

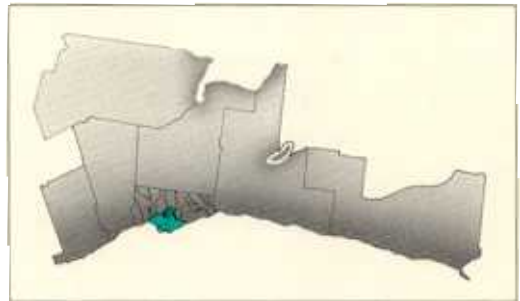


CHAPTER 10: THE CENTRAL WATERFRONT

This chapter deals with the bioregion's Central Waterfront and its three bays: Humber, Toronto, and Ashbridge's. Two rivers — the Humber and the Don — empty into this part of the waterfront. South and east of Toronto Bay, separating it from Ashbridge's Bay (or what little remains of it), stretches the Leslie Street Spit which, with the Toronto Islands, forms a southern ring around Toronto Harbour. On the landward side, the Central Waterfront stretches east from Park Lawn Road to Woodbine Avenue, while on the north lies the escarpment carved by the shoreline of ancient Lake Iroquois.

The Central Waterfront embraces parts of the waterfronts of two cities: Etobicoke (at its eastern end), and Toronto (as far as the Beach). This area, home of indigenous peoples before European exploration and settlement began, the meeting place where ancient trails joined, and the trading place where indigenous and other peoples have traditionally traded goods and services, is the cradle of our modern region.

It is also the central part of an area identified by the International Joint Commission as one of the hot spots around



Lake Ontario, with clean-up problems as complex and difficult as any in the Great Lakes. In addition, it is the area on the entire waterfront in which the greatest change is occurring. Almost all the places along this waterfront are in a state of transition, which raises major issues but also produces major opportunities — opportunities to regenerate the environment, reconnect the waterfront to the river valleys and the cities to their waterfront, and stimulate economic recovery.

This is the part of the waterfront where the Government of Ontario first made significant interventions, signalling the emerging importance of waterfront issues in the Province. The Provincial commitment to making substantive changes in the way the waterfront is

As we approach Toronto, everything looks doubly beautiful, especially the glimpses of blue Ontario's waters, sunlit, yet with a slight haze through which occasionally a distant sail. The city made the impression on me of a lively dashing place. The lake gives it its character.

Whitman, W. 1904. *Walt Whitman's diary in Canada*. Edited by W. S. Kennedy. Boston: Small, Maynard and Company.

redeveloped can be found in three moves: the declaration of a Provincial Interest in the Etobicoke motel strip and in the East Bayfront/Port Industrial Area; and the ministerial zoning order freezing development on the Harbourfront and Stadium Road lands until redevelopment plans met the test of public values and objectives, including public access to the waterfront.

As then-Premier David Peterson and Cabinet Minister John Sweeney explained when announcing these actions, the Province wanted to ensure the integrity of the Royal Commission's work and provide an appropriate opportunity for formulating policies and plans.

In October 1989, the provincial and federal governments asked the Royal Commission to carry out an in-depth environmental audit of the East Bayfront/Port Industrial Area. In December 1990 the provincial Minister of the Environment asked the Commission to study the feasibility of relocating the Gardiner Expressway, and to examine the possibility of pooling lands and integrating future plans for the Canadian National Exhibition, Ontario Place, Fort York, and HMCS York. Among them, these three studies cover the most

important issues on the waterfront: environment, transportation, and land use.

In response, the Royal Commission organized intergovernmental steering committees and work groups, and contracted consultants who have a wide variety of disciplines, skills, and experience, to research the issues and formulate policy, planning, and program recommendations. The Commission also consulted the private sector (business and labour), neighbourhood, environmental, and other community groups, and members of the general public to obtain their views of the problems and opportunities.

