 1960 Official Plan defined as a “balanced approach” to development that combined public transit and roads for private automobiles.³⁸ Metro still had a financially stable and well-used transit system, including one subway line that was independently financed and built by the City of Toronto in the early 1950s. However, the car was seen as the future, and the demand for development was expected to be matched by an equal demand for roads. In the preceding decades, the Province had already built expressways to the city’s outskirts (e.g., the Queen Elizabeth Way), and the City of Toronto had successfully built its first subway line.³⁹ Metro continued both efforts, but its emphasis was on planning and developing the new road network under its jurisdiction, consisting of expressways and arterial roads (See Figure 4).⁴⁰

The complete proposed network included 325 kilometers of expressways⁴¹ but only its first sections were built. The Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley

1953 - 1971

Parkway (DVP) began construction in the 1950s and were both partially completed by the early 1960s.⁴² Their development involved housing demolition and displacement. 150 families were displaced along the Gardiner's path in South Parkdale⁴³ and a few others in Corktown for the DVP's Eastern Avenue Overpass.⁴⁴ These cases of displacement eventually remained an exception, but mostly due to the fierce opposition that arose in the late 1960s, as discussed below.

The rest of the expressway network passed through many unbuilt areas but also intended to cut through existing neighbourhoods, especially in downtown. The Spadina Expressway, which was discussed as early as 1952, began construction in 1963 from the north southwards, passing through mostly unbuilt areas, but was intended to carve through neighbourhoods to the south. Houses on its path were expropriated in the 1960s. Similarly, the 400 Extension and Crosstown expressways were expected to involve significant demolitions. Still, planners saw the expressways as a net good that would increase overall accessibility in the region. As a report to the Planning Board explains,

*“An expressway system would add to the mobility of every car owner in the metropolitan area and bring the whole area closer together in travelling time. This is an important factor in metropolitan living. Journeys to shop, journeys to recreation, journeys to visit, are all made easier. An expressway system ties the metropolis together”.*⁴⁵

While this approach largely reflects the planning paradigm of the time, it was critiqued well before the famous Stop Spadina campaign erupted in 1969 (see Box 3.1).



Figure 3 : Image from the 1957-1958 biennial report of the Department of Roads, Municipality of Metro Toronto, showcasing the Parkdale section of the newly built Gardiner Expressway. approximately 150 families were displaced to build this section⁴⁶



Figure 4 : Future Major Road System Plan, Official Plan of the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Area. Expressways are marked in red, arterial roads in black⁴⁷

BOX 3.1 CONTEMPORARY CRITICS OF THE EXPRESSWAY PLAN

Surprisingly, Metro's car-oriented approach was critiqued in real time, well before the famous Stop Spadina campaign erupted in 1969. In 1955, as Metro was debating its network, the Toronto Star published an extensive rebuke of expressways, under the headline "Super-roads are no solution to traffic problem".⁴⁸ The two-day project highlighted the futility of solving congestion with more roads, and highlighted the inequity of expressways:

"Each day 350,000 people go to work [in downtown Toronto] ... The automobiles carry only one-third of the people. Nevertheless, they take up nearly 90 per cent of the street space ... the obvious way to relieve [congestion] is to induce more people to leave their cars at home".⁴⁹

Similar sentiments were expressed in a 1957 report by the Urban Land Institute that was presented to the Planning Board:

"No one type of transportation can function without regard to the impact upon other types ... the private car owner is only one segment of the population. Over attention to him [sic] may not only harm non-car owners but it may finally strangle him in the congestion that will inevitably result if improved highway conditions are not meshed with all forms of metropolitan public transportation".⁵⁰

Metro's apartment policy was also criticized in the media. The renowned urbanist William H. Whyte wrote a column for the Star in 1957 criticizing the city's adoption of a high-rises over mixed-use, mid-rise urban development:

"If you've seen one redevelopment project, you've seen them all ... The projects are cut off from the life of the city. A keyword is 'self contained;' as much as possible, these places are constructed like islands".⁵¹

In another piece from the Star, in 1962, it was a realtor who argued that "suburban apartments are in the wrong place" and should be downtown, where there is demand.⁵²



Figure 1. Headlines from the Toronto Daily Star (1955)

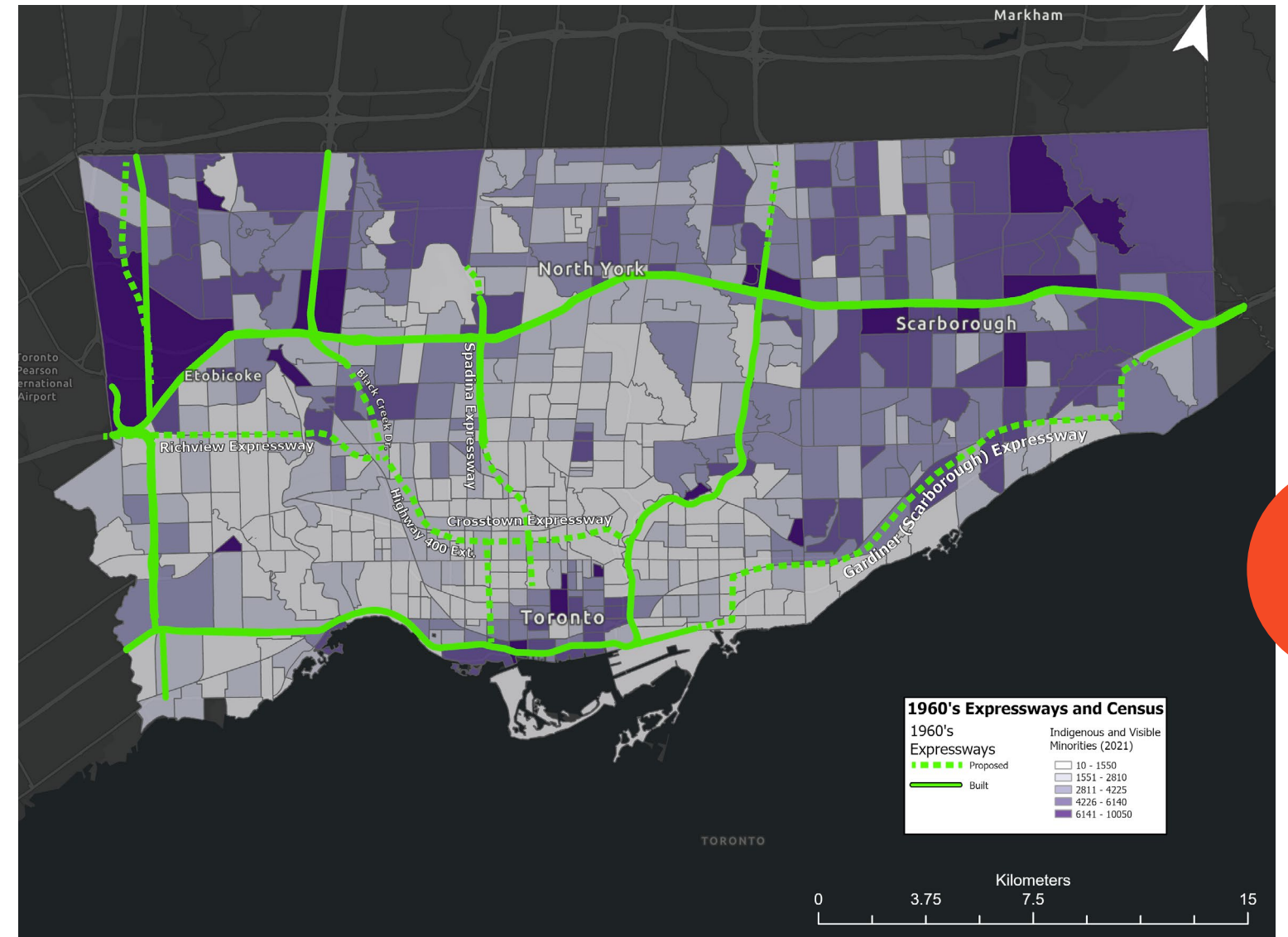
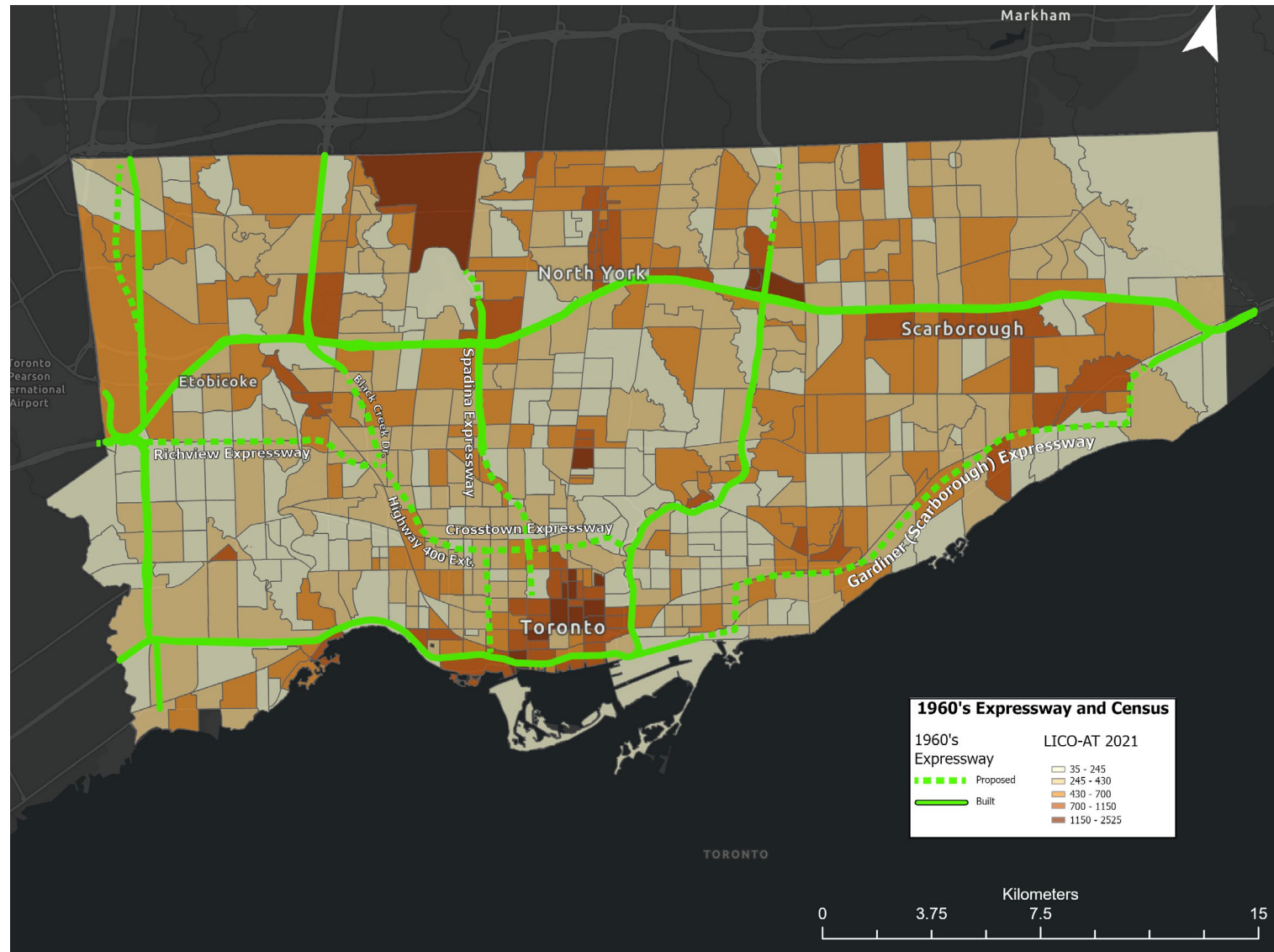
The second and much less contested portion of the road network was the grid of arterial roads that would be developed over the existing rural roads criss-crossing the city. These roads were to handle most in-city travel, public transit, and commercial traffic.⁵³ The mega-blocks created by the arterial grid became convenient plots for subdivision into new neighbourhoods. Metro's Planning Board was concerned from an early stage with widening the existing rural roads and completing missing connections in the network, two tasks that involved considerable land acquisition.

A sense of urgency pervades the Planning Board discussions of the time, as road designations and acquisitions are often instructed to be completed with "no delay in the matter" or "immediately".⁵⁴ A particular focus was placed on the widening of Eglinton Avenue East (see *the Eglinton Corridor case study*), bridging gaps over the Don River Valley, and bridging rail crossings. Similarly, reports published by the Metro Toronto Roads Department show the fast progression of road projects from the Old City of Toronto in the 1950s well into the far edges of the city in the mid 1960s.⁵⁵

Like in the case of urban renewal projects, which Metro and the City actively promoted,⁵⁶ acquisition priorities in transportation were led by financial calculations rather than social ones. Often, the priority was to buy land cheaply, even at the cost of demolishing social amenities such as churches.⁵⁷



1953 - 1971



1953 - 1971

Figure 5 : Census maps of people/households under the LICO-AT (Low-income cut-offs, after tax) (left) and Indigenous and Visible Minorities (right) within Metro Toronto in 2021 and the proposed 1960 expressway network. The maps illustrate how the proposed plans could have intersected with neighbourhoods that currently have higher concentrations of ethnically diverse and low-income communities, particularly around the Gardiner (Scarborough) Expressway.

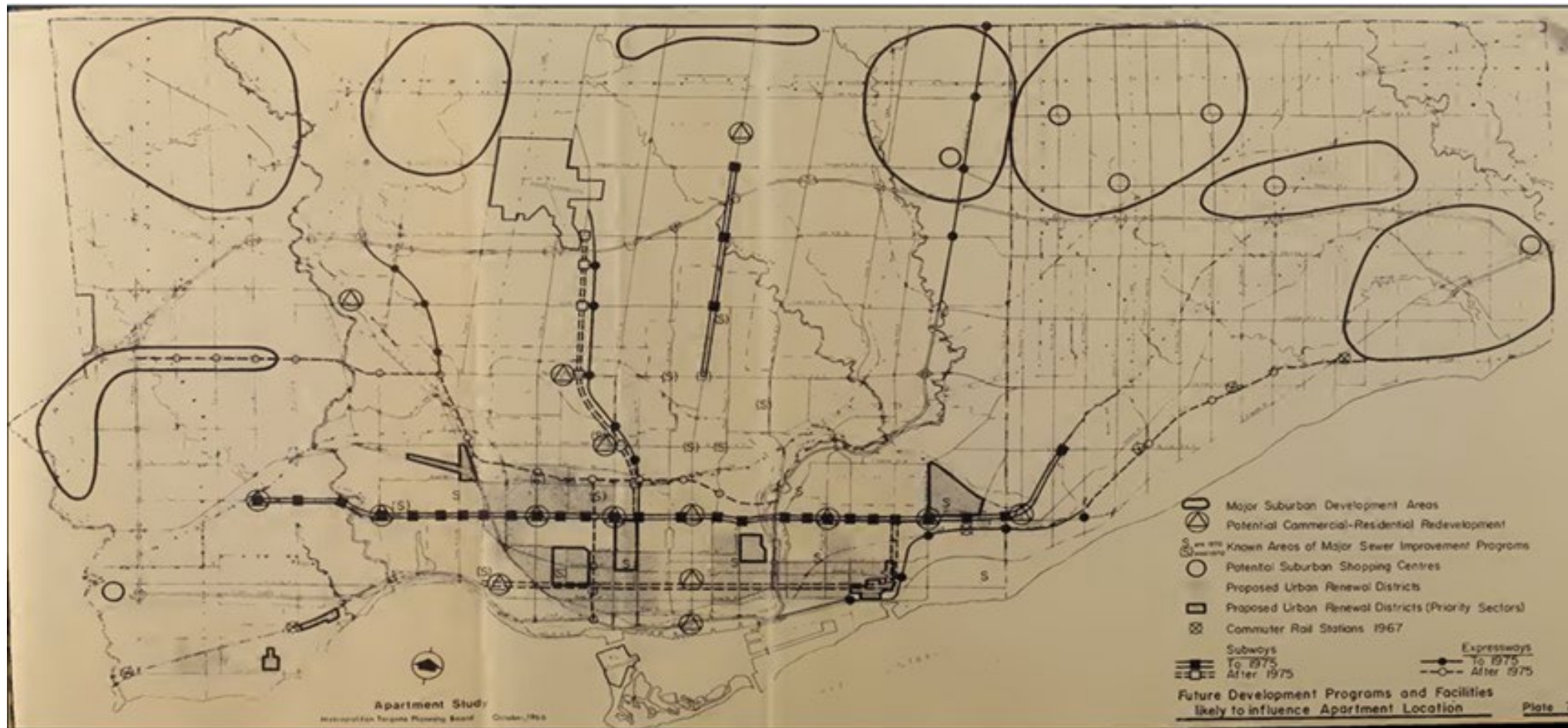


Figure 6 : A map from *The Study of Apartment Distribution and Apartment Densities in the Metropolitan Planning Area*, identifying future apartment clusters in relation to public transit and expressway plans. Expected development is in areas not serviced by rapid transit.⁵⁸

The birth of car-oriented apartment high-rises

High-density development had aligned the interests of developers and of lower-tier municipalities, who enjoyed increased tax revenues and lower service expenditures compared to single-family neighbourhoods.⁵⁹ By the early 1960s, 64% of all new units in Toronto were in multi-family buildings.⁶⁰ But high-rises were vehemently opposed by single-family homeowners who cited concerns

over shading, congestion, and the influx of lower-income residents.⁶¹

Contemporary newspapers featured multiple articles on residents objecting, sometimes successfully, to high-rise developments in all parts of the city, from Bloor Street to north Jane St. The sentiment was echoed by a realtor that argued that “apartments should be confined to areas near mass transit lines and arterial roads, not in ‘good residential areas’”.⁶² Metro’s deference toward affluent homeowners was

most notable in Rosedale, where residents managed to block both road widenings and high-rise development around subway stations in the neighbourhood.⁶³

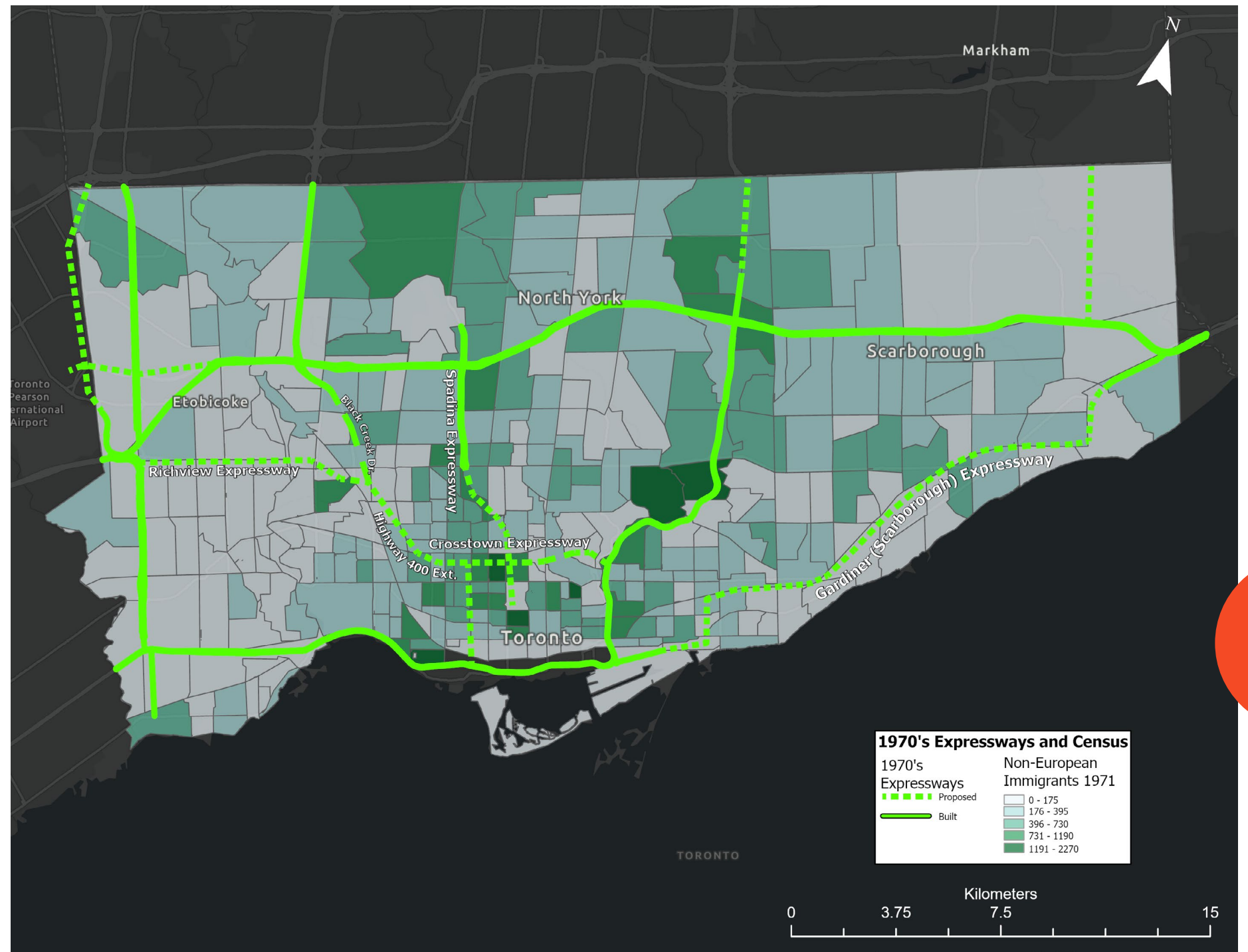
Meanwhile the arterial network posed a double opportunity for high-rise development: buildings could enjoy easy vehicular access while avoiding placement in single-family neighbourhoods. Moreover, Metro was aware of the “ill effects”, as they were called at the time, of arterials on adjacent housing. These aspects were considered in the 1960 Official Plan:

*“[Land along arterial roads] which is more expensive than interior land and, therefore, has to be developed more densely, has been used for large blocks of apartments facing straight on to the road. This is unsatisfactory because of the noise, fumes, and dirt of the road and the danger to children. On the other hand this arrangement gives the highest residential density areas immediate access to the arterial system.”*⁶⁴

In other words, Metro’s plan considered the environmental health burdens faced by residents of apartment blocks to be outweighed by the presumed benefits of easy access to the arterial network by automobile.

