

Debunking Toronto's Transportation Myths

Expressways destroy neighbourhoods

Wrong. Not having expressways destroys neighbourhoods. Through traffic is infiltrating city neighbourhoods because it can't get around them, making local streets dangerous. Expressways act as by-passes and remove through traffic from neighbourhoods, thus making local streets quiet and safe again. New expressways can be built throughout the City of Toronto in vacant corridors such as hydro rights-of-way and green space can actually be increased with lidding technology where a deck is built over the expressway and new housing and greenspace built over. If houses are needed to be demolished to make way for expressways, market value is always offered.

Expressways increase pollution

Wrong. Traffic on expressways is generally moving at a fast speed, usually 90-110 km/h. There is far less concentrated pollution at these levels than traffic which is traveling very slowly or is stopping and starting. A car traveling slowly puts out three times the amount of pollution as a car traveling at expressway speed. A car stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic puts out nine times the pollution of a car traveling at expressway speed. Today's cars put out 90% less pollution than their 1970 counterparts and non-polluting engines will be on the market very soon.

Cars are the prime cause of Toronto's smog alerts

Wrong. The vast majority of Toronto's smog is caused by industrial pollution, partly from coal-burning hydro generating stations and partly industrial pollution blowing up from the USA. Only a very small percentage of smog is caused by Toronto cars — about 9%.

If we build public transit, people will get out of their cars

Not necessarily. In 1971, municipal expressway-building stopped in Toronto and the rapid transit system was expanded with no new road-building. However, in forty years, transit use has barely increased and auto use has continued to grow. There is no sign that this will change. This policy has completely failed. If we build transit, it must be rapid and reach all parts of the city in less than 30 minutes from the centre before people will use it and leave their cars at home.

If a road is closed, traffic just disappears

Wrong. Traffic mostly never disappears, it just goes to other roads. When the DVP or Gardiner are closed for repairs, other streets such as Don Mills Road, Lakeshore Boulevard and Kingston Road are heavily clogged with the traffic which would normally use the expressways. Only some traffic, up to 13% at most, would disappear due to drivers giving up on looking for an alternative, but this can cause economic damage.

The elevated Gardiner Expressway is a barrier to the lake

Wrong. If the Gardiner was on the surface, then it would be a barrier, because it would be hard to cross, but by being up in the air, people just walk straight under it. The railway corridor, which

requires streets to tunnel under it is the real barrier, not to mention all of the condo buildings along the shoreline. After the east Gardiner was taken down, the people of Riverdale found themselves cut off from the lakeshore because they could not cross Lake Shore Boulevard as it was carrying expressway traffic, while previously, they could just walk under the Gardiner.

Cities everywhere are taking down elevated highways

Wrong. San Francisco's Embarcadero Freeway collapsed in an earthquake. It was decided not to put it back up again because, firstly it was a small spur highway and not a major route, and secondly, being in an earthquake zone, it was not considered the safe thing to do. Cincinnati only removed some on and off ramps from its elevated highway, but left the through route intact. New York City's West Side Highway, only an elevated road over railway tracks and not a major expressway, fell down because it was so old and was beyond repair. Boston's "Big Dig" was a highway expansion project. A six lane elevated highway was replaced with a ten lane underground highway because the elevated highway could not be expanded. It has been done at tremendous cost, becoming way over budget. The tunnel also has new bridges at both ends. Meanwhile, Bangkok, Shanghai and Tokyo are building elevated highways and Honolulu, San Antonio and Los Angeles are double-decking highways. London and Manchester have elevated highways with stores and parking underneath them.

Expressways destroy the city

How? They carry goods and help the economy. This actually contributes to the economy. U.S. city centres declined due to a prohibitive mortgage policy, nothing to do with roads.

Public Transit is the only answer to Toronto's transportation gridlock

Wrong. As previously mentioned, people will not give up their cars and over 70% of Toronto's population continue to prefer to use them. Also, what if we all relied on transit and it went on strike? The city would be paralysed. Roads don't go on strike. We need both roads and transit.

If we build a new road, it just fills up with traffic, encouraging people to drive more

Wrong. A U.S. study recently done shows that only 5-13% of traffic on a new highway is new traffic. The overwhelming majority is existing traffic which has transferred from other roads making them safer and providing more space on them for other modes of transportation.

We should be encouraging people to get out of their cars and use transit

It is not the responsibility of planners and politicians to dictate or even encourage any form of transportation. This is a personal choice. Planning must recognize this and facilities must be provided to assist the people with whatever mode of transportation they choose. It is the people's choice, not the job of the city to tell people what to do. The best thing is to take a look at people's travel habits and plan both roads and transit to suit them. Then let the people decide which they want to use. It is not the mandate of the city to try to change people's travel habits.

Congestion charging will reduce traffic gridlock

In London, where congestion charging was brought in, many people refused to pay the charge or just drove around the charge zone. Also retail within the charge zone lost 3% of business in the first two weeks, while retail outside the zone gained 2% of business in the same time. Therefore, people were just driving to areas outside the charging zone to do shop. Is it really worth losing business to cut down a little bit of traffic?

Children in schools located near expressways experience more asthma

This has not been proven. The pollution from traffic on local streets, including diesel-polluting buses could be contributing to this. With less concentrated pollution on expressways, it is hard to prove this point. Slow traffic on congested arterial streets could also be causing the asthma. Public transit can also be bad for people's health, as germs carrying colds and flu, etc. can easily spread amongst people in crowded buses and trains, while someone in a private car is shielded from them.

Higher density development will encourage public transit use

Maybe. However, higher density development will cause more traffic congestion as more people mean more cars. Portland, Oregon has experienced this.

According to Jane Jacobs, Toronto should be a city of villages where everyone works close to where they live and walks, takes transit and cycles.

Quite the opposite. People prefer quiet suburban living with lots of green space for their children and big-box shopping. That is why more and more houses are being built further out rather than intensification within the city. Not everyone likes downtown living. Jane Jacobs had no planning degree or formal training. She was just a person with ideas which have contributed to Toronto's congestion and decline.

Expressways cause urban sprawl

Wrong. Development causes urban sprawl. Roads built across an empty area will be hardly used, but roads built where there is development will be greatly used. Also, offices and factories like to locate where there are good roads, so roads bring jobs. If we intensify the city, people will move further out for suburban living, causing sprawl.