The results of these collaborative efforts were published in four background reports (No. 10, *Environment in Transition: A Report on Phase I of an Environmental Audit of Toronto's East Bayfront and Port Industrial Area* (RCFTW 1990); No. 11, *Pathways: Towards an Ecosystem Approach: A Report of Phases I and II of an Environmental Audit of Toronto's East Bayfront and Port Industrial Area* (Barrett and Kidd 1991); No. 14, *Garrison Common Preliminary Master Plan* (Berridge Lewinberg Greenberg et al. 1991); and No. 15, *Toronto Central Waterfront Transportation Corridor Study* (IBI Group et al. 1991)) and, in addition, 12 working papers and an in-depth technical report.

All work was based on the ecosystem approach. A common thread running through every piece was that, because the Central Waterfront has the greatest pressures, problems, and opportunities, regeneration of that area, more than of any other part of the regional waterfront, requires integrated planning.

Balancing and integrating these issues is difficult but necessary. The best example of doing that can be found in the Royal

Commission's last background report, *Toronto Central Waterfront Transportation Corridor Study*. It is based on the Commission's earlier work, reflecting what had been learned about environmental issues during the environmental audit of the East Bayfront, and applying the understanding of place-making that had been developed as part of the Garrison Common Preliminary Master Plan. In its turn, the corridor study gave those involved an opportunity to apply the ecosystem approach to resolving transportation issues, as well as the challenge of integrated environment, land use, and transportation planning.

Therefore, this chapter begins with an essay that follows "Watershed Update", which summarizes the process and findings of the transportation corridor study, describes how governments could move toward integrating the elements of the ecosystem, and proposes a Stage I program designed to reach that goal.

This is followed by a survey of various places in transition, starting with Humber Bay, the western gateway to the Central Waterfront, and concluding with the Lower Don Lands at the eastern end. There is no reason to comment at length on those waterfront places — Swansea, High Park, Parkdale, the Toronto Islands, and the Beach — that have important qualities of their own but are not in serious or significant transition. Obviously, the Commission recognizes their values, and urges that these be maintained.

For the purposes of this analysis, the Commission classifies the places along the waterfront according to a combination of natural, cultural, and/or functional characteristics. The transitional processes affecting them have been operating for at least 20 years. All these areas have smaller sub-places,

districts or neighbourhoods within them, each with its own characteristics and functions as part of the greater whole. They are discussed in the following order:

Humber Bay:

eastern Etobicoke
Humber bridges
Swansea
High Park
Sunnyside
Parkdale

Garrison Common:

Ontario Place
Exhibition Place
HMCS York and
Coronation Park
Fort York
Northern Industrial Area
Niagara neighbourhood
Fleet Street
Lower Bathurst

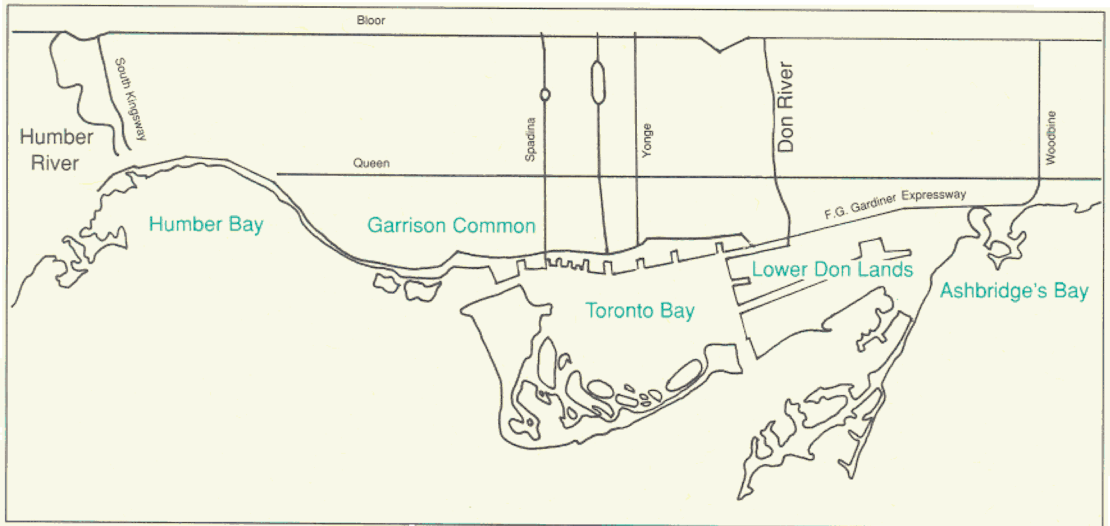
Toronto Bay:

Railway Lands (CityPlace,
Central Park and
Southtown)
Harbourfront
Toronto Island Airport
Union Station, and Bayfront

Lower Don Lands:

East Bayfront
Ataratiri Lands
Gooderham and Worts
Lower Don Industrial Area
Port of Toronto
Cherry Beach
Leslie Street Spit (Tommy
Thompson Park)
Ashbridge's Bay

Map 10.1 Central Waterfront



There is remarkable diversity within and among the different places along the waterfront. It must be recognized and sustained. At the same time, there is the potential to integrate the area's natural and cultural environments with transportation functions and land use in a way that connects the various places along the waterfront, links the waterfront to the hinterland, and attaches the central waterfront to the region.

At present, proponents of plans for the various places bump into one another as they try to move through the maze of approval processes, an intra- and inter-governmental gridlock.

None, however, can move alone. Matters along the waterfront are complex and linked to each other. Progress in shaping and improving the waterfront, regenerating the environment, and reviving the region's economy requires consensus about its future and the various places along it.

Co-ordinated action plans and partnerships, which are also needed, are discussed in Part IV.

WATERSHED UPDATE

In its *Watershed* report, the Commission described the Gardiner/Lakeshore Corridor as the central fact of the Central Waterfront, and noted that:

Depending on the decision made about its future, the people of Greater

Toronto will have an excellent waterfront — or they will not. The waterfront will be integrated into downtown Toronto — or it

will remain essentially separate from it.

The combination of the elevated portion of the Gardiner Expressway, Lake Shore Boulevard underneath it, and the rail corridor beside it has created a physical, visual, and psychological barrier to the Central Waterfront.

*Technology makes a good servant
but a bad master.
— Jacques Ellul*

It is a constant source of noise and air pollution, a hostile, dirty environment for thousands of people who walk under it daily, and a barrier to thousands of others who risk life and limb to get across or around it. The Gardiner/Lakeshore is not only a road; it is a structure. As it processes traffic, it stunts land use; meant to move us along, it limits our opportunities.

The Commission has concluded that the elevated portion of the Gardiner Expressway is incompatible with the fundamental environmental and land-use objectives in the Central Waterfront.

With respect to the rail corridor the Commission concluded that:

As it crosses over major north-south arteries such as York, Bay, and Yonge streets, the rail corridor is a major barrier between the City and the waterfront, visually and in day-to-day pedestrian use. The effect can be greatly reduced by such changes as glass partitions between the sidewalk and road traffic, improved lighting, and possibly opening up retail outlets along the sidewalks under the rail corridor.

The length of the underpass and its barrier effect will be substantially reduced when the rail corridor is narrowed in preparation for redeveloping the Railway Lands.

Pedestrian walkways and amenities could be greatly improved south of the railway corridor, as suggested by the Gardiner/Lakeshore Task Force, which proposed tree-lined, widened sidewalks and improved pedestrian crossings to recreate Lower Yonge as an urban street, rather than an expressway ramp.

Another promising possibility would be to deck over the rail corridor in the central area, to allow pedestrian access between the City and the waterfront, in conjunction with a newly created plaza and park, which would have harbour vistas.

THE PROVINCIAL RESPONSE

In December 1990, in response to these comments, the Province of Ontario asked the Royal Commission, in consultation with the Ministry of Transportation and Metropolitan Toronto, to address the feasibility of relocating the Gardiner Expressway.

SETTING UP THE STUDY

In early 1991, in order to reconcile transportation functions with environmental regeneration and evolving land uses along the Central Waterfront, the Royal

Creating sustainable urban transport systems that meet people's needs equitably and that foster a healthy environment requires putting the automobile back into its useful place as a servant. With a shift in priorities, cars can be part of a broad, balanced system in which public transport, cycling, and walking are all viable options. Neither the exploding Cairos and Delhis nor the relatively stabilized New Yorks and Londons can sustain future growth in automobile use.