As high-rise development continued to expand and attract growing opposition, Metro conducted a study of its apartment policy, aiming to ensure that the burdens of development on infrastructure and communities are evenly distributed.⁶⁵ Apartments concentrations were identified around existing and anticipated subway stations (Line 2 had just opened, and line 1's northern extensions were approaching construction), but also near existing and planned expressways and along inner-suburban arterials. This pattern, the study concludes, reflects an expectation that suburban apartment clusters will be served (see Figure 6) primarily by private automobiles. The authors support this claim citing surveys that show near-100% car ownership in suburban apartment buildings at the time.

The 1966 Study of Apartment Distribution concluded by recommending gradually increasing densities around transit stations, reflecting an early adoption of transit-oriented planning. At the same time, however, peripheral apartment clusters were expected to rely on cars as their main form of accessibility. The authors did not question the socio-economic character of the future apartment residents and their potential access to a private vehicle. As the *Flemington Park case study* shows, even relatively central apartment neighbourhoods quickly shifted from promising neighbourhoods of the future, to under-served areas of concentrated poverty.



1953 - 1971

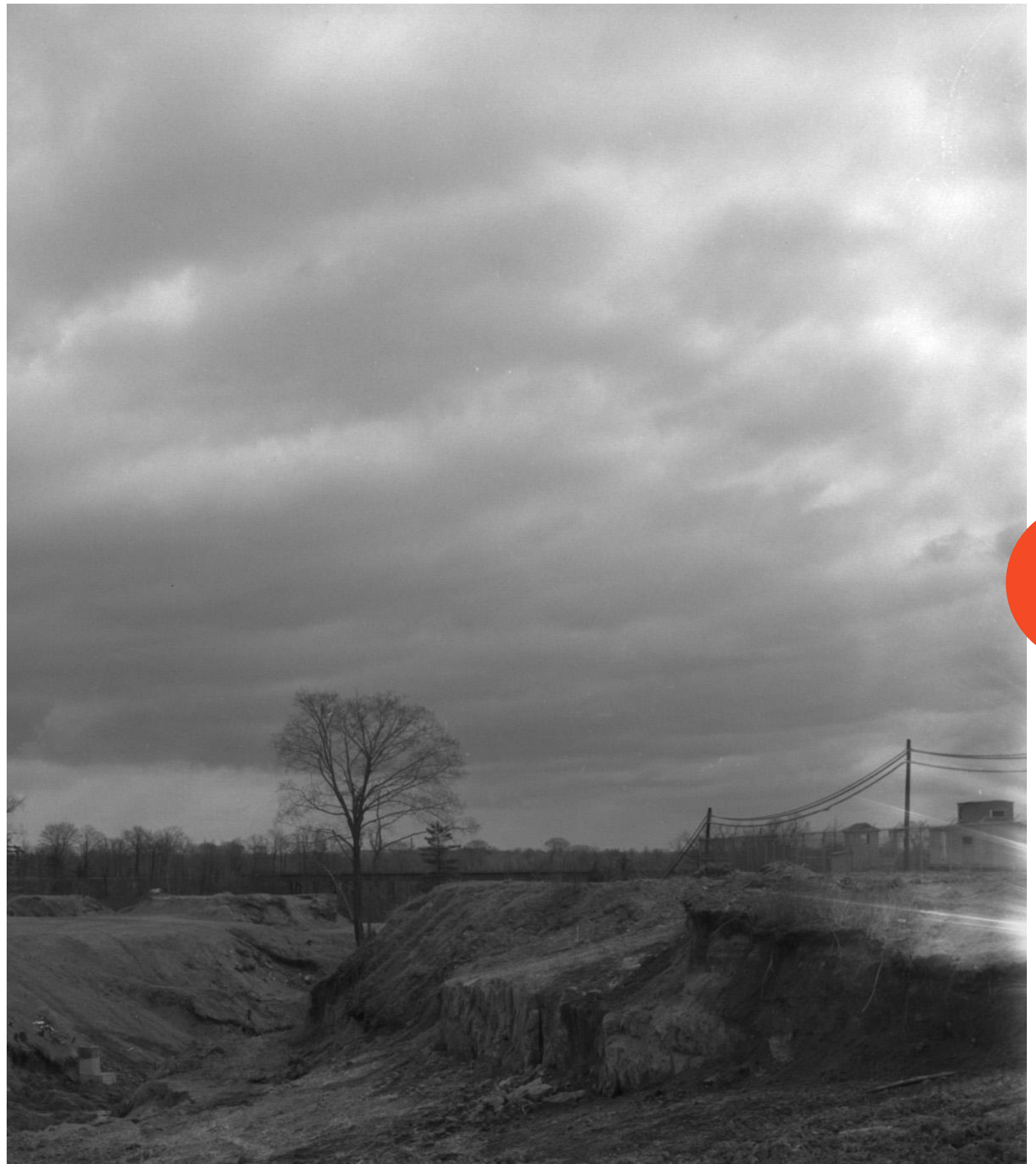
Figure 7 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1961 and the proposed 1970 expressway network. The map illustrates how sections of the proposed plan (particularly the Crosstown, Spadina, Gardiner (Scarborough), and Highway 400 Extensions) would have intersected with several pockets of ethnically diverse communities.

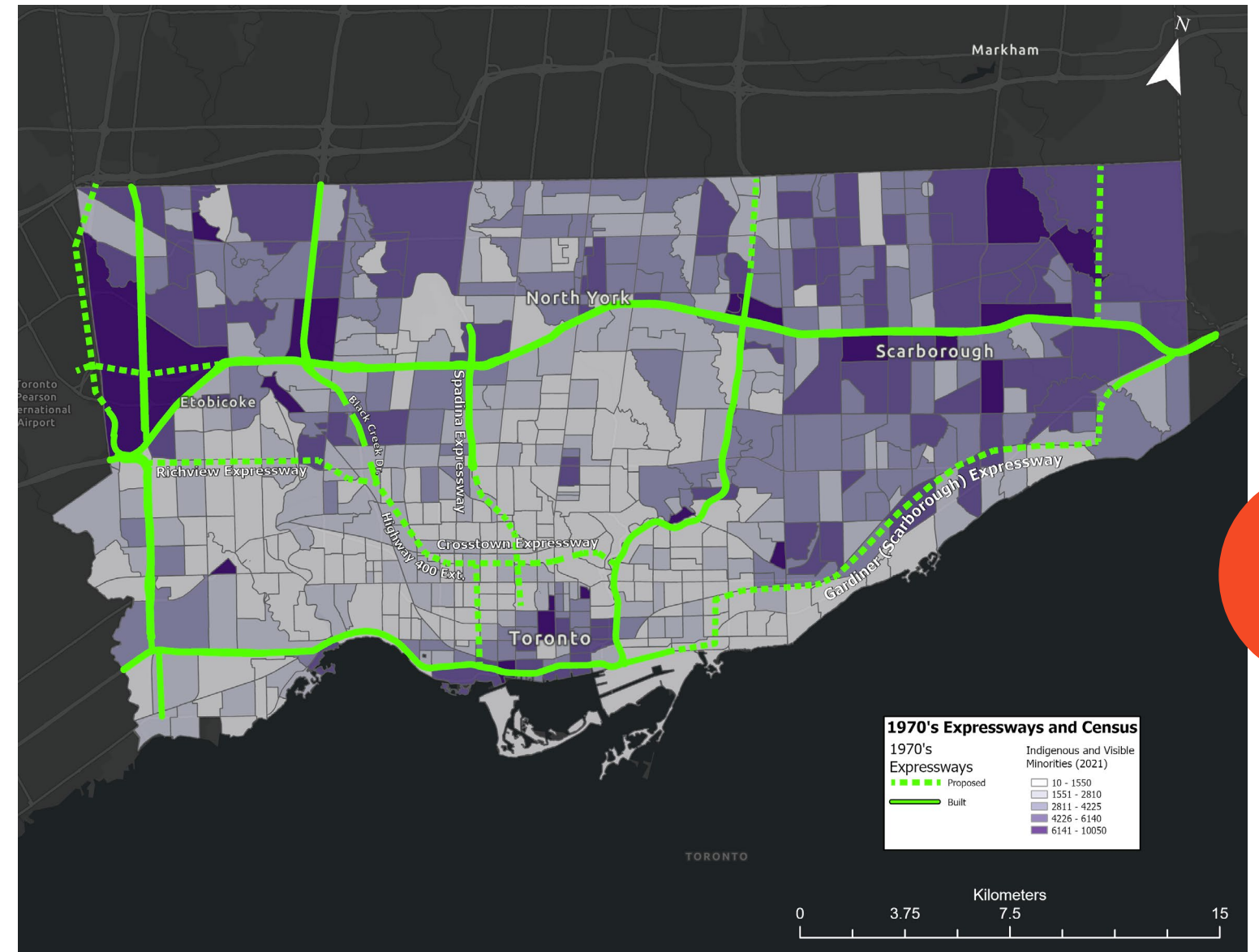
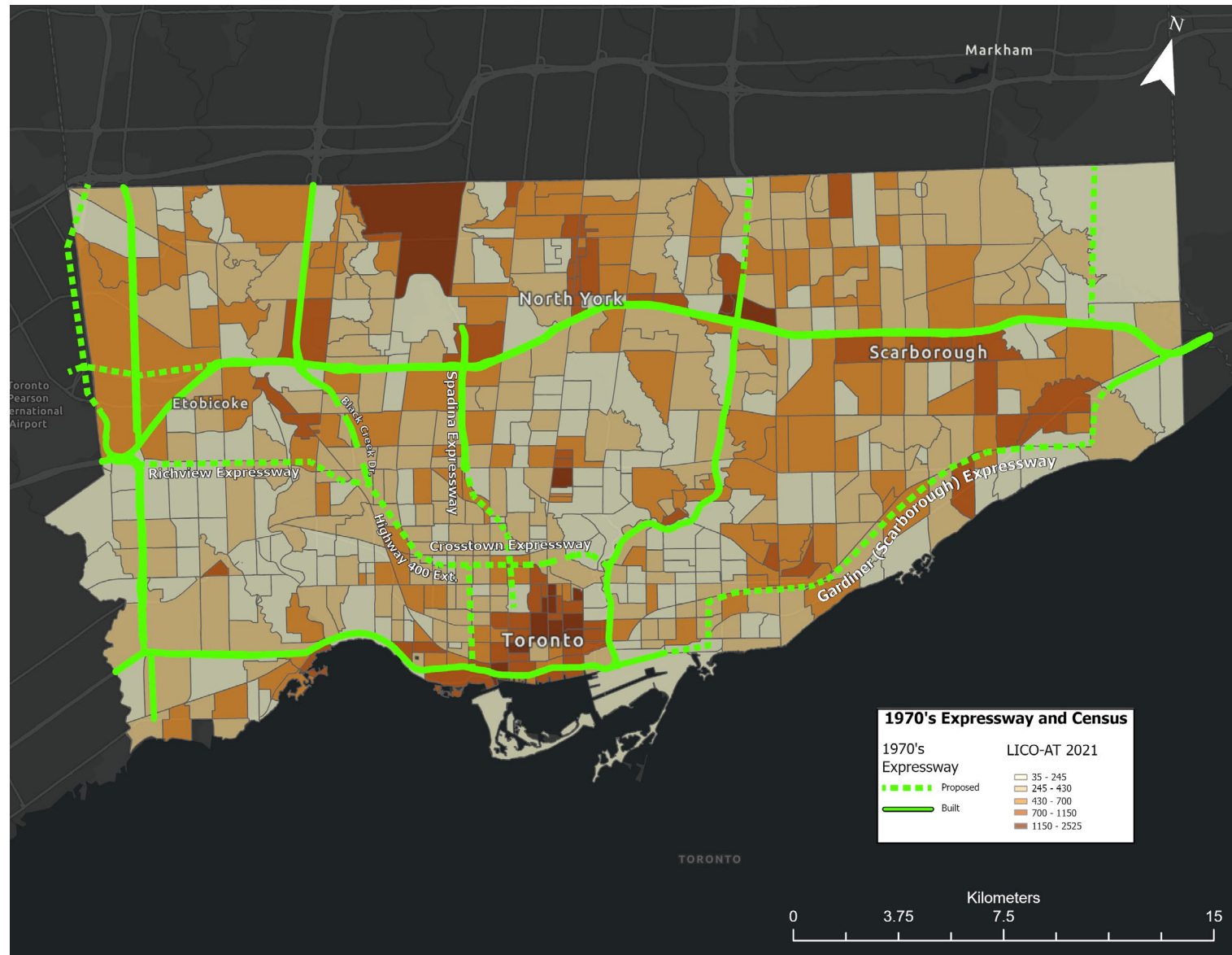
The end of the expressway era

Metro's first decades set the stage for future transportation and development mismatches and for future political and public debates. Most notable is the deference toward affluent homeowners and the compromises made on behalf of future residents. In the periphery of the city, a modernist dream of mixed-density neighbourhoods served by expressways was being pursued with enthusiasm. However, in the city's core, there was growing skepticism and resistance to both aspects of this model.

Interestingly, the *Stop Spadina* campaign, which signalled a sea change in Metro's transportation policy, was formed only when the project was nearing its southern, downtown section and construction was threatening the more politically active parts of downtown. Its threat galvanized residents of the professional class, such as university professors and architects who voiced environmental concerns, which were relatively forward-thinking for their time.⁶⁶

Yet the cancellation of the expressway project created new challenges for the growing suburbs. By 1971, the year in which premier Bill Davis cancelled Spadina and declared that "the city is for people, not for cars", Metro's municipal area was almost completely built up. The new neighbourhoods along highways, such as Jane-Finch, Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park, were already attracting relatively large numbers of non-European immigrants living in high-rise apartment units. Without expressways, Toronto would now have to rethink its accessibility policy for these peripheral communities.





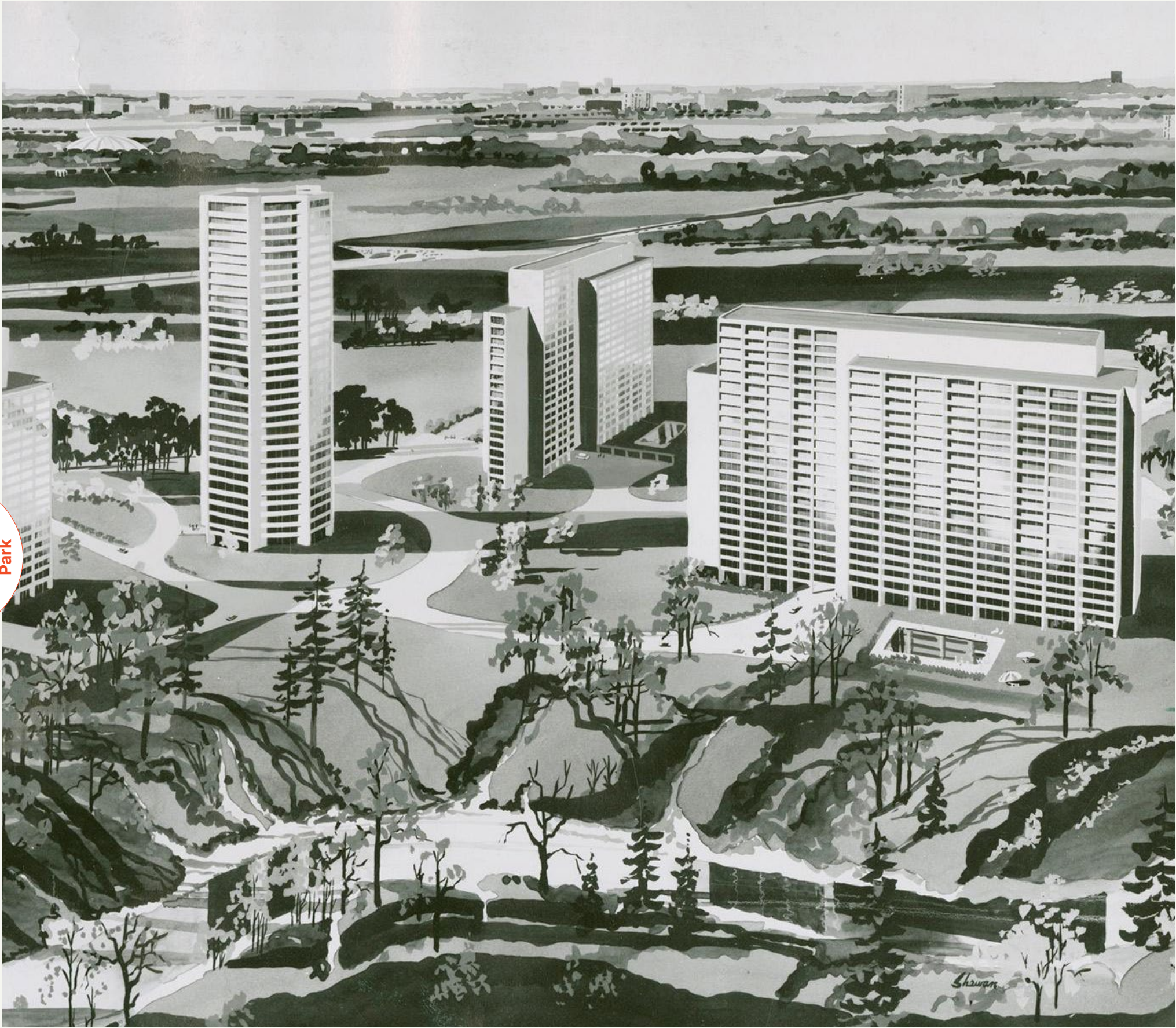
1953 - 1971

Figure 8 : Census maps of people/households under the LICO-AT (Low-income cut-offs, after tax) (left) and Indigenous and Visible Minorities (right) within Metro Toronto in 2021 and the proposed 1970 expressway network. The maps illustrate how the proposed plans could have intersected with neighbourhoods that currently have higher concentrations of ethnically diverse and low-income communities, particularly along the proposed Gardiner (Scarborough) Expressway.

Case study: Flemington Park

Under the title “Alex Rubin is planning a utopia”,⁶⁸ a two-page article outlines the life and ideas of the developer-philosopher that is proposing a 15,000-person community in Flemington Park. Rubin reads philosophy and sociology and is up to speed with current planning ideas. He is especially excited about urban renewal: “you have an opportunity to create something unique”. In Flemington Park, Rubin is “putting his latest sociological theories to work”, offering a wide range of rents and offering recreational activities. His visions are of developing “downtown areas into controlled residential and commercial estates”. He believes “that large [developments] by huge commercial concerns is the pattern for the future”. The article ends by wondering whether these “planned, utilitarian, scientific and antiseptic” communities will be “Utopia or hell”.