Lowe, M. D. 1991. "Rethinking urban transport." In *State of the world 1991*. Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute.

Commission — with the active participation of the Province, Metropolitan Toronto, the City of Toronto, and the federal government — contracted with a consulting team comprising 11 different firms and individuals to undertake a major study.

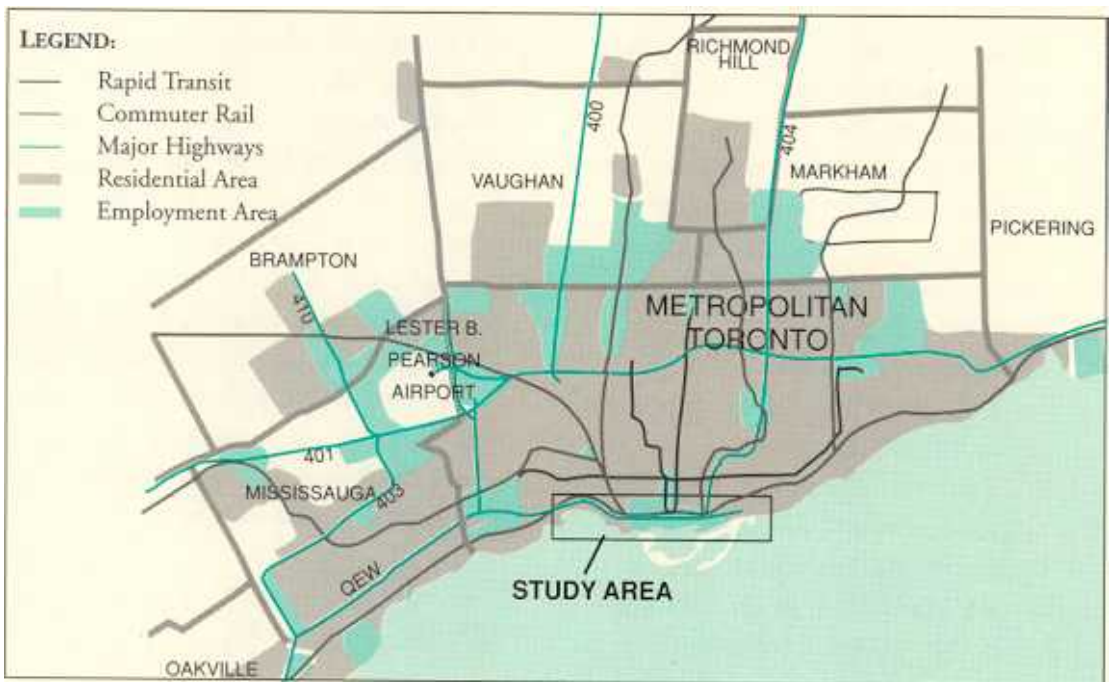
The team that was assembled included a broad range of skills and expertise in a variety of disciplines: environmental science, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, land use and land development, transportation and civil engineering, economics, and finance. A steering committee was organized, composed of senior officials from all four levels of government and the special-purpose bodies concerned; in addition, a work group of technical specialists from Metropolitan Toronto, the City, and the Province was established to provide overall direction and technical advice and support for the study.

The terms of reference specified an integrated ecosystem approach, one that brings together environmental, land-use, transportation, and economic considerations, and asked the team to take a long-term (20- to 30-year) planning perspective.

The team was also asked to consider the Gardiner/Lakeshore in the light of three objectives:

- to improve the Central Waterfront, recognizing its strategic importance as a place, as well as a corridor, in the context of the Greater Toronto bioregion (GTB);
- to improve the relationship and links between the GTB, the central city, and the waterfront, and;
- within the context of the first two objectives, to improve the overall transportation system to and through the Central Waterfront.