Flemington Park was one of the most complete versions of a modernist master-planned neighbourhood that Toronto has seen. Alongside neighbouring Don Mills and Thorncliffe Park, it brought the idea of a complete “new town” from Europe to Canada and became a lab and model for



Flemington Park

1953 - 1971

Figure 9 : Renderings of Flemington Park, 1965⁶⁷

tower-in-the-park developments.⁶⁹

The neighbourhood of the future would not only be close to nature and affordable: it would also be strictly car oriented. The architects and planners took pride in the design solutions that banished the “asphalt jungle by parking the automobile underground”⁷⁰ and in the convenient location next to the Don Valley expressway.

Construction was extremely quick: the first phase opened in 1961⁷¹ and much of the neighbourhood was built by the late 1960s. With 8% of the units developed as public housing, Flemington Park quickly became an immigrant neighbourhood, housing residents from 72 ethnic backgrounds by the 1980s.⁷² At the same time, Flemington rapidly became known as a diverse and conflicted neighbourhood: “At Flemington ... there are two separate worlds ... [public housing] tenants and the rest”.⁷³ By the late 1980s, it was frequently mentioned in newspapers in the contexts of violent crimes, clashes with police, racial tension, and welfare issues, or simply as “crime-ridden [and] full of crack houses”.⁷⁴ Despite this, residents took pride in their organizing and contrasted their experience as an immigrant neighbourhood with that of the troubled

Jane-Finch neighbourhood.⁷⁵

Unlike other peripheral neighbourhoods, Flemington Park is located close to the city centre and midtown, and importantly, close to two major arterials: Eglinton and Don Mills avenues. This advantage was not utilized to create a transit link: *Network 2011* included a truncated “relief line” that did not reach the neighbourhood, and *Transit City* placed the Don Mills line in a low priority. A former resident lamented that “Flemington might have been the most densely populated area of the city, but the TTC hadn’t discovered it as yet.”⁷⁶

While transportation was never the main challenge for Flemington Park, it nonetheless compounded issues, such as limited services. For example, in 2010, a study linked insufficient grocery options in Flemington to high rates of diabetes. Residents complained having to walk to the nearest supermarket “a good half-hour ... Maybe a little longer, coming back with a load.”⁷⁷

Today Flemington Park’s transportation landscape is shifting, benefitting from two new rapid transit lines currently under construction. The anticipated Eglinton Crosstown will provide east-west access, and a direct north-south connection to downtown will be provided on the Ontario

Line, which the provincial government accelerated ahead of the City’s original plans. It is unclear how the planned rapid transit connections will change the neighbourhood. As much of its housing is privately rented, there is a possibility that it will eventually gentrify. Residents in neighbouring Thorncliffe Park, for example, are raising similar concerns over the plans for “Transit Oriented Communities” along the line.⁷⁸



Figure 10 : Architectural model of Flemington Park, 1958⁷⁹

**Delayed,
deferred,
cancelled**

1971 - 1993

Unfinished Transit Plans

Chapter 04

DELAYED, DEFERRED, CANCELLED: UNFINISHED TRANSIT PLANS

“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 Day⁸⁰

Figure 11 : 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 cars⁸¹



- **Toronto abandoned its expressway plan in favour of transit as ideas of transit-oriented development, community engagement, and equitable planning entered the political and professional discourse.**
- **A series of ambitious transit plans were proposed to replace the expressway network as the city grows increasingly diverse and unequal access becomes a pressing matter. However, the plans either failed completely or failed to prioritize service to low-income, high-density areas.**
- **Two plans, GO-Urban (1972) and Network 2011 (1985), illustrate how political battles, fiscal conservatism, and mismatched priorities have become constant obstacles to transit development in Toronto.**

The 1970s brought a paradigm shift to Toronto's planning, especially within the City of Toronto. It started with The Spadina Expressway's cancellation and continued with the election of David Crombie as Toronto's mayor in 1973, along a new generation of progressive councillors. The City increasingly introduced community planning measures and prioritized medium density, mixed-use, and mixed-income development.⁸² This was a stark rejection of Metro's top-down planning culture and development priorities.⁸³ 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.

Equity enters the expressway debate

Spadina's cancellation caught Metro's expressway plans in advanced stages: On the Spadina path, a stretch of houses between Lawrence and Eglinton had already been demolished, leaving an infamous "ditch". Properties further south, as well as on the route of other planned expressways, had already been acquired.⁸⁴ Metro and the Province abandoned some expressway plans, but throughout the 1970s and early 1980s continued to pursue the development along already-acquired lands: the Scarborough Expressway to the east, and later the 400 Extension to the northwest. Acknowledging the changing public sentiments, the expressways were occasionally recategorized as "arterial roads" or "transportation corridors",⁸⁵ or rerouted to circumvent opposing neighbourhood groups.⁸⁶

Yet Metro now faced much more organized opposition from homeowner associations, advocacy groups, and politicians, who were using new arguments. Groups like the *Scarborough Expressway Coalition* weighed expressways' questionable traffic benefits against their multiple financial, social, and environmental costs.⁸⁷ Importantly,

some of their arguments focused on those who will not benefit from expressways, saying, for example, that “the area served by the Scarborough Expressway is the least downtown oriented area in Metro”, and that downtown commuters are chiefly transit riders who do not own a car.⁸⁸ Similarly, the *Coalition Against the Highway 400 Extension* argued,

*“Expressways serve the relatively rich and offer nothing to the aged and the relatively poor, anyone who doesn’t own or drive a car. These people must pay to build freeways and pay to maintain them, however”.*⁸⁹

With expressway service to the inner suburbs now off the table, Metro and the Province shifted their attention to public transit plans. Yet suburban neighbourhoods posed a planning problem: their density was deemed too low for a full subway service, but too high to rely exclusively on buses. The search for an “intermediate” rapid transit system came to define the different transit plans proposed during this era. The repeated failure of these transit plans, due to mismatched priorities, fiscal conservatism, and political strife, left the suburbs largely underserved.



1971 - 1993

GO-Urban: Driven by technology

In 1972, Ontario premier Bill Davis announced a new transit plan for the GTA called *GO-Urban*. The proposed network extended to the far ends of Metro and connected apartment neighbourhoods such as Thorncliffe Park and Jane-Finch to downtown.⁹⁰ The network was based on a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) proposal from 1969 for a suburban streetcar network that would make use of rail and hydro corridors to reduce costs and disruptions.⁹¹ The plan also included implementing services such as “Dial-a-Bus” service to and from transit stations.

GO-Urban's accessibility was marketed with language that highlighted the interests of suburban, single-family communities:

“With GO-Urban, less densely populated areas will receive the same quality of service that subways had given the densely populated areas, but without disturbing the character of the neighbourhood ... subway systems have tended to promote high-density ... In the future, a person will be able to maintain the type of community life he desires with high-quality transit service.”⁹²

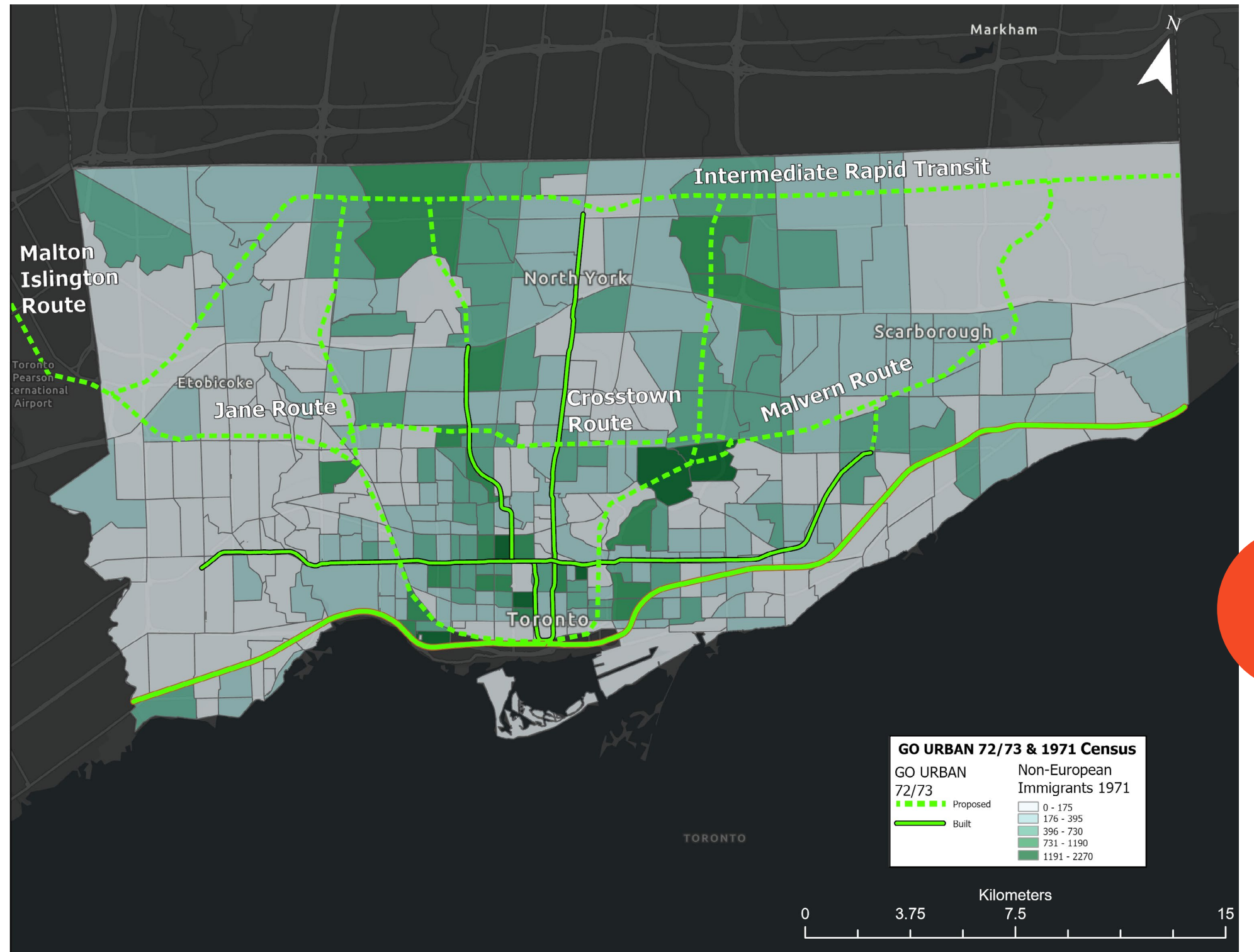


Figure 12 : Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 1971 and the GO-Urban. The map illustrates how the proposed lines would have connected ethnically diverse communities to the existing subway network and the rest of downtown Toronto.



globally. In its place, the Province tapped its Urban Transportation Development Corporation which produced a new intermediate capacity advanced light rail system. The TTC's original idea of repurposing streetcars for cost and operational efficiency was abandoned over concerns about noise and neighbourhood fit. However, the Province's attempt to transform suburban transit eventually faded.⁹³ The Scarborough Rapid Transit line was the only line built in Ontario using the Urban Transit Development Corporation's intermediate capacity light rail technology. The technology was eventually used as the cornerstone for systems in Vancouver, Detroit and in other cities globally. In Toronto, however, the Scarborough RT experienced mechanical problems throughout its lifetime and was eventually taken out of service.

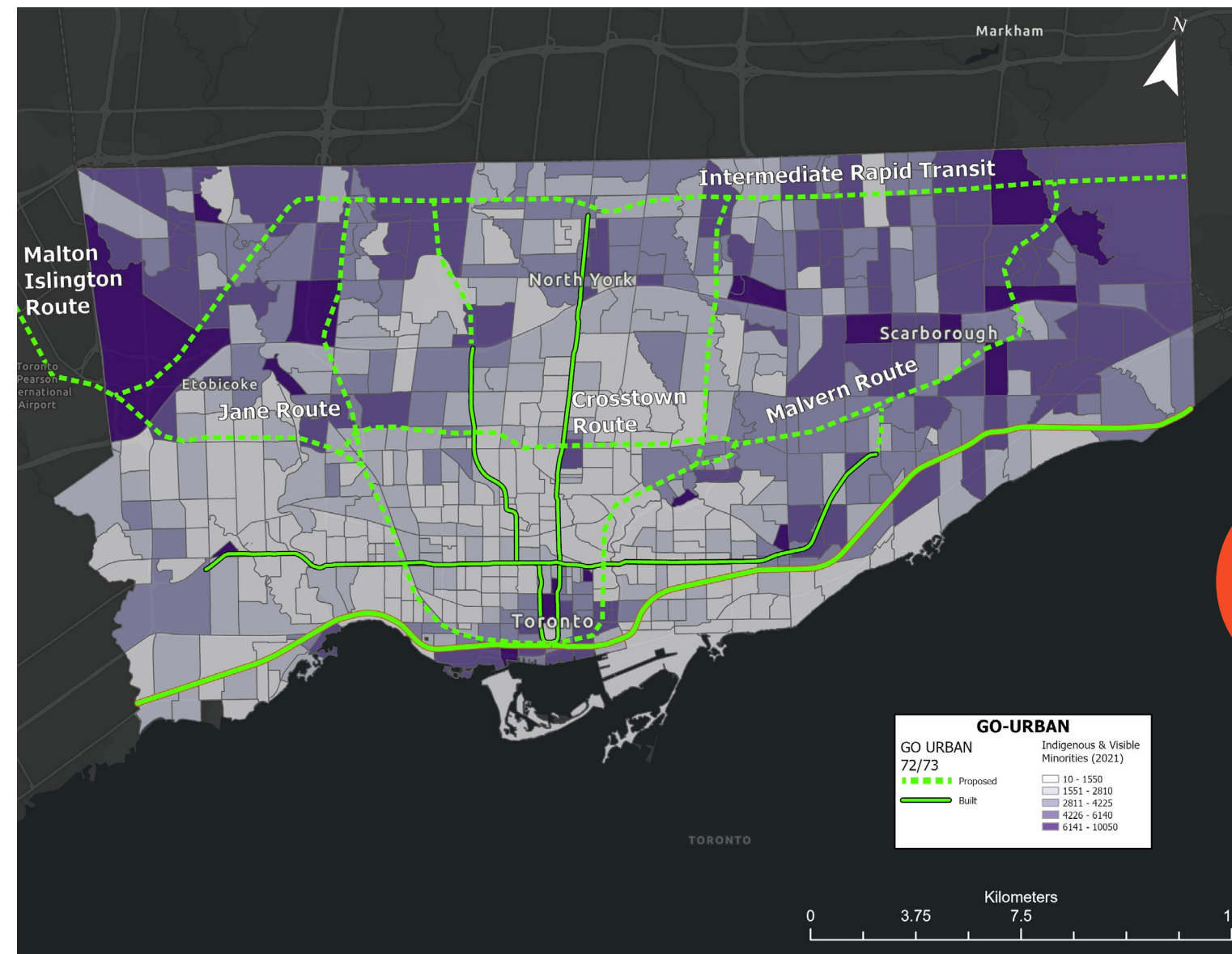
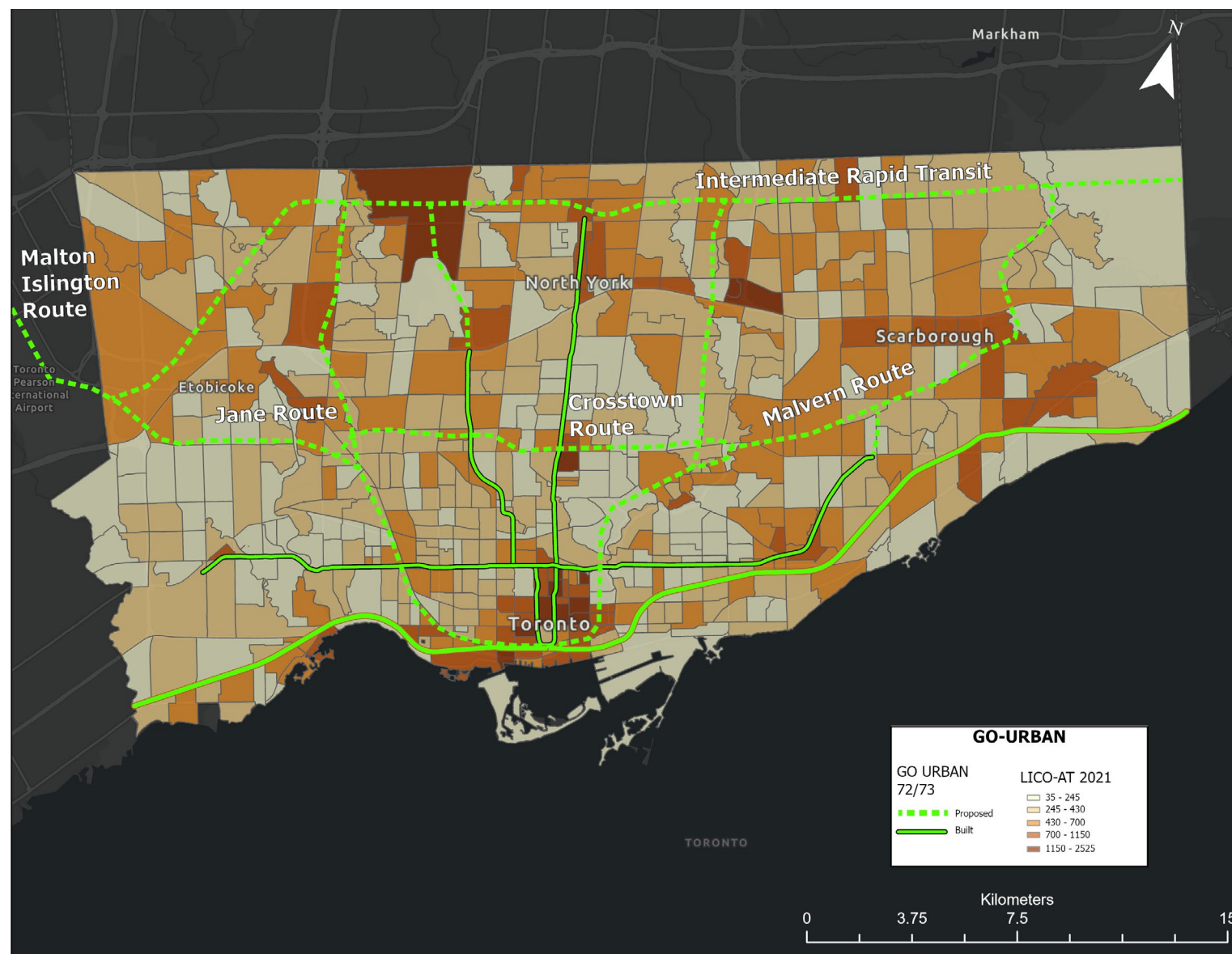
Figure 13 : (Image Top Left) Promotional renderings of GO-Urban's vehicles running in a suburban setting⁹⁴

Despite the anti-density rhetoric, this was the most geographically extensive transit network that was proposed in 20th century Toronto, and its components reappeared, in different variations, in most plans that followed it: east-west lines on Eglinton and Sheppard or Finch; a northeastern line through Scarborough; and a "downtown relief line" from Union station through the East End and Flemingdon Park and

Thorncliffe Park.

Eventually, the accessibility objectives of GO-Urban fell victim to its technological aspirations. The Province's initial international partner failed to deliver on its promise of producing an intermediate capacity magnetic levitation transit system, which had been envisioned for use across Ontario and as an export product

1971 - 1993



1971 - 1993

Figure 14 : Census maps of people/households under the LICO-AT (Low-income cut-offs, after tax) (left) and Indigenous and Visible Minorities (right) within Metro Toronto in 2021 and the proposed GO-Urban plan. Both maps illustrate how the GO-Urban could have connected current low-income and ethnically diverse communities in the suburbs to the existing subway lines and the rest of downtown Toronto.

Network 2011: defined by budgets, succumbed to politics

In the years following the cancellation of *GO-Urban*, Metro and the TTC continued deliberating transit expansions amidst growing economic pressures brought by the 1970s recession (see Box 4.1). Eventually, in 1985 Metro released *Network 2011: A Rapid Transit Plan for Metropolitan Toronto*, which was the fruit of a rare coordination between Metro, the TTC, and the provincial government. It proposed the gradual development of three lines, one after the other, over a period of 26 years: first, a short Sheppard Avenue subway; second, a “relief line” subway from downtown through the east end to the Danforth; third, an underground busway along Eglinton; fourth, extensions of the Sheppard line to the east and west; finally, a subway in the Eglinton tunnels.

Several aspects of *Network 2011* reflect its approach to equity. First, the plan served Metro’s polycentric approach, intended to shift economic activity from downtown to “secondary centres” located in the boroughs of Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke.⁹⁵ While the plan’s goals included improvements to “accessibility and mobility throughout Metro and particularly in suburban areas”,⁹⁶ the proposed layout suggests that this was interpreted

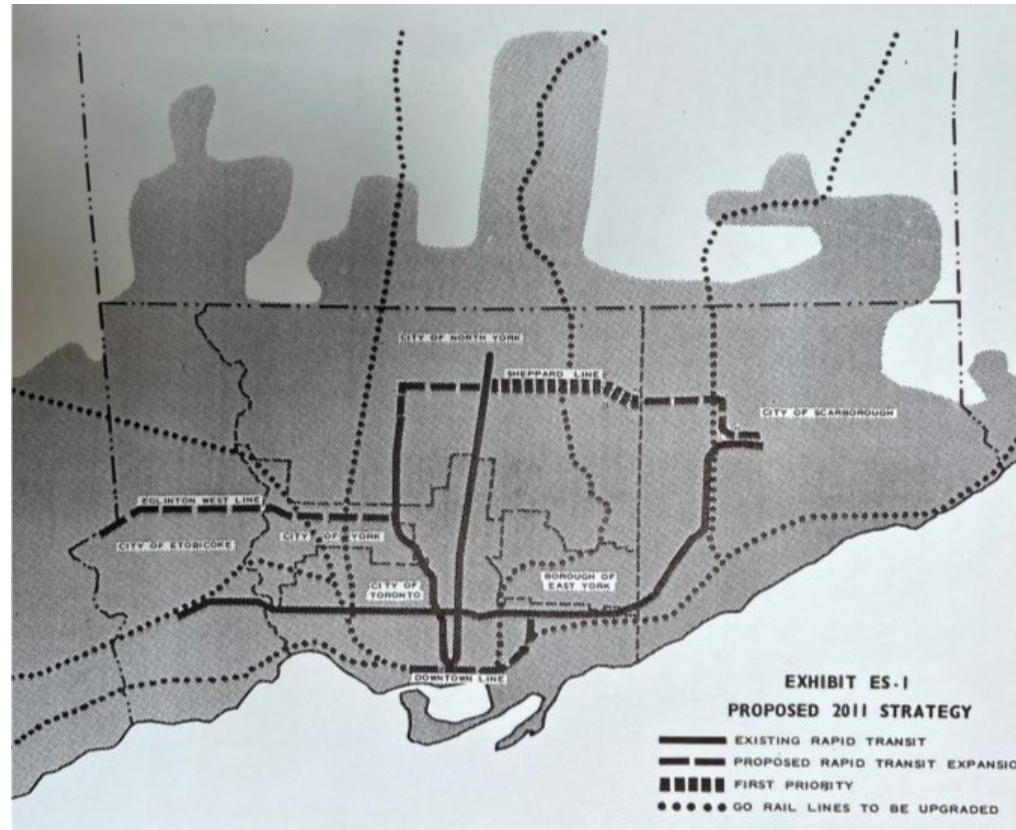


Figure 15 : The Sheppard East line is marked as first priority; Eglinton, Downtown Relief and Sheppard West are proposed in the following stages⁹⁷

as access to employment, and not to remote areas. Notably, the northeastern and northwestern edges of Metro were not included and plans to extend the Scarborough RT were axed (see the *Malvern case study*).

Second, *Network 2011* applied a fiscal conservative approach that matched service to budget limits and avoided debt or tax increases. Its strategy statement states affordability as the first priority, and as the reason for spreading development

over 25 years. The public documentation elaborates on this point:

“Although it would be ideal to construct all the lines simultaneously, it is simply not affordable ... The phasing of implementation over a 28 year period indicates the fastest possible construction program which Metro can afford without increases in taxes”.⁹⁸

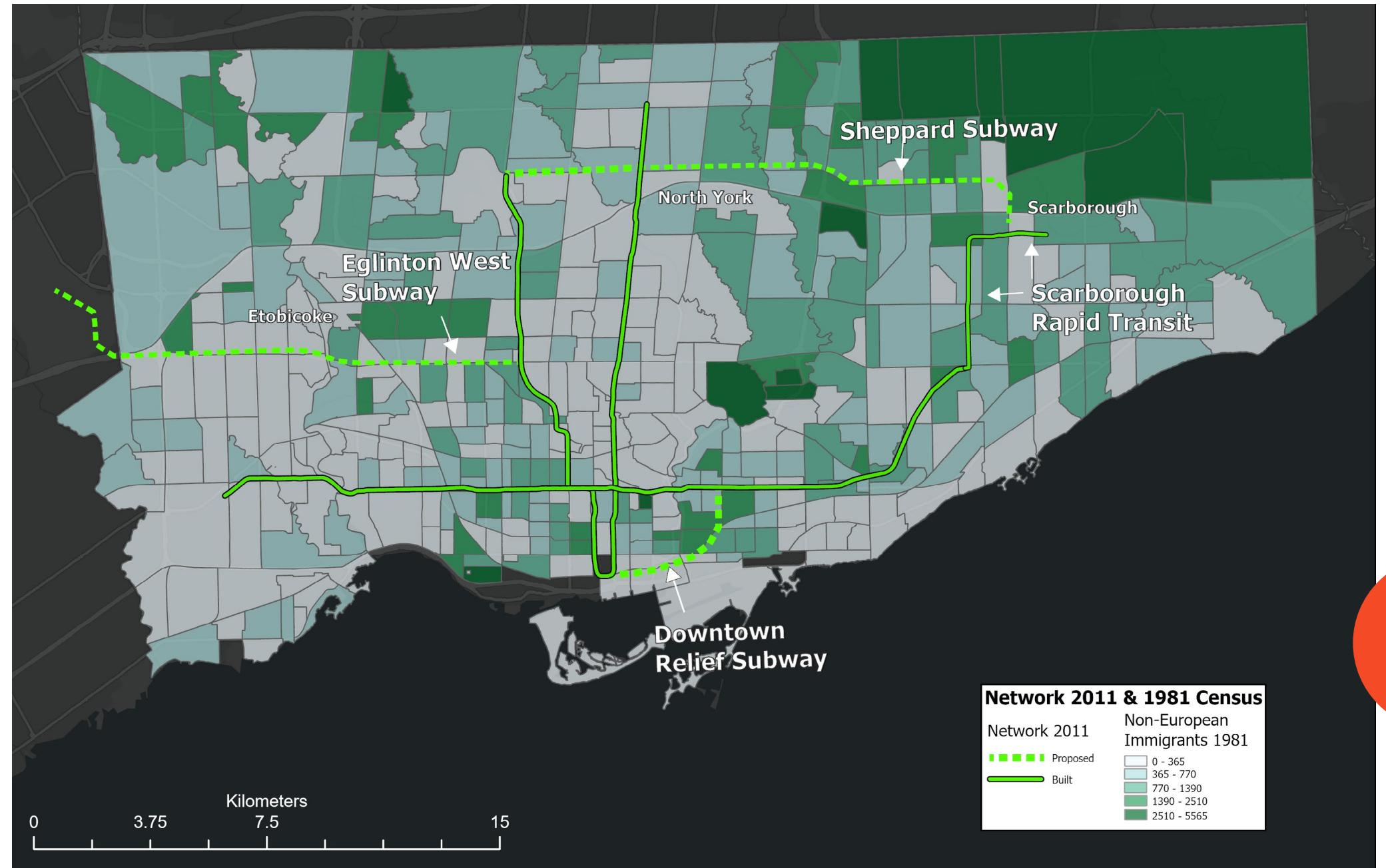
Simultaneously, the plan embodied the values of the progressive shift in Toronto’s planning. Documentation provides extensive detail on the outreach and public consultation process and on how feedback was incorporated into the plan.⁹⁹ In other words, the focus on representation in the planning process came as the plans themselves shifted away from improving service to those in need.

The fiscally conservative approach to transit expansion meant that some lines would only be built in the distant future. Thus, while all of Metro’s municipalities agreed with the general need for transit, the plan sparked in-fighting over the order of development, with each borough arguing for a different priority. The immediate winner was North York, which would receive the first line. Scarborough, in response, demanded to build the entire

Sheppard line in one piece to Scarborough Town Centre, arguing that their borough will have the greatest employment growth in the upcoming years.¹⁰⁰ The City of York, in contrast, argued that the plan “prolongs the neglect of northwest Metro which is devoid of rapid transit”¹⁰¹ and further strengthens the economic potential of North York and Scarborough “while eliminating or destroying such potential in York”.¹⁰²

The different arguments rarely rejected the premise of the plan, which was focused on economic development, but one planning consultant summed up the plan as a “masterpiece of planning to open up the City of Toronto-suburban conflicts”.¹⁰³ Indeed, by 1987, the plan that had been hailed by the media when it was announced, was labeled in the newspapers with the adjective “controversial”.¹⁰⁴

Eventually, it was political power struggles with the Province that ended *Network 2011*. The initial plan was developed in close collaboration with the Conservative provincial government, but shortly after it was unveiled, the Liberals rose to power and began undermining their predecessors’ policies. The Liberal transportation minister said it bluntly: “We weren’t part of Network 2011 ... It’s not our



plan”.¹⁰⁵ The suburban municipalities, which were opposed to funding Metro’s needs over those of commuters, now demanded to shift funding to the new 407 highway.¹⁰⁶ The transportation minister indeed repurposed the Sheppard line budget to build the 407, upgrade GO train service, and build park-and-ride parking lots in the suburbs.¹⁰⁷

Figure 16 : 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

BOX 4.1: TRANSIT AS SOCIAL POLICY: THE 1983 TTC LONG RANGE PLAN

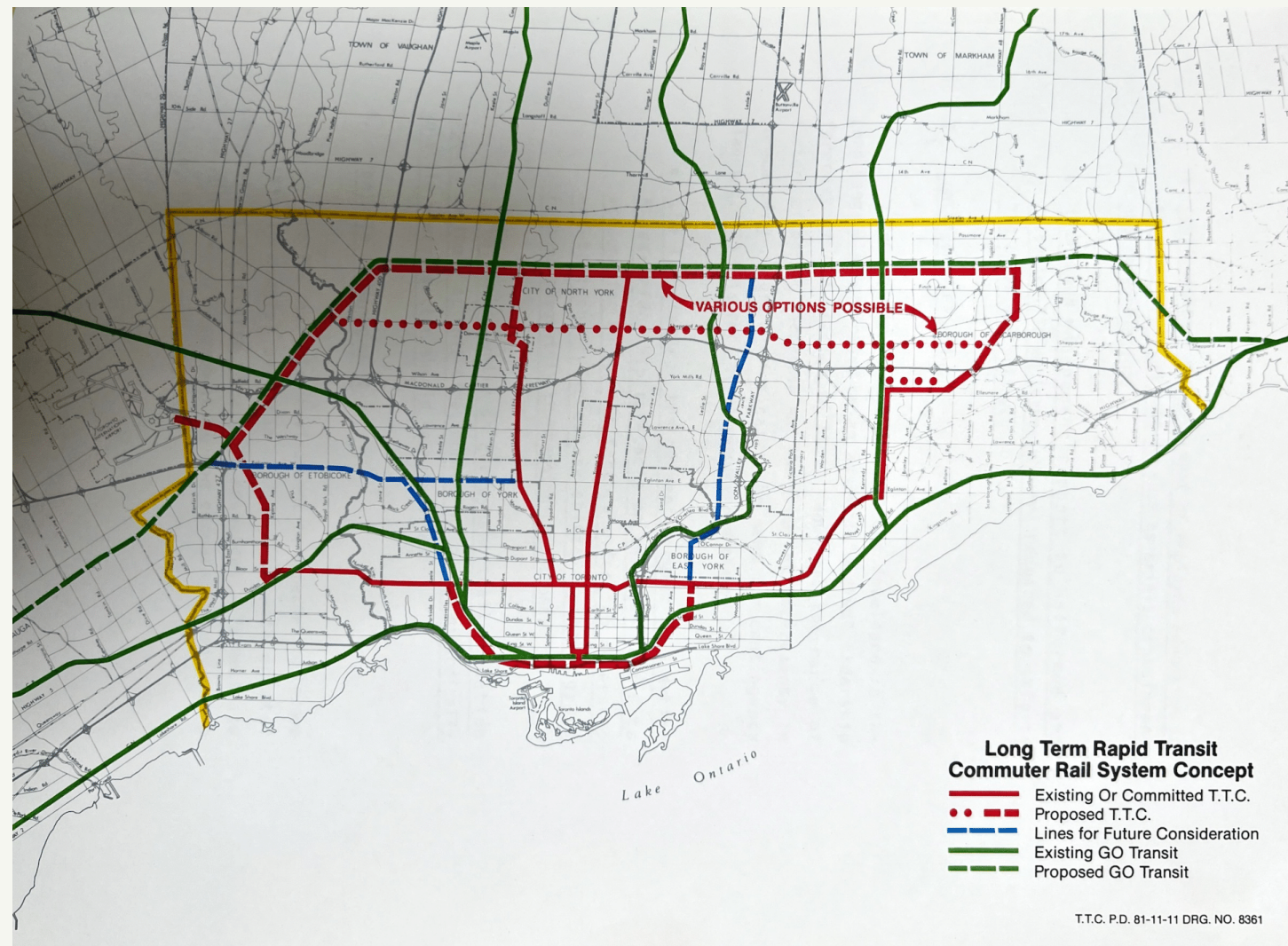


Figure 1. Long Term Rapid Transit Commuter Rail System Concept from the TTC 1983 Long Range Plan

Leading to *Network 2011*, the TTC conducted its own long-range plan, which focused primarily on operational issues rather than on network planning. In contrast with Metro's focus on infrastructure and development, the language and priorities of the report offer a glimpse into a markedly different approach to transit equity. The report's approach to transit is especially attuned to the socio-economic and demographic changes in Toronto, which was becoming older, more racially diverse, and more economically polarised.

Thus, the report notes the rise of racial tension and fear of crime, and notes that "groups most susceptible to and fearful of crime, namely women, senior citizens, and ethnic minorities, are expected to represent an increasing proportion of total ridership", and that service should adapt to the needs of these populations.¹⁰⁸ To accommodate the increased workforce participation of women, specifically in the suburbs, "extended hours of family-oriented services" is proposed.¹⁰⁹ Aging infrastructure would create "further demands for service oriented to the (largely off-peak) travel needs for senior citizens".¹¹⁰

These representative quotes stand in stark contrast to both *GO-Urban* and *Network 2011*, in defining transit primarily as an equity issue. The plan succinctly summarizes this difference in its priorities: "The needs of the TTC's riders ... must be accommodated as a first priority".¹¹¹

The city, in the meantime, continued to change (see Figure 16). Non-European immigrant populations continued to grow and concentrate in Toronto's northern edges, some of which were completely passed on by Network 2011. Most notable was Jane-Finch, a large concentration of apartments in the city's northwest, suffered almost from day one from social and infrastructural problems. As early as 1979, news articles were describing the area as a hotbed of racial tension and youth delinquency that posed a threat to the city. Transit was often noted as a cause:

*“One of the biggest criticisms levelled at Jane-Finch, as designed by the urban planners, was that there were no support services within the community and that residents had to travel up to 25 kilometres on an inadequate transit system to have their needs met.”*¹¹²

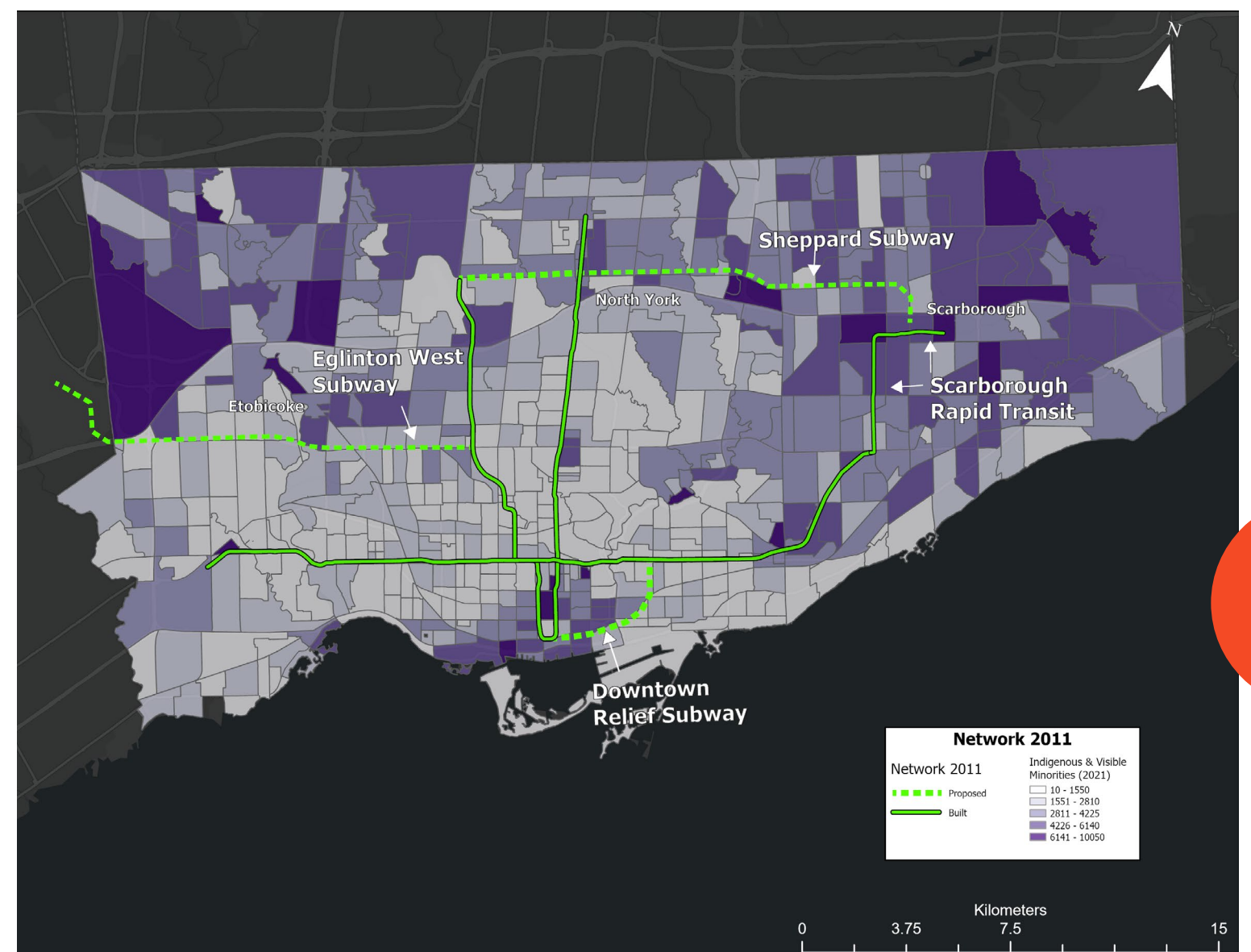
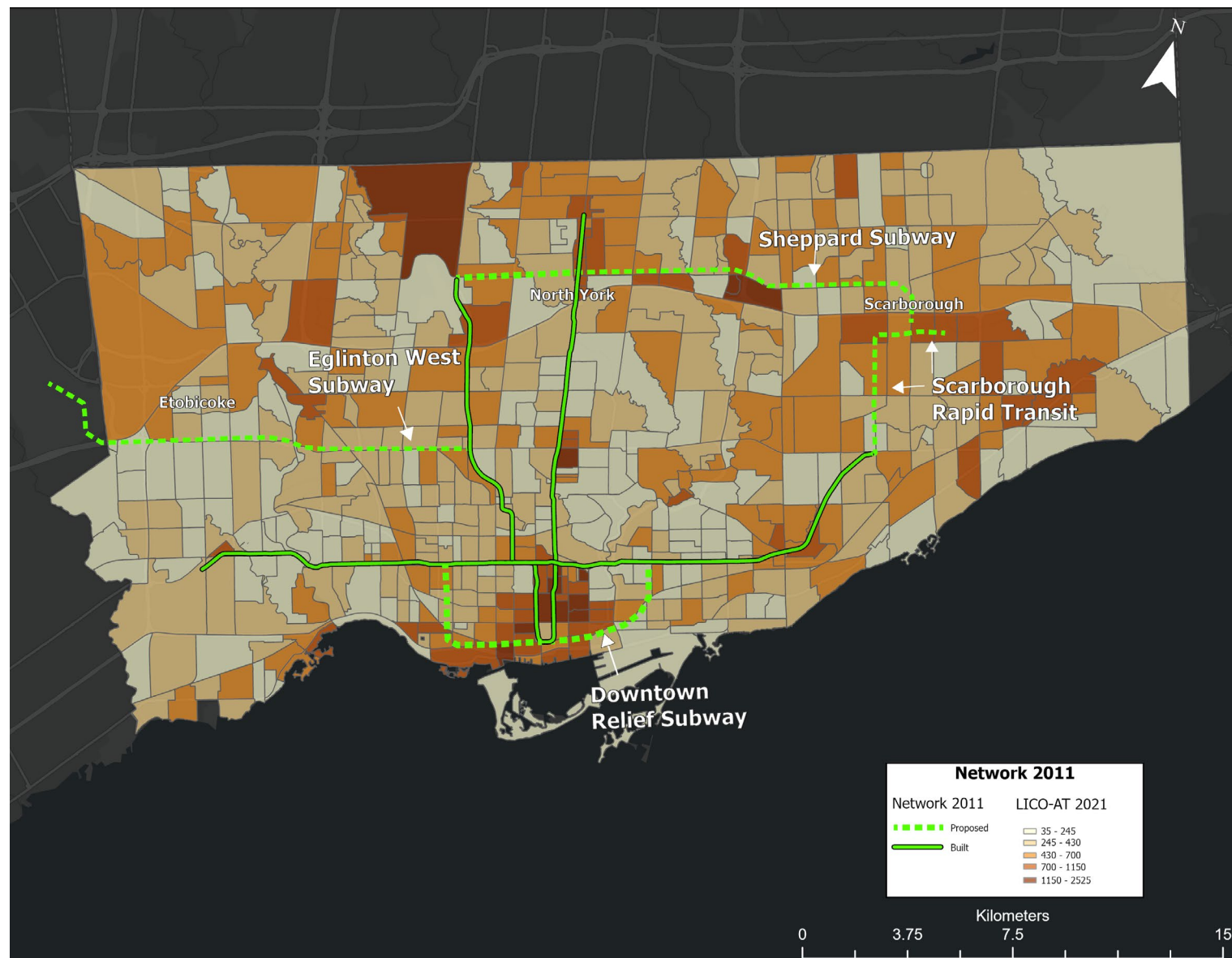
Iterations of *Network 2011* resurfaced in the early 1990s under the title *Let's Move*, but by then Toronto was entering an era of austerity and financial challenges that would last into the 2000s. First, during the early 1990s recession, Ontario and the City of Toronto cut operating funding for the TTC, reducing annual subsidies by \$100 million from 1991 to 2000.¹¹³ Furthermore, in 1998 Provincial subsidies stopped entirely