Map 10.2 Regional context



The primary geographical focus of the study was the Central Waterfront: i.e., stretching from Park Lawn in the west to Woodbine in the east, Queen Street in the north and the water's edge to the south. However, the study also examined the Central Waterfront in the context of a Toronto's Central Area: from Bathurst Street to the Don River, and from Lake Ontario to the CP Rail tracks north of Dupont Street. Considerable thought was also given to the full regional context and functions: to the area beyond Metropolitan Toronto, as well as the implications for all of Metro of changes to the Central Waterfront.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

The study was completed in November 1991, and the results published in two documents: Publication No. 15, *The Toronto Central Waterfront Transportation Corridor Study* (IBI Group et al. 1991), and a detailed 450-page technical report. In a sense, the study belies its name: while it establishes the fact that the role of the Gardiner/Lakeshore is diminishing in the overall regional transportation system, it does more than that. The study also offers new insights on future environmental conditions; green infrastructure; the strategic value of place-making on the Central Waterfront, supported by a major housing program and transit expansion; the need for consolidated capital budgets among participating governments; and the role of the private sector. It came to the conclusion that:

It is both feasible and desirable to relocate and redesign the expressway and Lake Shore Boulevard, as part of an integrated and phased plan to improve the Central Waterfront.

2. Green infrastructure (parks, open space, and waterfront trail links) and other environmental infrastructure are needed as a priority in regenerating the waterfront.
3. Regionally, workplaces and living places must be integrated, in order to reduce sprawl, improve the regional urban structure, contribute to regional environmental goals, reduce dependence on the automobile, and moderate the pressure of commuter traffic on the Central Waterfront and the central area.
4. There are major opportunities for place-making and community-building on the Central Waterfront.
5. A substantial and sustained long-term housing program would be a catalyst for doing so.
6. There is a need to maintain and extend a connected arterial road system to support the regional economy.
7. A "civilized" street system should be designed as the armature around which places, community, and green infrastructure can be organized in the Central Waterfront.
8. There is an urgent need to expand the transit system as a means of linking the region and the centre and of providing freedom of movement and circulation within the centre.
9. If the necessary critical mass of private and public investment is to be created, integrated approval processes, consolidated capital budgets, and timely decision-making are vital.
10. The framework and conditions for private-sector involvement should be established, in order to fully exploit its enterprise, initiative, and capability for investment and creativity.

The first stage of the suggested implementation program in the study offers opportunities for public/private sector co-operation and action.

These matters, which are part of the summary that comprises the rest of this chapter, are covered in greater detail in *The Toronto Central Waterfront Transportation Corridor Study*; readers who are particularly interested in this aspect of the waterfront should read it in conjunction with this part of the final report.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

The consultants first examined the relationships between the Central Waterfront, the Central Area, and the region in the light of economic trends, population growth, and changing land uses since the Second World War. This included the migration of heavy industry from the centre to the suburbs, the accompanying changes in rail and road systems, office and commercial growth in the Central Area and in the regional centres, and the residential growth of suburbs.

Toronto's Central Waterfront has undergone economic changes similar to those in other major metropolitan areas: at the end of World War II, Canada was the world's fourth-largest manufacturing country. While manufacturing has continued to be of basic importance to Canada's economy in the years since then, its relative significance has declined and its nature has changed as other nations have developed their own capabilities and Canada's service economy has grown.

During the war and for some years following it, Toronto's Central Area and parts of South Etobicoke and Scarborough, as well as areas north of what is now

Metropolitan Toronto, contained perhaps the single largest concentration of manufacturing capability in Canada. This important sector was supported by the massive road-building program of the 1950s and 1960s which included, among other important links, the Gardiner Expressway, the Don Valley Parkway, and Highway 401.

However, as the metropolitan region grew, land values in the Central Area increased dramatically and so did intensification of land uses in the Central Area and Central Waterfront. As early as the 1960s, and in the face of these trends and the resultant increases in road traffic and congestion, heavy industries started to migrate from their original, central locations to suburban sites where land values were lower, modern one- or two-storey facilities could be constructed economically, and adjacent freeways provided greatly improved access for increasingly important truck traffic.