(and were only reinstated in 2003 through a gas-tax initiative).¹¹⁴ This funding reduction led to five fare increases totaling 41%, labour strikes, and service cuts: TTC removed about 200 buses and 40 streetcars from service over the decade. By 1996, ridership had dropped by 20%.¹¹⁵

Then, Premier Mike Harris's "Common Sense Revolution", which involved deep cuts to provincial spending, halted all plans for transit expansion. Harris famously ordered the Eglinton line tunnels to be filled in. The short Sheppard line, which had been *Network 2011's* first priority, was saved from this fate thanks to the pressure from North York's influential mayor, Mel Lastman.¹¹⁶ A final blow to transit plans came with the amalgamation of Toronto in 1998 that disbanded the powerful Metro Toronto and significantly weakened the political power of "old" Toronto. It will be nearly another decade until transit expansion is once again seriously discussed.



1971 - 1993



1971 - 1993

Figure 17 : Census maps of people/households under the LICO-AT (Low-income cut-offs, after tax) (left) and Indigenous and Visible Minorities (right) within Metro Toronto in 2021 and the proposed Network 2011 plan. The map illustrates how the proposed Network 2011 lines could have connected several ethnically diverse and low-income communities to the existing subway network and the rest of downtown Toronto, particularly in the northwest and northeast regions of the city.



Figure 18 : Land banking in Scarborough: Houses in Malvern sell for \$15,000 to \$20,000, with leasing arrangements for the land¹¹⁷

Case study: Malvern Community

The story of Malvern, a community in the far northeastern corner of Toronto, demonstrates how the city's misaligned land use and transit policies created systemic hurdles for peripheral neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood was part of Metro Toronto's original plan for the Borough of Scarborough, published in 1959. The plan provided detailed guidelines for each new suburban community, dictating a mix of housing types, amenities, and basic design requirements.¹¹⁸

Much of Malvern's land was bought by the provincial and federal government for housing in anticipation of the city's growth.¹¹⁹ Despite being specifically planned for affordable and public housing, the neighbourhood received the same car-oriented and expressway-based design as the rest of Toronto's post-war suburbs and includes a cluster of high-rise apartment buildings among predominantly single-family homes. However, as explained in Chapter 3, Metro dictated the gradual development of neighbourhoods from the city centre outwards. Malvern's development was approved only in 1970,

and by then, the expressways were all but cancelled.

Despite being remote, Malvern enjoyed proximity to employment and to existing rail corridors, making it a good candidate for rapid transit connection. Transit connections to the neighbourhood appeared in several plans, starting with the TTC's proposed network from 1969, but these plans repeatedly failed. Time and again, the density in the area was deemed too low to justify rapid transit. A Scarborough municipal official described it as inevitable:

“The question of equity is most difficult. It is just impossible to offer equal service everywhere ... In suburban areas which have been developed as an automobile-oriented area you just cannot expect the same level of transit service as in the higher density inner-city areas”.¹²⁰

This approach continued to affect Malvern in the following years. Plans for an SRT extension were dropped in 1986 as Scarborough's leadership preferred to focus their efforts on the Sheppard line, saying “even in the long term, transit demand to and from the northeast of Scarborough will not

be sufficient to justify construction of the Malvern LRT”.¹²¹ The *Transit City* Malvern connection was not prioritized, and like much of the plan, cancelled. Finally, the closure of the Scarborough RT further distanced Malvern from rapid transit.

In the meantime, the neighbourhood continued to suffer from high unemployment rates and stigmatization of its racially diverse community.¹²² Its continued marginalization can be linked back to inaccessibility in what seems like a perpetual negative feedback loop: The neighbourhood's population is too sparse, or not connected enough to employment centres, to be worthy of transit; but lack of access limits the possibility of changing employment and economic realities. A service provider in the neighbourhood explained this bluntly:

“The transit is inexcusable. It's inexplicable...dithering about how many stops we can afford. The whole killing of the LRT; when people get political instead of real. You see all the people standing at bus shelters, it is a piece of the problem. How do you get to places of unemployment and [travel] safely?”¹²³

Malvern is once again expecting an LRT connection, this time as a branch of the Eglinton East LRT. This connection is not yet guaranteed: breaking the cycle would require an upfront and substantial investment in transit that would likely be unjustifiable by traditional transit appraisal methods.



LEFT BEHIND IN A GLOBAL CITY

2006 - 2012

The Transit City Debate

Chapter 05

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 Munro¹²⁴

- The last section of our historical study focuses on one transit plan and examines how its birth and demise embody both Toronto’s past and future transit equity challenges.
- 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 and, for the first time, explicitly aligned transit with spatial equity. But this vision was once again truncated to match a frugal policy environment, and transit quickly became a political flashpoint and victim of a conflict between ‘global’ and suburban images of Toronto.
- At the same time, the plan (and its more recent incarnations) underestimated the role of transit in perpetuating new equity challenges, such as gentrification and displacement. This omission once again threatens the city’s historically underserved communities.

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.¹²⁵ But Toronto was also facing widening socio-economic gaps, fueled by changing immigration patterns, growing economic pressures and the erosion of provincial and federal social policies.

By 1991, nearly half of all immigrants to Canada were non-white, and Toronto was a port of entry for many of them. Income polarization was changing the social and physical makeup of the city, particularly in the suburbs. Between 1990 and 1995, the share of low-income neighbourhoods in the city jumped from 32% to 46%. Furthermore, the ongoing gentrification of the downtown core has been pushing poverty further into the city’s periphery, creating what has become known as the “third city”, comprising most of the area outside the old city of Toronto (see Box 5.1).¹²⁶

BOX 5.1: THE THREE CITIES WITHIN TORONTO

In 2010, David Hulchanski published an influential study analyzing long-term socio-demographic changes in Toronto, and especially the growing socio-economic divide and spatial inequality. The *Three Cities Within Toronto* traced the changes in three urban zones defined by average income: City #1 represents the growing affluent class, City #2 the diminishing middle class, and City #3 the expanding lower class. The project's maps told a compelling and alarming story. Over 35 years, between 1970 and 2005, the middle-class City #2 has almost disappeared, while the low-income City #3 grew to encompass every part of Toronto but the affluent central core and waterfront.

Hulchanski argued that the postwar suburbs that made up the majority of City #3, with their concentration of affordable apartments and social housing, attracted low-income residents and immigrants that faced increasingly precarious employment and stagnating wages.¹²⁷ Higher income, often white, families were leaving these areas for the suburban municipalities around Toronto, resulting in a concentration of lower-income communities of colour in North York, Etobicoke, and Scarborough.¹²⁸

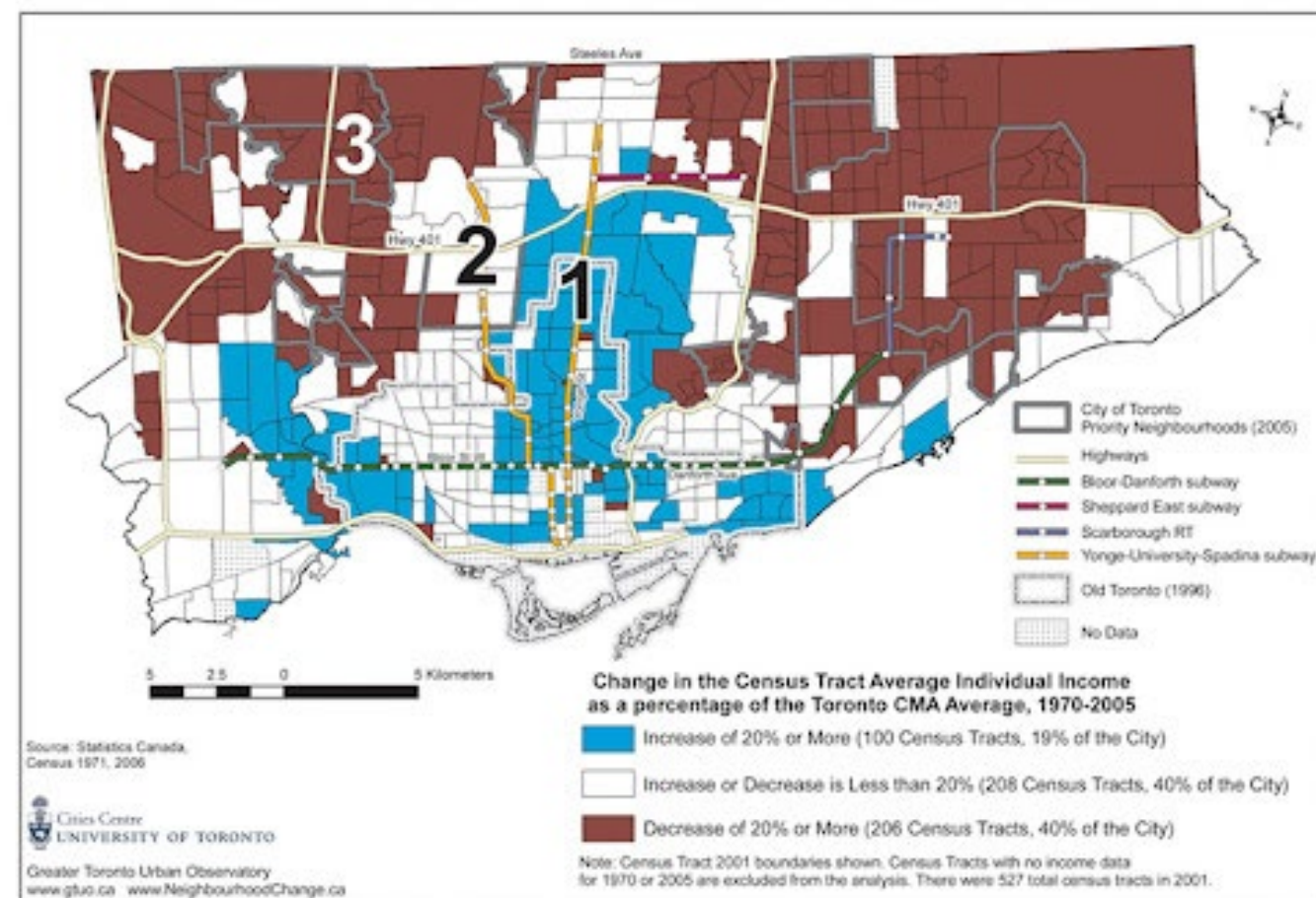
The transit perspective of the Three Cities is somewhat inconclusive. A study from 2013 found that overall transit accessibility in Toronto has improved between 1996 and 2006 and that the most socially disadvantaged populations have the best transit access to jobs, suggesting that Toronto's transit system improved in terms of vertical

equity.¹²⁹ The study found that socially disadvantaged populations, who had increasingly moved to suburban areas, had greater accessibility to jobs and shorter transit travel times compared to the rest of the region in both years. However, transit travel times increased slightly for commuters in 2006. The study highlights the importance of transit systems being flexible to accommodate changing commuting patterns. Longer commute times reflect not only the transit system but also changes in home and work locations (i.e. the growing suburbanization of jobs and poverty), land use patterns, and commuters' willingness to travel. For example, improved transit infrastructure and services may make commuters more willing to travel farther to work.¹³⁰ A later study, however, further points to the uneven effects of the "suburbanization of transport poverty".¹³¹ While confirming Hulchanski's main findings, the study finds uneven effects in different parts of the city, with Scarborough in particular suffering from lower accessibility and other car-oriented suburbs nonetheless suffering from worse accessibility than neighbourhoods in Hulchanski's City #1.

BOX 5.1: THE THREE CITIES WITHIN TORONTO

MAP 1: CHANGE IN AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL INCOME, CITY OF TORONTO, RELATIVE TO THE TORONTO CMA, 1970-2005

Average individual income from all sources, 15 years and over, census tracts



MAP 7: PROJECTION OF THE "THREE CITIES" IN TORONTO TO 2025

Based on the 1970 to 2005 Trends in Census Tract Average Individual Income, Assuming No Change in Trends

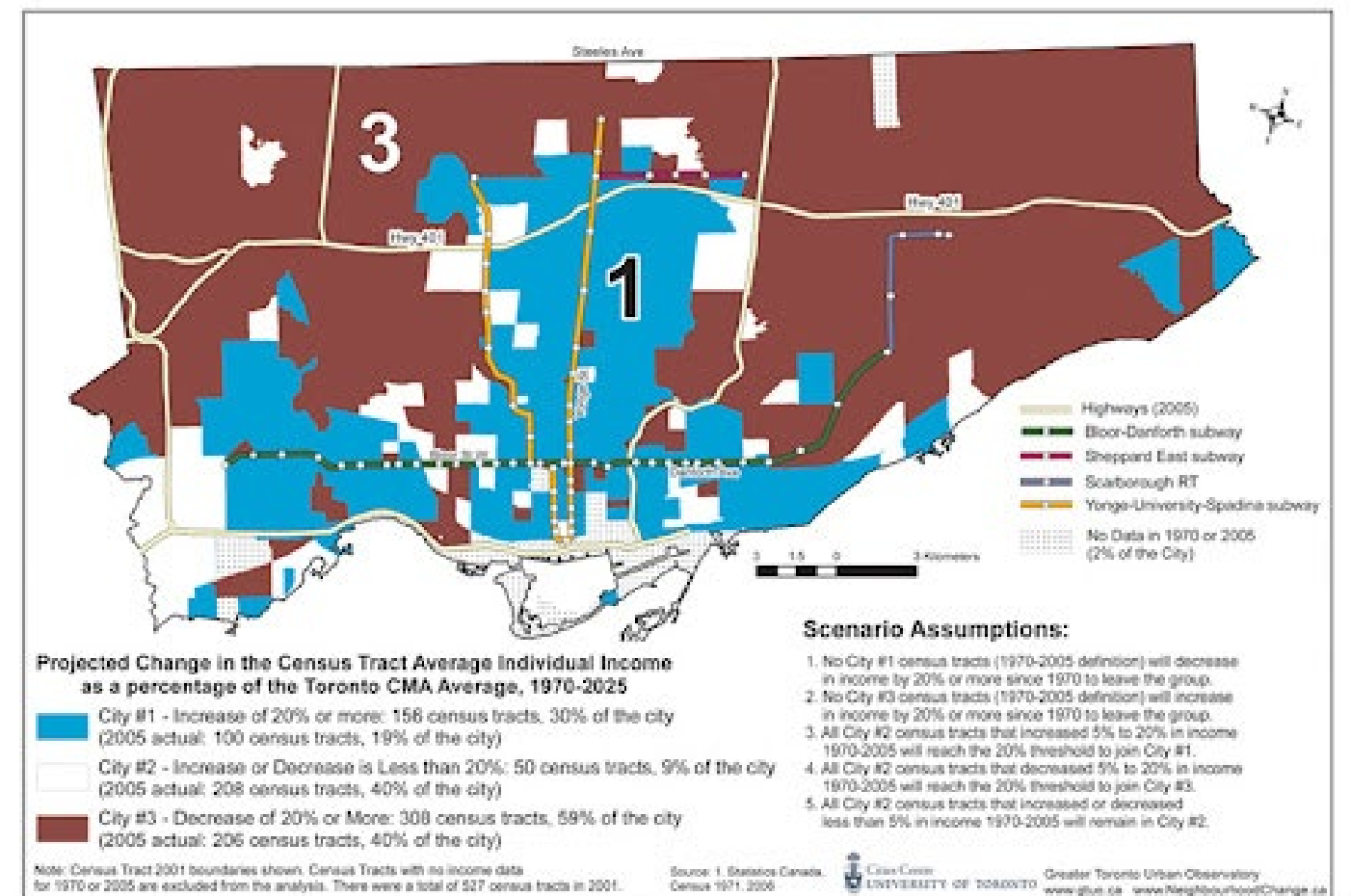


Figure 1. Maps of the Three Cities of Toronto¹³²

In 2003, a new mayor, David Miller, introduced the Strong Neighbourhood Policy, which highlighted the deepening polarization of the city and identified 13 underserved 'priority neighbourhoods' (see Figure 19). The list comprised overwhelmingly inner-suburban neighbourhoods with large concentrations of apartments and poor services, including transit. This was an acknowledgement that the challenges faced by apartment neighbourhoods required a coordinated response from the different City branches.

Transit City, introduced in 2007, applied the new administration's social lens to transit planning. The plan consisted of 120km of LRT lines designed to connect "areas that are currently far removed from rapid transit, including the north, west, and eastern areas of Toronto".¹³³ including Eglinton, Sheppard East, Malvern, Finch West, Jane and Don Mills. LRT lines were proposed as an opportunity to serve marginalized neighbourhoods while improving the pedestrian streetscape of arterial roads along their path.¹³⁴ Despite the plan's urban regeneration and equity goals, it was marketed to the public primarily as a cost-effective and climate-responsible solution to congestion.

Like its predecessors, *Transit City's* implementation was designed to match limited provincial funding, starting with four priority lines. Yet even this first phase quickly fell victim to political struggles.¹³⁵ First, in 2010 the Province cut its initial commitment of \$8.4 billion by nearly half. The mayor, the TTC Chair and a coalition of advocacy groups responded with a campaign to "Save Transit City".¹³⁶ Miller noted,

*"They always say it's a deferral and a delay and all of a sudden it's another generation gone by and we haven't met the transit needs of the past generation, let alone the future generation."*¹³⁷

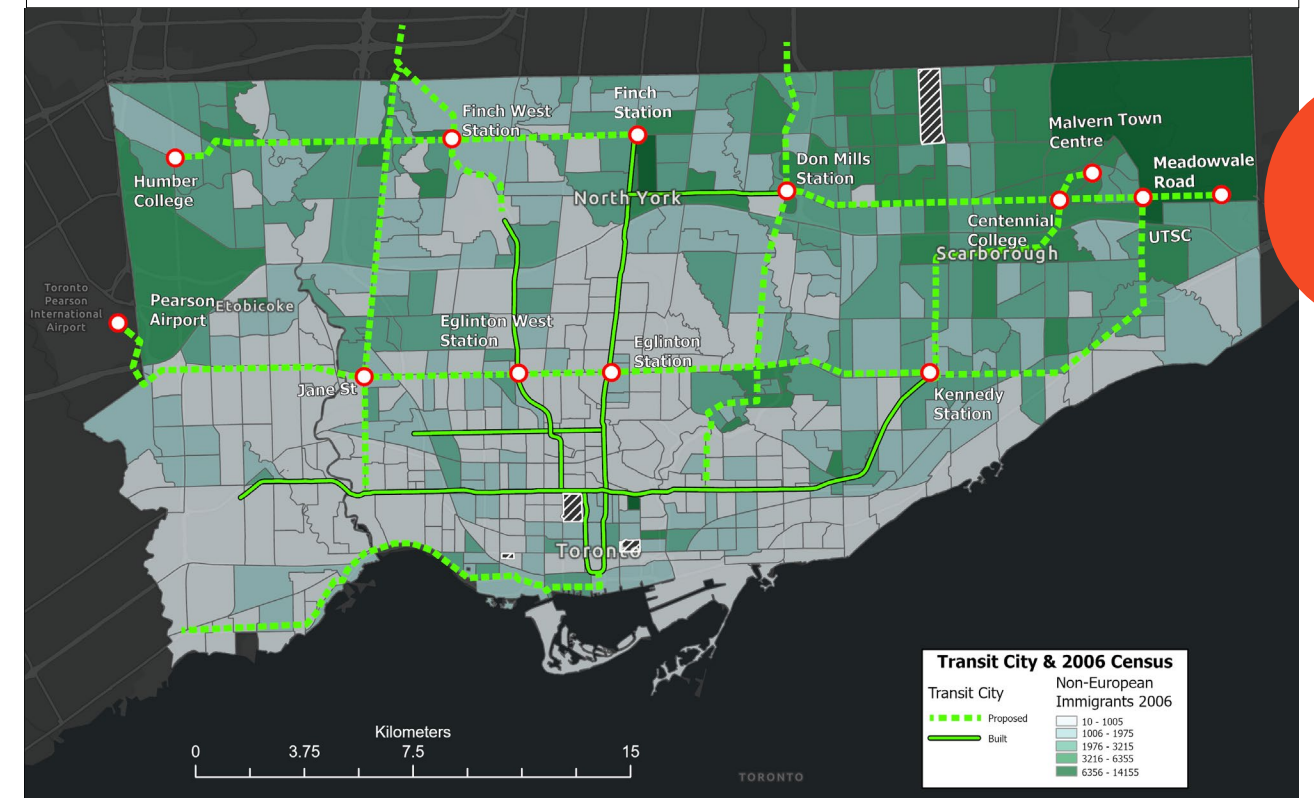
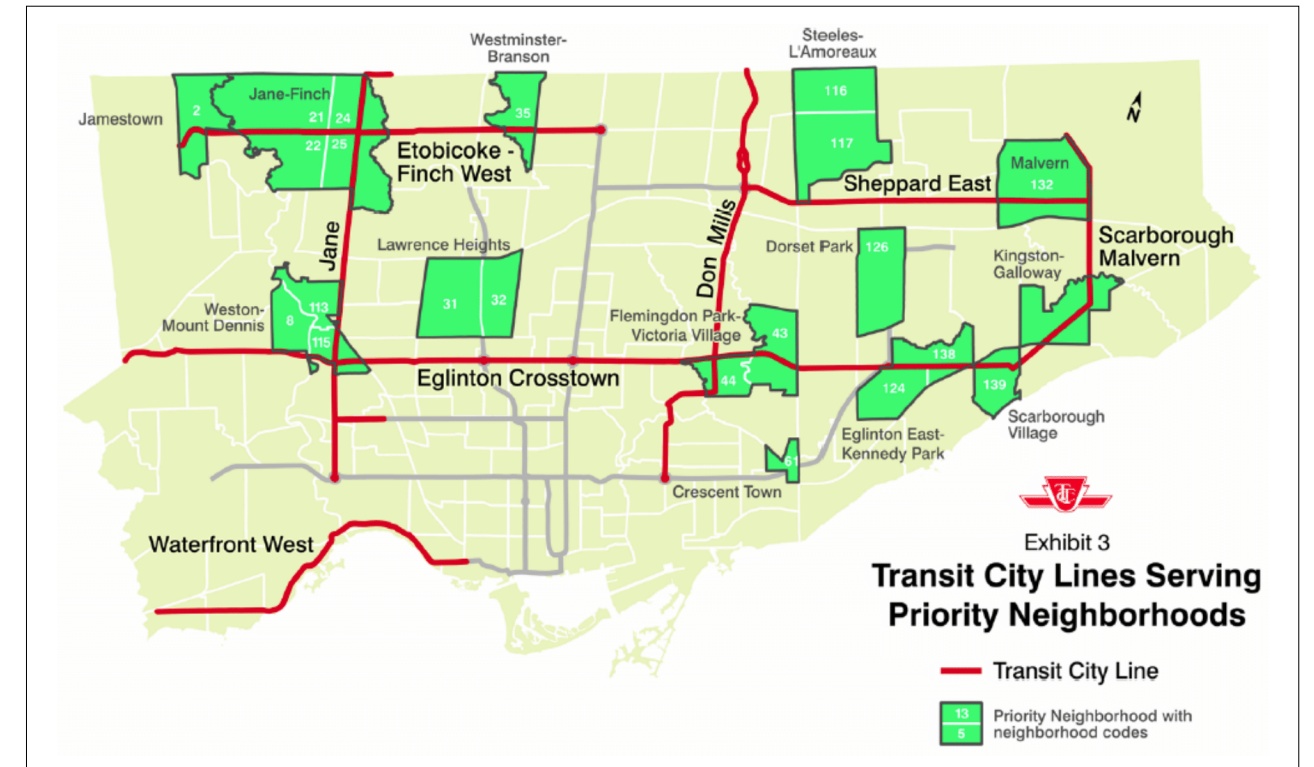


Figure 19 : (Top) Map of Transit City Lines Serving Priority Neighbourhoods¹³⁸

Figure 20 : (Bottom) Census map of non-European immigrants within Metro Toronto in 2006 and Transit City. The map illustrates how the proposed lines would have connected several ethnically diverse communities to the existing subway network and the rest of downtown Toronto.

2006 - 2012

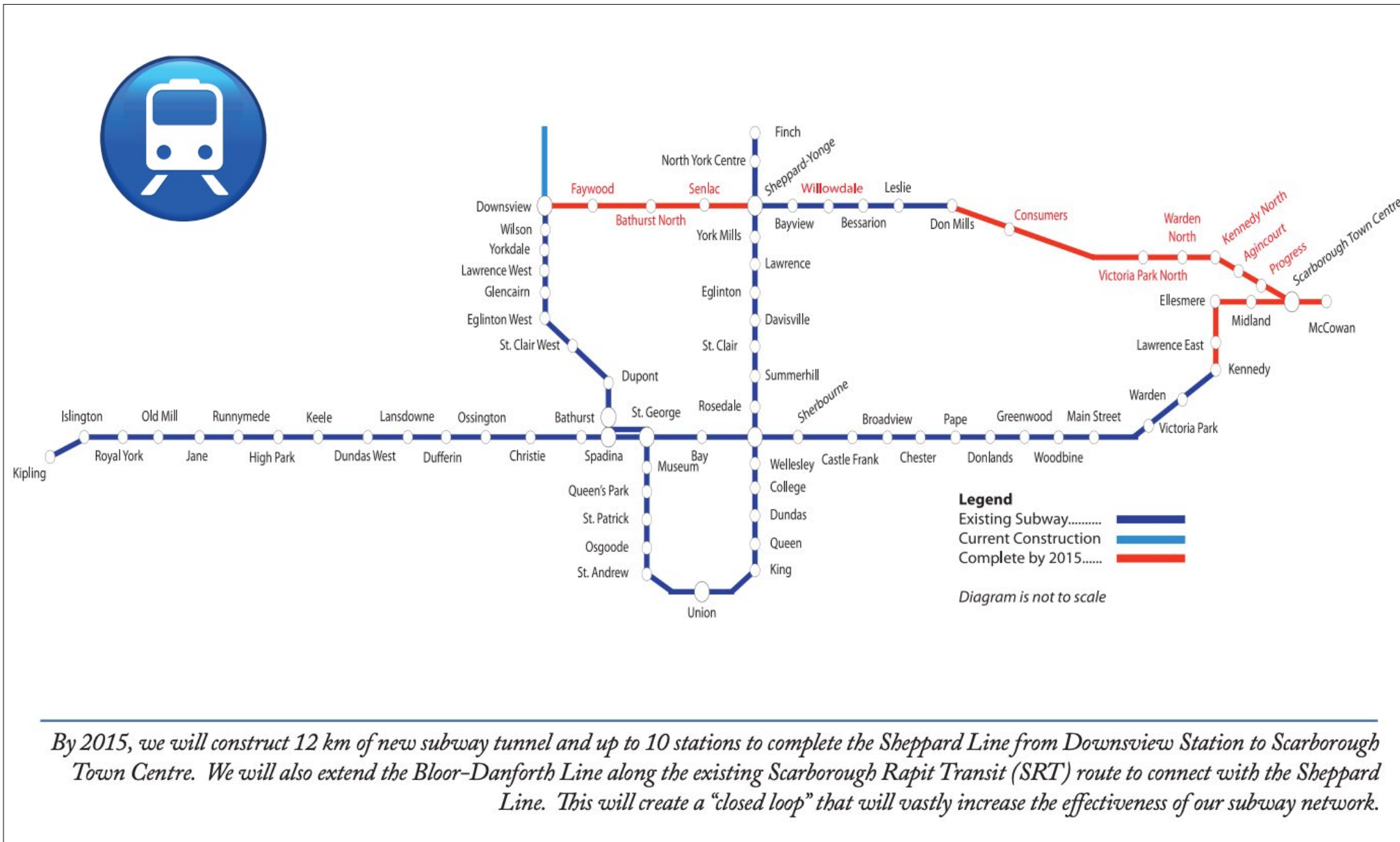


Figure 21 : Transportation City¹³⁹

Local opposition to a new dedicated-lane streetcar on St. Clair Avenue, running along relatively affluent and well-connected downtown neighbourhoods, also helped erode support for the plan.

The final blow to *Transit City*, however, came with Toronto’s election of Rob Ford as mayor in 2010. Ford campaigned on a promise to stop “the war on the car”, and upon election quickly moved to

cancel *Transit City*. Instead, he proposed *Transportation City*: a subway-based plan that did not take away road space from private and commercial vehicles (see *Figure 22*).¹⁴⁰ Despite being advertised as cost-efficient, the plan suggested using the \$8 billion budget allocated to seven LRT lines to build two subway lines (Sheppard and a below-grade LRT along Eglinton) and a replacement to the Scarborough SRT. In 2011, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty re-

allocated *Transit City’s* Funding toward the first phase of Ford’s plan along Eglinton. The rest of the plan purportedly relied on public-private partnerships and federal funding. As McGuinty explained in the legislature:

*“If the new, duly elected council, led by their new mayor, comes to us ... a different representation on behalf of the people of Toronto, who elected that council, is my friend honestly suggesting that we tell them to go away?”*¹⁴¹

Ford’s plan attracted a flurry of oppositional studies, legal investigations, community organizing campaigns, and alternative plans. For example, a report published as part of the *Save Transit City* campaign dispelled Ford’s cost-saving and congestion-solving claims; and argued that LRTs would provide far better accessibility across the city, especially for low-income, underserved communities (see *Figure 21*).¹⁴² Councillor Joe Mihevic summed up the criticism, stating:

*The suburbs get screwed, transit riders get screwed, the people along Finch get screwed ... If [The Sheppard extension] ever gets built, it will indebt the city to such a great extent that ... my children’s children will be responsible for paying it.”*¹⁴³

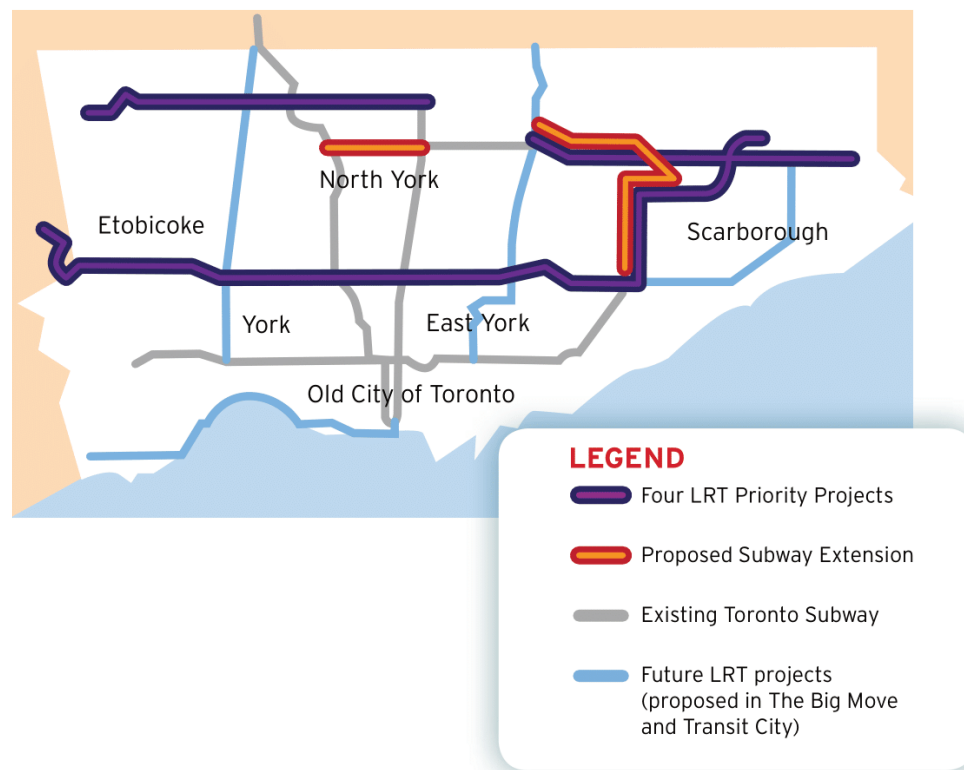


Figure 22 : Transit City priority LRT lines (purple) compared to Transportation City subway lines (orange).¹⁴⁴

Transportation City was eventually blocked by a legal challenge that showed Ford overstepped his authority by failing to secure council approval for the plan.¹⁴⁵ After reviewing alternative transit plan proposals, the Council eventually voted in favour of *Transit City's* original four priority lines,¹⁴⁶ including the Finch West and Eglinton LRT lines, currently under construction.



Figure 23 : Proposed OneCity Plan¹⁴⁷

The *Transit/Transportation City* conflict represented a new step in the longstanding use of transit as a wedge issue between city and suburbs, highlighting tensions between democratic accountability to voters and more technocratic approaches to transit planning. During this period, the City of Toronto embarked on a major strategic planning exercise called *Feeling Congested*, which consulted with

thousands of Toronto residents in order to develop a framework for prioritizing rapid transit project investments. Through this process, social equity, affordability and healthy neighbourhoods emerged as key decision making criteria alongside promoting greater choice, improved user experience and supporting growth.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, despite these more technical, city-staff led planning

initiatives, Transportation City rode a wave of strong political support. Mayor Rob Ford had an electoral mandate and his voter support was in fact strongest in precisely the suburbs that would receive less rapid transit service under his proposed *Transportation City* plan than in the *Transit City* alternative. This period showed the power of tapping into and channeling voter sentiment to enable politicians to advance their preferred transit plans, even when there was limited deliberation, planning or supporting evidence.

BENEFITS OF A FULL TRANSIT PLAN FOR TORONTO

Benefits	Proposed subway extension	Four LRT priority projects	Transit City - full implementation of all eight LRT lines
Length of transit constructed	18 km	75 km	148 km
Torontonians served: Number of residences or workplaces within 250 metres of rapid transit ⁴⁶	61,000	290,000	630,000
Low-income population connected ⁴⁷	7,200	45,000	106,000
Communities served	Scarborough North York	Scarborough East York North York Etobicoke York Old Toronto	Scarborough East York North York Etobicoke York Old Toronto
Estimated transit trips per year	65 million ⁴⁸	126 million ⁴⁹	224 million ⁵⁰
Cars off the road	60,000-70,000	120,000-140,000	220,000-240,000
GHG emissions reduced (by 2031, tonnes)	75,000	201,000	327,000
Cost (billions of 2008 dollars)	\$5.7 ⁵¹	\$8.15 (Phase 1) ⁵² \$9.9 (total) ⁵³	\$15.8 ⁵⁴
Cost (billions of 2010 dollars)	\$6.2 ⁵⁵	\$8.7 (Phase 1) ⁵⁶ \$10.5 (total) ⁵⁷	\$17.2 ⁵⁸
Cost per km (2010 dollars)	\$344 million	\$140 million	\$116 million

Figure 24 : Overview of Benefits for Transit City vs Transportation City vs Four Priority LRTs¹⁴⁹

Serving Priority Neighbourhoods: From under investment to displacement

But what of the original 13 Priority Neighbourhoods that *Transit City* was designed to support? Many of these neighbourhoods are now identified as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) that have been historically underserved by municipal amenities and services. They are overwhelmingly suburban and are some of the most ethnically diverse in the city (see Figure 25). NIAs rank high in inequities in safety, health, education, employment, and more.¹⁵⁰ At the time that the current Eglinton Crosstown project and Finch West LRTs were being planned in the late 2000s, transit was seen by civic leaders and transit policymakers as a means of providing improved access to priority neighbourhoods, and a positive way of increasing property values and spurring denser development around the station areas. The provincial business cases evaluating these projects promoted these goals, but did not include analysis of the risks of displacement or gentrification of the existing communities.¹⁵¹

Among the communities served by the legacy *Transit City* lines, such as Jane-Finch, Thorncliffe Park and Mount

Dennis, however, there has been rising advocacy and community organizing about disruptive construction, impending gentrification and displacement, and ensuring the long-term community benefit from the new transit lines being built. This has resulted in a reactive and geographically uneven approach to remediating the local impacts of transit projects. In some cases, Metrolinx, the provincial transit agency established in 2006 that is tasked with planning and building the new lines, has provided compensation and remediation, for instance providing funding to rebuild a new Islamic Centre in Thorncliffe Park that would be displaced by the Ontario Line. In other cases like in South Riverdale and at Osgoode Hall on Queen Street in downtown Toronto, despite community advocacy for changes to the transit lines, Metrolinx has stuck with their original plans, likely primarily due to the cost and schedule impacts of changing course. This highlights the difficult trade-offs inherent in transit investments, where skyrocketing costs in North America have in part been attributed to expensive design changes to accommodate community demands.¹⁵²

Neighbourhood displacement and gentrification has been another major concern in the communities where

2006 - 2012

the new transit lines are being built. There is much debate in the academic literature about the extent and the conditions under which new transit lines cause displacement and gentrification. In Toronto's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, the pressures are already being felt. Locally-serving street level retail has struggled to survive the disruptive construction phase of the transit project. Major mall redevelopments are being planned to turn these aging but locally-serving spaces into mixed use communities in Thorncliffe, Jane-Finch and the Golden Mile. These projects will bring tens of thousands of new residents over the next few decades to these economically and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. And mid-rise housing developments are starting to pop up along the key transit-oriented avenues.

The response to the risks of transit oriented gentrification and displacement in Toronto's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas has come in earnest while these mega projects are in mid-stream. The City of Toronto, responding to community advocacy, has engaged with local residents and created local district plans grounded in principles of equity and the local cultural heritage.¹⁵³ In the Golden Mile, the United Way of Greater Toronto along with Bank of Montreal has convened the Inclusive Local Economic Opportunities initiative to spur inclusive prosperity through partnerships as the neighbourhood redevelops in response to the arrival of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT.¹⁵⁴ Yet the City's planning tools to influence development are limited, and it remains to be seen whether the planning processes put in place will be sufficient to drive inclusive development in the face of considerable market pressures.