Thirty years ago CN Rail also decided to transfer its rail freight operations from the Central Area to the suburbs. It built a by-pass freight rail line (the York and Halton subdivisions just north of Metro's boundary), and constructed major new freight yards adjacent to that line. Similarly, CP Rail created a major new freight classification yard at Agincourt and moved its freight operations from the centre, while continuing to use its Galt, North Toronto, and Belleville subdivisions (which pass through midtown Metropolitan Toronto) as its main freight line. The railways were responding to the same economic forces and the centrifugal migration of their major industrial customers: it was efficient and economic to build the extensive new classification yards on suburban land, which was also well served by highways for truck

interchange movement, and to free up more valuable downtown land for other, more intensive, urban uses.

The railways' move also freed up significant capacity on the "spider's web" of radial rail lines converging on Union Station, allowing the Province of Ontario to introduce commuter rail service, initially on the Lake Shore West and Lake Shore East lines, in 1967.

The major concentrations of heavy industry, as well as of other industrial activities, are now in the outer reaches of Metropolitan Toronto (e.g., towards Pearson International Airport and in northeast Scarborough) and beyond (in Oakville, north Mississauga, Brampton/Bramalea, Vaughan, Markham, Pickering, Ajax, Oshawa, etc.). While some of these

municipalities had substantial industrial activity during and following the War, all have benefitted economically from the industrial exodus from central Toronto, and have experienced related residential growth.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, most of the remaining underdeveloped land in Metropolitan Toronto was covered, and there has been dramatic population growth in the outer regional municipalities (Peel, Durham, York, and Halton) in the past two decades.

As documented in the 1990 *Greater Toronto Area Urban Structure Concepts Study* (IBI Group et al.), earlier suburban residential development in Metropolitan Toronto was relatively compact and occurred in the context of a well-developed urban transit system. Until very recently, by contrast,

Map 10.3 Major existing industrial areas, freight rail, and highway facilities



development in the outer regions tended to be at lower densities, without the benefit of extensive urban transit services, and it created extensive auto-dependent areas surrounding Metropolitan Toronto. These trends added greatly to the pressure for cross-boundary commuting trips to jobs within Metropolitan Toronto, a large majority of which are by automobile.

As these regional changes were going on, a trend developed on the Central Waterfront for more intense and specialized land uses, utilizing the hundreds of hectares of prime land vacated by industrial and rail activities. Obvious examples include the expanding financial service industry, manifested in the office buildings of major international and national financial institutions in Toronto's central core. Office, retail, and trade activities also expanded and intensified greatly in the Central Area, as well as in other city centres (e.g., North York, Scarborough, Mississauga) in keeping with the Metropolitan Toronto Official Plan, the Official Plans of adjacent municipalities, and provincial policies.

In recent years, total office/commercial growth in the regional centres and throughout the region rivalled that of the Central Area in absolute terms; but the Central Area remains an order of magnitude greater in size, diversity, and critical importance than any others. While continuing growth is anticipated in all these centres, it is expected that the Central Area will remain paramount in the region and will continue as a major financial centre in the global markets of the next century. In

addition, the Central Waterfront has become the focal point for Toronto's important international tourism, trade, and convention industries and associated recreational areas and facilities.

While there has been a tendency to move heavy manufacturing and related warehousing to the suburbs, there has been significant growth in a wide variety of light industrial activities, sometimes referred to as urban industrial, which are thriving in the shoulder areas adjacent to the financial core. These activities, many of which are directly related to office/commercial activities but cannot support premium rents, include the burgeoning information industry (computer systems, data processing centres, word processing, software development, communications) and media industries (e.g., publishing, film, music, visual art) that have expanded in their own right and in support of other commercial activities.

The Central Area will remain paramount in the region and will continue as a major financial centre in the global markets of the next century.

Such urban industrial activities tend to be "at home" in medium-rise (four to eight-storey) buildings located on urban

streets, and have naturally congregated in buildings in the shoulder areas surrounding the financial core. Accordingly, these areas have been transformed in both occupying uses and physical rehabilitation, particularly during the past two decades.

Beginning in the 1970s, and especially after the OPEC cartel crisis, the suburban dream began to crumble as gas prices rose. At first, those who already lived downtown simply stayed put; later, people who had moved out began to move back in. In doing so, they were renewing a Toronto tradition