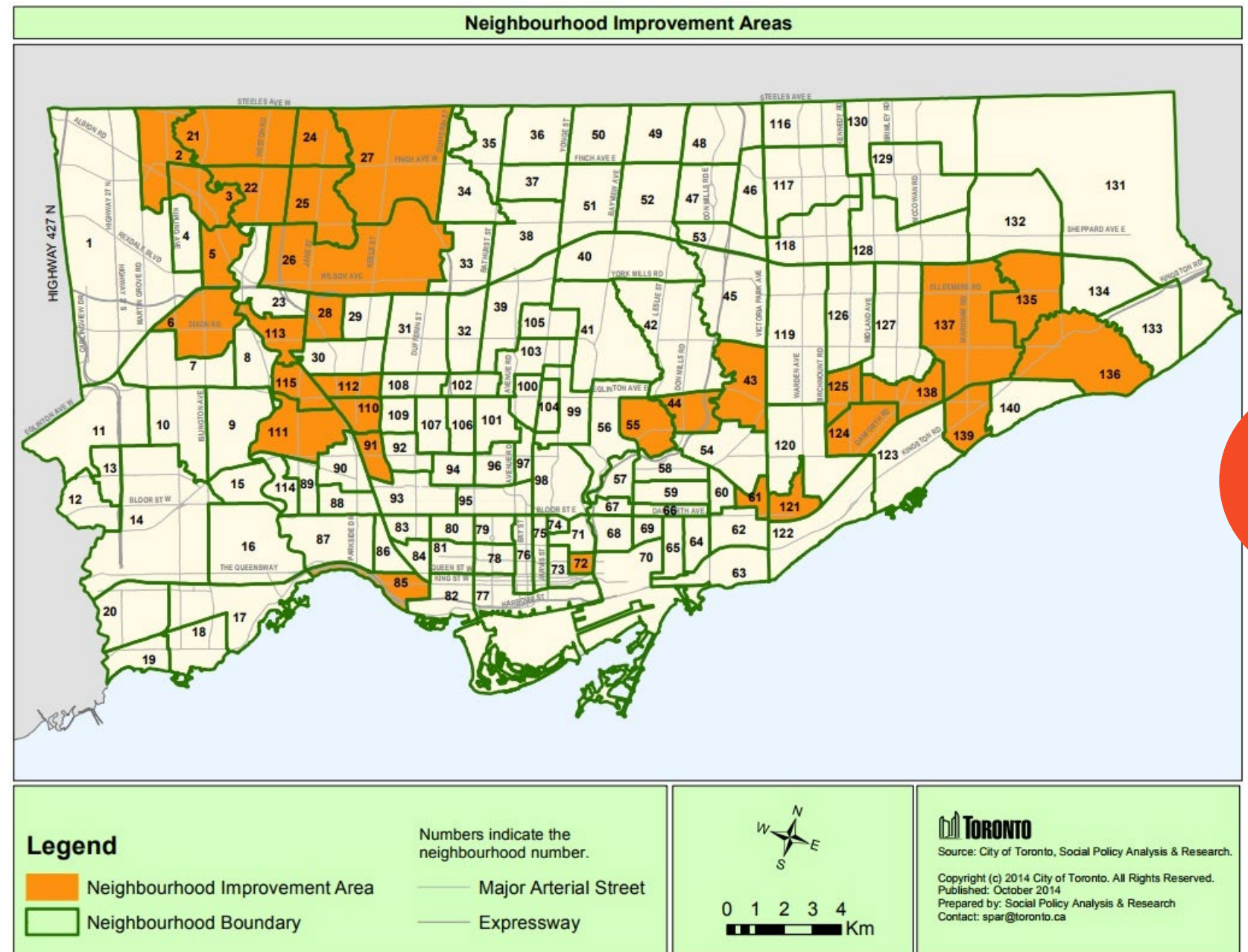


Figure 25 : Toronto's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)¹⁵⁵

2006 - 2012



Figure 26 : Census maps of people/households under the LICO-AT (Low-income cut-offs, after tax) (top) and Indigenous and Visible Minorities (bottom) within Metro Toronto in 2021 and Transit City. The map illustrates how the proposed Transit City lines could have connected several low-income and ethnically diverse communities to the existing subway network and the rest of downtown Toronto, particularly in the northwest and northeast regions of the city.



Figure 27 : Roads Department Biennial Report (1957-1958)¹⁵⁶

Case study: The Eglinton Corridor

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. 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.

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.¹⁵⁷ 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".¹⁵⁸

In the 1970s, the corridor was the focus of rapid transit plans. The Eglinton intermediate rapid transit line was planned to extend to the city limits.¹⁵⁹ However, a 1977 impact study once again showed concerns for “considerable community disruption”,¹⁶⁰ describing Eglinton as an underdeveloped area with frequent commercial turnover in Weston Road and Dufferin.¹⁶¹ Proponents hoped the line would attract private investment and improve access and opportunities for marginalized communities.

However, the line was relegated to a second-tier priority, surpassed by the Bloor-Danforth subway extension. In the 1980s, under *Network 2011*, the Eglinton West Rapid Transit Line was once again assigned a third-tier priority, and was a source of discontent for the City of York.¹⁶²

Plans for an LRT resurfaced in the 2007 *Transit City* plan, and eventually evolved into the current project: the 19km Eglinton-Scarborough Crosstown LRT project, with a western extension to Mississauga under construction and a planned eastern extension to Malvern.¹⁶³

In the meantime, however, the equity considerations along the corridor have changed. In the 2000s, Eglinton was

designated as an intensification corridor intended for high-density, mixed-use development¹⁶⁴, and the debates around *Transit City* focused on whether the line should be underground or overground. These plans failed to address the disruption either development would cause, leaving the surrounding communities and businesses with a project that began in 2013 and is still ongoing.

In communities of colour like Mount Dennis and Little Jamaica, the legacies of government neglect and transit provision without regard for impacts on the community have had a devastating effect.¹⁶⁵ Anticipation for transit has attracted “landlords and developers who are now gobbling up a lot of the properties and raising rent for people who have lived there for years”.¹⁶⁶ By 2021, Little Jamaica had lost over 50 businesses, and the local advocates argue that foot traffic has suffered from a combination of construction and lack of communication from transit officials.¹⁶⁷ They assert that “gentrification and the impact on existing communities was not given adequate consideration, and therefore neither was the value of Black culture or Black lives”.¹⁶⁸ The caution around the “ill effects” of transit investments that were a part of historical transit analyses along Eglinton have not carried on to

today’s affected communities.

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 in the area. Both the Mount Dennis and Little Jamaica communities have mobilized against future residential and retail displacement, implementing strategies that aim to boost the local economy, celebrate cultural heritage, and preserve affordable housing. These plans aim to tap into local resources and talents, particularly supporting Black and Afro-Caribbean communities in the area, previously overlooked in the City’s assessments of the corridor.¹⁶⁹

This situation highlights a significant tension: not only can delayed transit feel like denied transit, but when it finally arrives, it risks benefiting 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

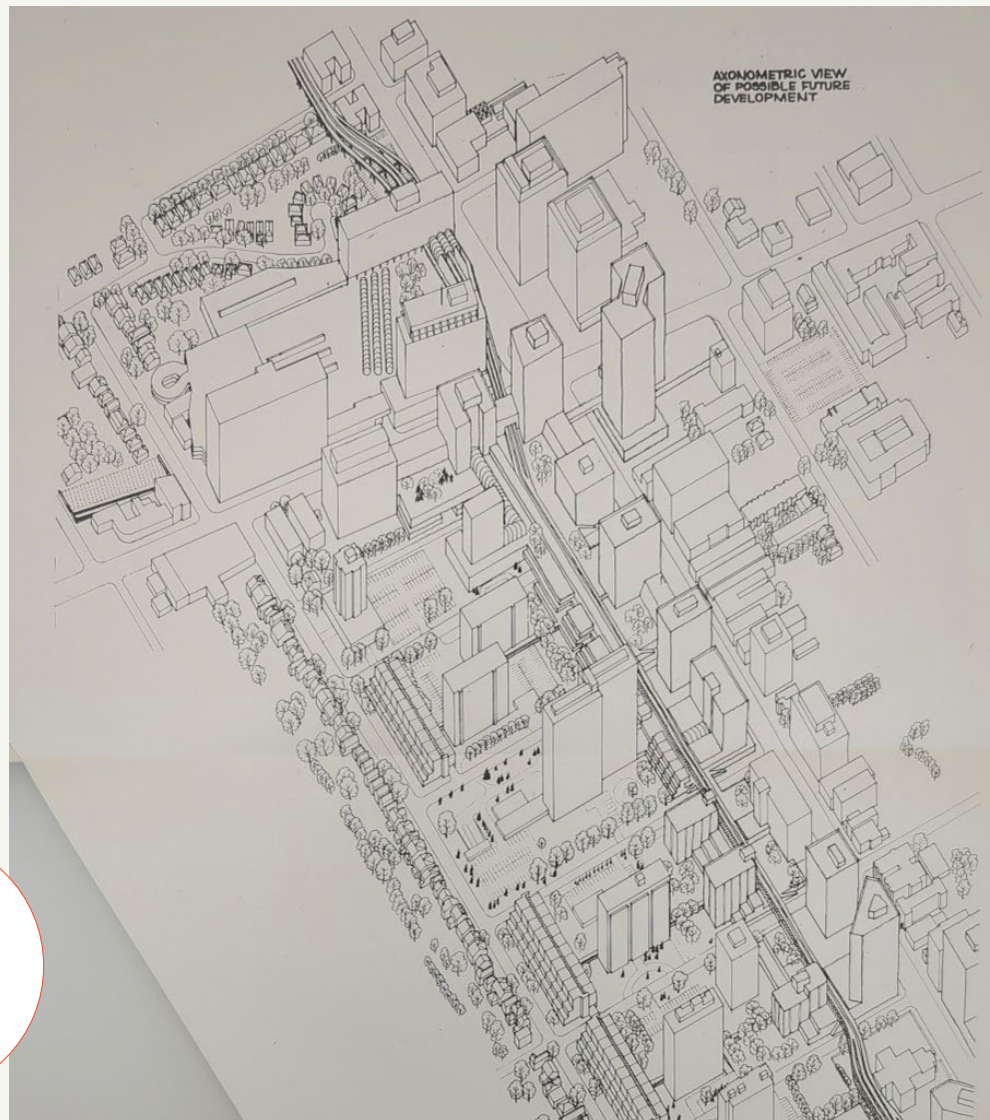


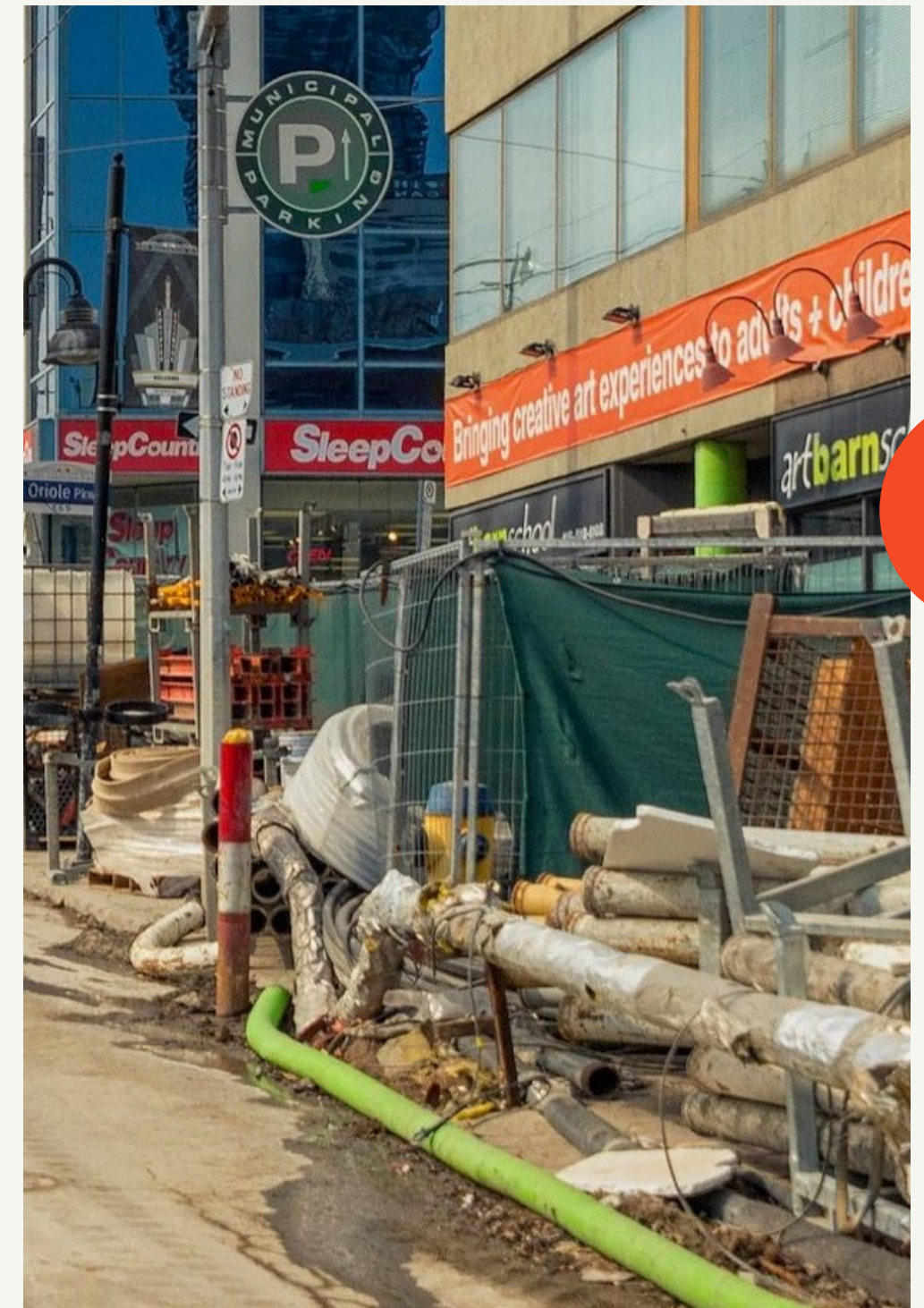
Figure 28 : Image from a study of GO-Urban's impact on Eglinton, focusing on minimizing disruption to adjacent single-family neighbourhoods, Performance & impact of the alternatives, year 2000¹⁷⁰

Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC).¹⁷¹ For example, in response to an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the Eglinton-Crosstown LRT, a Toronto City councillor member motion filled with council asked:

“The ECLRT passes through two of Toronto’s priority neighbourhoods: Mount Dennis and Victoria Village. These two priority neighbourhoods are the sites of some of the more serious concerns from communities in the ECLRT project. To date, these concerns have been approached purely from a technical perspective instead of a broader planning perspective that includes other factors such as social and socio-economic impacts.”

The case of the Eglinton Corridor reflects the challenges of not only building rapid transit, but doing so in a manner that ensures existing residents can reap the economic, social and environmental benefits of new transit assets. The planning paradigm of mixed-use transit-oriented development, while widely acknowledged as effective planning, is not inherently or naturally inclusive. When applied in historically underserved neighbourhoods in particular, significant purposiveness is required to ensure plans do not reproduce inequities in new forms. This can include proactive and extensive engagement, commercial and residential anti-displacement policies and local economic development strategies that can protect and support existing tenants and local business owners as property values

predictably rise. Without such tools, the most vulnerable existing residents that would benefit most from new transit provision may become at risk of being pushed out to other transit and amenity-poor locations.



“TRANSIT DELAYED IS TRANSIT DENIED”

Lessons Learned From Toronto’s History?

Chapter 06

“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. While this comparison does not account for other aspects (e.g., the unrealistic expectations from the proprietary *GO-Urban* system), it is also a very conservative comparison: the implications for the city’s forgotten peripheral neighbourhoods is much harder to quantify.

At its core, transportation planning is about reconciling a series of tensions and trade-offs: between which parts of the city are prioritized for investment of scarce resources; between expensive and lower cost technologies; between the needs of current residents in a neighbourhood and those who may live there in the future; between an urge to



move quickly and a desire for deliberative, meaningful community engagement; between politically and technically driven decision making. How these tensions and trade-offs have been handled in Toronto has varied over time.

Today, the GTA is in a period of change. As the region is again facing rapid population growth and unprecedented housing pressures, transportation infrastructure investment is on the rise. Post-pandemic,

Toronto is experiencing the largest transit building boom in a generation, propelled by policies that are reshaping both the processes and some of the outcomes of infrastructure investment.

In 2019, Premier Doug Ford revealed a new *Subway Transit Plan for the GTA* that revived several lines from previous plans, such as the Yonge subway into York Region, and added massive investment in the regional GO train network that also

serves some Toronto's inner suburbs.¹⁷² These projects have moved from concept to construction in what feels like record time, backed by the full financial and institutional power of the provincial government. The Province has also emphasized the use of transit investments as a catalyst for dense development around the station areas to meet housing goals. At the same time, the plans were announced in a big reveal that was backed by very little consultation or planning evidence. The business cases for the major subway projects were released after rather than before the announcement of the projects, and show decidedly mixed benefit-cost ratios and return on investment.

How does this surge of development fare against the history of transportation planning in Toronto? Are we seeing a return to Metro-style public development? If so, what historical lessons can be applied to today's context and challenges? In this section we return to key equity themes and discuss them in relation to current developments: The region's legacy of fragmented governance, the persistent culture of budgetary thrift, implications of the mismatch between land use and transit, representation deficits, and the ongoing reliance on private automobiles.

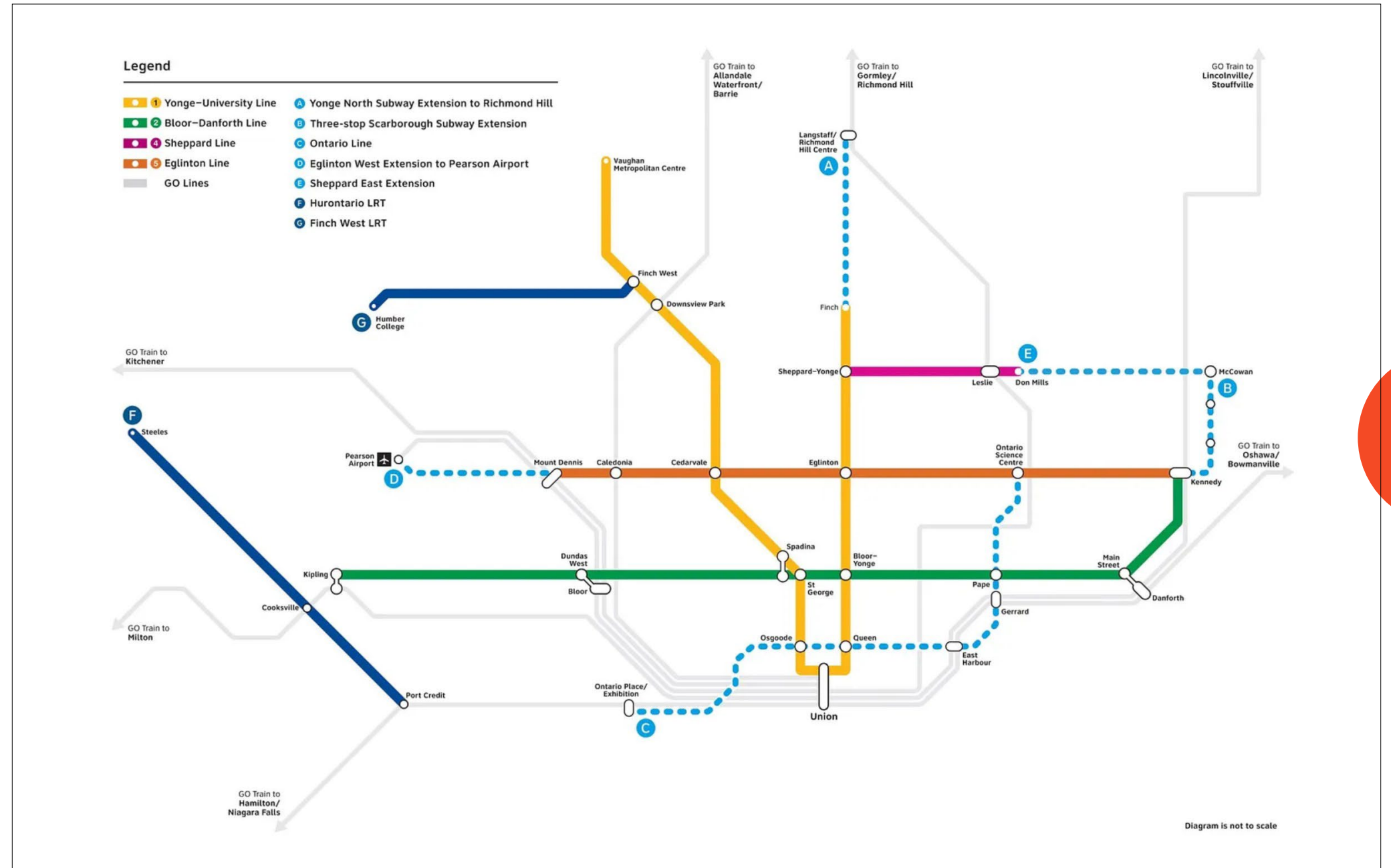


Figure 29 : The Subway Transit Plan for the GTA¹⁷³

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.

Project	Past iterations	Status
Eglinton Crosstown	GO-Urban, Network 2011, Transit City	Under construction, mostly complete
Finch West LRT	Transit City	Under construction, mostly complete
Eglinton Crosstown West to Pearson Airport	GO-Urban, Network 2011, Transit City	Under construction
Ontario Line	GO-Urban, Network 2011 "Relief Line"	Under construction
Scarborough Subway Extension	Replacing the decommissioned Scarborough RT	Under construction
Yonge North Subway Extension	None	Pre-construction

Table 2: Key transportation projects within the City of Toronto led by the provincial government

A legacy of fragmented governance and widening suburban-urban divide

Toronto's transit plans have time and again become mired in conflicts between municipalities and other levels of government or the source of conflicts between suburban and urban voters. As a high-stakes issue with considerable budgetary and electoral implications, it has repeatedly been subject to political calculations at the expense of social needs. This was the case with the infighting over *Network 2011's* prioritization, *GO-Urban* technological aspirations, and the *Transit City* debate. Ultimately, planning follows funding, and in Ontario, this places the Province in a structural advantage.

First, the Province has increasingly applied a top-down approach to “get things done”. The Province has centralized control over rapid transit planning in the region by consolidating control over Metrolinx, taking responsibility for rapid transit construction, and removing procedural barriers to transportation development.¹⁷⁴

While these steps have contributed to the acceleration of transit development, they come at a cost of limiting resident intervention in major transportation

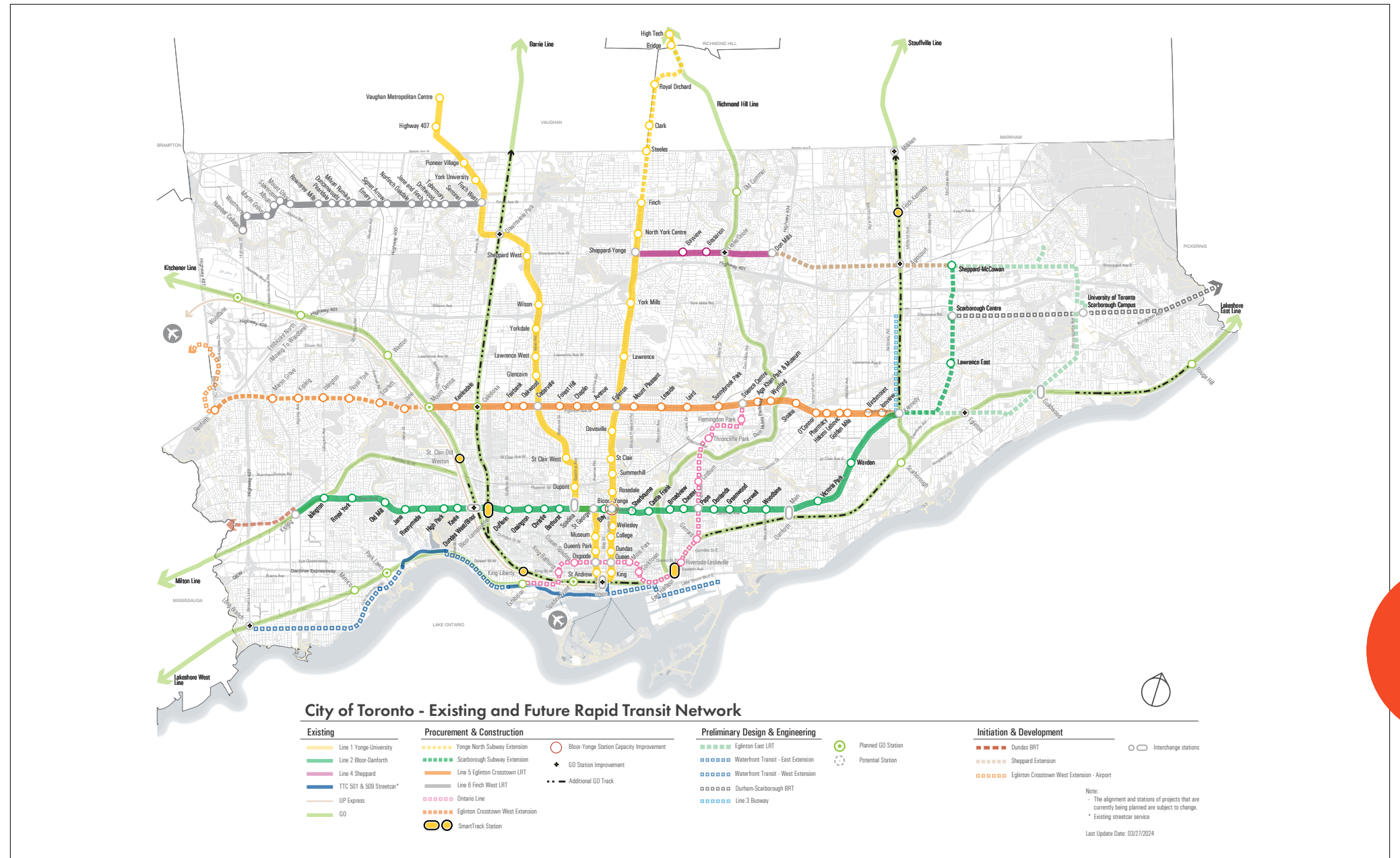


Figure 30 : City of Toronto - Existing and Future Rapid Transit Network.¹⁷⁶

projects. Notably, current plans were supported by legislation that restricts property owners' rights to challenge expropriations for priority transit projects and streamlines municipal and utilities service (ex. utilities) and right of way access.¹⁷⁵ These strategies aim to address lengthy permitting processes, resident legal appeals and utility relocations which are key drivers of high transit costs in North

America, but they can limit meaningful community engagement in decision making.

Second, the legacy of discordant planning and “divisive politics” used during the *Transit City* era continues to persist today,¹⁷⁷ with ongoing mismatches between

funding and responsibilities in Toronto's new transit lines. Toronto's marginalized neighbourhoods have suffered from this the most, as provincial agendas historically prioritized suburban and regional development, for example the 407 over the completion of the full Sheppard line. The tensions between urban and suburban communities, especially around infrastructure priorities and the role of the car in local areas, are ongoing. Suburban voters have consistently elected politicians that advocate for making driving easier and more affordable, while prioritizing rapid transit projects that are off road and do not interfere with traffic. However, the image of the suburbs does not necessarily keep up with their reality.¹⁷⁸ The suburbs have evolved and changed over the past decades, becoming more diverse and often outpacing the city's ability to provide necessary services and connectivity. To balance these needs, the Province's regional coordination requires the inclusion of a careful equity lens.

From a scarcity mentality to abundance

Toronto's fiscal conservatism of previous decades has shifted into the current period of generous funding, fuelled by

a renewed sense of urgency reminiscent of the 1950s. Premier Ford's transit plan introduced a mindset of building "everything, everywhere, all at once", which seemingly reversed decades of plans that were designed to fit slow and limited investment. The development timelines of plans such as *Network 2011* and *Transit City* created political infighting and, since plans were quick to be cancelled, left many transit lines on the drawing table.

The Ford approach seemingly goes against a decades-old Toronto orthodoxy that has seen financial scarcity pit one project against another, and intense battles to design the most cost-effective systems. Without the financial constraints, the Ford government has moved at warp speed to announce, plan and begin construction on four new rapid lines in Toronto, each with significant expensive underground components - the Ontario Line, the Eglinton West LRT extension, the Scarborough Subway and the Yonge North subway extension. Yet the strategy of moving quickly has not been effective at controlling costs. While the total package of projects was initially estimated to cost \$28.5 billion, the cost of the Ontario Line alone has already ballooned to \$27.2 billion in 2024, a far cry from the \$10.9 billion projected in 2019.¹⁷⁹

Importantly, current centralized efforts of transit planning and delivery with the province are once again causing tensions with local priorities. Detailed planning and funding for bus rapid transit along major arterial roads in the suburbs has been slow to materialize, and conflicts have arisen over the density and quality of mixed use developments being proposed for the new station areas. Ultimately, despite the new provincial planning paradigm on capital spending, the same issues of inadequate operational funding persist, leaving the City and the TTC once again playing catch-up in maintaining existing assets and developing transportation infrastructure.

Land use and transportation planning: disconnected and marginalized, or integrated and gentrified?

Historically, the lack of coordination between transportation, housing, and land use planning was a major source of inequity in Toronto and elsewhere. However, contemporary ideas of transit-oriented development that integrate these fields risk reproducing these inequities. *Transit City* illustrates this concern. The plan aimed to serve long-underserved



Priority Neighbourhoods, spur revitalization, and support Regeneration Areas. The City anticipated the disruption and potential increases in property and land values but with Metrolinx in control of the actual project and municipal planning powers constrained by provincial regulation, little was done to mitigate displacement along these lines. Residents raised concerns over disruption to businesses and residences during public consultations¹⁸⁰, but these local considerations were never seriously weighed against the need for cost efficiencies and the goals for general economic and environmental benefits. Proactive policies from the outset of the project to ensure affordability and mitigate displacement during and after construction were not widely included. This has left residents of priority neighbourhoods who were intended to benefit from the project exposed to market pressures and the risks of displacement.

Toronto's housing policy has evolved from encouraging apartments in the inner suburbs that are affordable but largely inaccessible by high quality rapid transit, to condos in downtown and at key transit nodes throughout the city that are accessible but increasingly unaffordable.¹⁸¹ Recent transit investment is a step in improving accessibility but may further

reduce affordability in a time when affordable housing stocks are quickly being eroded.¹⁸² A transit equity lens that aims to address today's challenges alongside older ones should address the uneven benefits and costs of increased development along transit lines.

Under-representation of marginalized groups

Toronto's planning was historically shaped by elites, leaving low-income communities marginalized and unheard. This has been a continuing and systemic issue: apartment neighbourhoods, built by elites for others, have become ports of entry for immigrants, noncitizens, and other groups that are less likely to have political influence and see their transit needs addressed.¹⁸³ Time and time again, transit planners were attentive primarily to homeowners and resident associations, who were able to halt major projects like expressways, while renters and other residents often struggled to access necessary services.

A lack of representation of marginalized voices impacts transit planning and other policy decisions and necessitates more robust engagement to ensure diverse needs are incorporated throughout



the planning process. Today, impacted communities like Jane-Finch and Mount Dennis are developing neighbourhood plans that align development with local economic, social, and ecological priorities. However, these plans arrive as gentrification is already underway.

Moreover, the current provincial dominance in municipal transportation planning results in remote decision-making that shows a pattern of acknowledging local equity concerns only after significant public backlash (see *Box 6.1*). As policies supporting community benefits wane, vulnerable populations face the greatest risks, with new projects increasing the

prospects of gentrification and displacement. Going forward, provincial agencies would benefit from working more closely with the City which has engaged in local community planning in priority neighbourhoods, in order to develop complete communities that avoid displacement.

Similarly, Indigenous communities in Toronto have historically been marginalized and excluded from transit planning processes. Our archival search found no references to meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities on large-scale transit planning. As the city undergoes rapid transit development, it is crucial to recognize and address the unique needs

and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. This includes acknowledging the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, ensuring meaningful consultation and engagement, and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and practices at the onset of transportation projects, rather than the end (see *Box 6.1*). Equitable TOD must prioritize the rights and interests of Indigenous communities, including the involvement of Indigenous nations and non-governmental organizations to provide access to affordable housing, culturally appropriate services, and economic opportunities.

BOX 6.1: REACTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY VOICES



Figure 1: Eglinton Crosstown LRT¹⁸⁴

Recent transit projects have repeatedly made concessions to local needs unequally, and only after public resistance. The following examples reveal a pattern of a reactive approach to community input, as opposed to proactive and premeditated needs assessments.

Finch West LRT: Jane-Finch, a historically underserved apartment neighbourhood, faced significant challenges when Metrolinx initially reneged on its promise to provide land for a much-needed and long-sought Community Hub and Centre for the Arts. After intense community pushback, Metrolinx ultimately reaffirmed its commitment, securing the space by 2023.¹⁸⁵

Ontario Line: Several local campaigns have opposed the line's effect on public spaces, with mixed results. In Leslieville-Riverside, residents unsuccessfully fought to have the line built underground to avoid the removal of trees and the construction of barriers in Jimmy Simpson Park; similarly at Osgoode Hall Metrolinx successfully rebuffed legal efforts to stop the removal of a historic fence and trees on the property; and in Thorncliffe Park, Metrolinx reached a \$50-million deal for a new religious and community centre, after the line was slated to run through the main commercial area, including an existing mosque.¹⁸⁶

GO Transit expansion: The threat of developing a Metrolinx rail yard in the Don Valley led to local outcry due to community and environmental impacts, resulting in the project being relocated to North York.¹⁸⁷

Eglinton Crosstown West Extension: An Indigenous-led coalition and Mount Dennis residents fought unsuccessfully to bury a 1.5 kilometer stretch of the Eglinton West Extension line to protect a green area where trees would be cut down for the elevated guideway.¹⁸⁸

The lingering supremacy of car-oriented planning

Toronto famously rejected its expressway plan in 1971 in favour of transit. But this shift was not only unrealized but also far from unequivocal. Notably, Metro pushed forward with Black Creek Drive in the 1980s, designating it as an arterial but retaining the width of the expressway it replaced. The region as a whole continues to be car-oriented to this day. Alternative modes of surface transit, such as LRTs and bike lanes, continue to be treated by many as threats to private vehicles' right-of-way and remain highly contested.

The Province's recent projects double down on this approach, despite the growing investment in transit. The city's new transit lines are chiefly underground or along existing rail corridors, explicitly avoiding taking away road lanes like street-surface LRTs. For example, in 2023 the status of the Sheppard line as an LRT or a subway was still uncertain, with Metrolinx launching a public consultation to determine its fate¹⁸⁹, even though the Sheppard subway has already been deemed "fiscally irresponsible use of taxpayers dollars" by previous studies.¹⁹⁰ As of 2024, the line has been confirmed as a subway extension.¹⁹¹

Moreover, while the Province is investing in transit it is also revamping provincial expressway investment in the outer suburbs. However, despite the accelerated highway infrastructure spending and construction, recent legislation also prohibits new tolls on provincial highways and supports removing bike lanes, prioritizing drivers' interests over the needs and safety of all transportation users.¹⁹²

The true costs of inequitable transportation planning?

Toronto is on the verge of a much-needed expansion of transit services that would enhance access to opportunities, but the projects being promoted raise the question: opportunities for whom? The recent provincial efforts to improve and integrate transit in the GTA are nonetheless accompanied by legislation that further incentivizes driving, loosens environmental protection, and entrenches inequitable development by disincentivizing meaningful engagement, communication, funding, and planning.

For example, while equity benefits are being created within the region through the construction of new transit lines in Mississauga and Hamilton, the introduction of long-awaited regional fare integration,

and the dramatic expansion of GO rail service, there are also plans for major highway developments in the region.¹⁹³ These projects, including Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, have sparked controversy and are under public and legal scrutiny due to their potential environmental impacts.¹⁹⁴

Moreover, under the proposed Get It Done Act, the Province aims to streamline Environmental Assessments, expropriation, and consultation processes to favour faster timelines.¹⁹⁵ It also bans new provincial toll roads, which has been an effective tool when paired with public transit to address road congestion. In other words, the improved future transit service is coming at the real economic social *and* environmental cost of embedding car dependence into the fabric of the region.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 07

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: Transit planning should be aligned with broader social objectives like reducing poverty, promoting inclusivity, building complete communities, and enhancing overall neighbourhood well-being. The allocation of resources for

public transit should be done in a way that ensures equity and benefits all communities, especially those that have been historically underserved.

Change the culture of representation in decision-making: Planning should ensure broader and more inclusive participation, actively incorporating input from under-represented groups and establishing robust community accountability processes. Practices such as Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) can build the capacity of affected communities through investments in local advocacy groups to ensure their informed perspectives are integrated into plans.¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere, groups have successfully proposed alternative transportation plans that have outperformed public ones in terms of social, environmental, and economic outcomes.¹⁹⁷

Coordinate planning, housing, land use, and social policy to match transit investment with protections against displacement: Enhanced coordination between different sectors that intersect with transportation planning, municipal divisions, and levels of government can help projects achieve economic goals without compromising on social equity, community resilience, and environmental sustainability. Specifically, transit-oriented development should safeguard against potential

displacement, environmental harm, and increased inequality. This requires developing anti-displacement policies that are often outside the scope of transit planning. Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs), workforce development programs, social procurement, affordable housing, and Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are other potential tools that can be combined to protect affected communities.

Ensure quantitative and qualitative methods are used in measuring impact of transportation decision-making: Alongside the quantitative planning tools (e.g., traffic studies and housing affordability metrics), qualitative data from community surveys and focus groups can capture a more holistic perspective on the impact of transportation and development. The overreliance on quantitative aggregates has been an issue for transportation planning since the early days of the discipline and it continues to disadvantage equity-deserving communities today. More rigorous and diverse data collection can support the institutionalization of equity metrics in policies and future plans.

Integrate equity metrics and include key performance indicators (KPIs) at every stage of the transit project process: From capital investment

planning to procurement, equity analyses and metrics should be integrated and monitored continuously. This approach goes beyond merely setting targets at the start; it necessitates regular, transparent updates on progress. For instance, information on the use of diverse suppliers and achievement of specific milestones should be clearly communicated in assessments and final reports. To improve transparency, an accessible dashboard should be created, enabling the public to track investments, review consultation efforts, and follow a project's progress.

Equity is not a one-size-fits-all approach; it must be responsive to the specific

context: Approaches to embedding equity need to be context-responsive, and therefore successfully integrating it into projects can be an iterative process, tailored to the project's objectives and evolving community priorities. Consider co-creating equity data and metrics with community-based organizations to leverage their expertise in evaluation, data collection (both qualitative and quantitative), and enhance community engagement efforts. For example, instead of hosting separate engagement sessions which residents might find difficult to attend, embed consultations into existing local events to reach under-engaged groups.

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- ⁵ Golub & Martens, 2014; Lucas et al., 2019; Martens et al., 2012; Pereira et al., 2017
- ⁶ Karner et al., 2024
- ⁷ Lucas et al., 2019
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- ⁹ Litman, 2022
- ¹⁰ Allen & Farber, 2020
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- ¹² Zuk et al., 2018
- ¹³ Delmelle, 2021; Doucet, 2021; Easton et al., 2020
- ¹⁴ Delmelle, 2021
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- ¹⁷ Farber & Marino, 2017; Pitter, 2023; Rankin et al., 2014
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- ¹⁹ Hertel et al., 2015; Karner et al., 2018
- ²⁰ Karner et al., 2018
- ²¹ Chakraborty, 2006
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- ²³ Mohl, 1964
- ²⁴ Karner et al., 2018
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- ²⁶ High et al., 2020; Perl et al., 2015
- ²⁷ Tattrie, 2014
- ²⁸ Tattrie, 2014
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- ³³ Toronto Daily Star, 1960
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- ³⁶ Fillion et al., 2020; Sorensen & Hess, 2015
- ³⁷ Sorensen, 2011
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- ³⁹ Levy, 2013
- ⁴⁰ Hodge et al, 2017; White, 2003; Ford, 1959
- ⁴¹ Dakin, 1969
- ⁴² White, 2003
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- ⁴⁴ Bonnell, 2014
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- ⁴⁹ Honderich, 1955, p.7
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- ⁵⁵ Metropolitan Toronto, 1955;1957;1959;196
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- ⁵⁹ Levy, 201
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- ⁶³ Globe and Mail, 1957, p.1; Toronto Daily Star, 1959, p.1; Kerr, 1961
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- ⁶⁵ Metro Toronto Planning Board, 1967
- ⁶⁶ Osbaldeston, 2008; Robinson, 2011

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- ⁶⁸ Walker, 1959
- ⁶⁹ Stewart, 2007
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