

**June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

## **Dear Mayor Guthrie and City Councilors**

Our family lives on Foster Ave, in Guelph and we are writing to Council with our concerns about the rail crossing study carried out by the City of Guelph on the Metrolinx rail corridor. Our specific concerns are around the preferred Edinburgh underpass project provided in the study.

As you should all be aware, the Edinburgh underpass is situated in close proximity to Sunny Acres Park, which is a part of the Guelph Junction and Old City neighbourhoods. Trains are a part of our days with many of our neighbours using them to commute daily to work. As a young family, we have enjoyed being part of this neighbourhood for almost a decade, and we appreciate and understand the importance of public transportation in meeting our Municipal, Provincial, Federal goals to create transportation hubs and meet our emission targets. We believe that these goals, as well as creating safer infrastructure, are possible without harming the communities they are meant to serve.

Our concerns with this study look at two factors that we believe have harmed the community today and could harm the community in the future, should this project proceed. The factor that we believe has harmed our community today is the process followed by the City and the consultant. We also believe that the methodology used in the study could harm our community in the future if this project moves forward.

### **The Process**

Our concerns with the process look at communication and protecting the privacy of the residents potentially and actually impacted by this study. This study, and the technical documents attached to it, provided a staff preferred option for the City's approach to at-grade rail crossings in our neighbourhood. The public Open House presentation identified on slide 20 that, subject to an Environmental Assessment, the Study Area A: Preferred scenario was to put an underpass at the Edinburgh Metrolinx rail crossing. This preferred option came with a drawing in the technical documents of the impact that the underpass would have on the neighbourhood. This included large retaining walls beginning at Sunny Acres Park and down the hill toward Waterloo Avenue, as well as the depiction of a temporary construction road that went along the east side of Edinburgh Road. The impact of the proposed construction showed twenty homes being destroyed, including ours, with a temporary construction road causing most of the impact.

For concerns with communication, the properties shown impacted by the study received no notification that our properties were being shared with the public in this way. We only received a Public Notice from the City of Guelph for the Virtual public open house for the study

of road-level railway crossings in Guelph. No where in this letter does it say that our property was going to be discussed, nor impacted by the study in question. We only found out about the technical report, through one of our neighbours coming door to door with a copy of it and asking if we had heard about it. These are our homes, and if the City was serious about exploring this option, and if the City absolutely needed to share it publicly, we should have been made aware of this personally before the general public.

For protecting the privacy of the residents, we are not sure why this preliminary design work needed to be shared publicly. The Municipal Act says that the City can take information to Council and Committee in closed session when:

- personal matters about an identifiable individual, including municipal or local board employee  
And/or
- a proposed or pending acquisition or disposition of land by the municipality or local board

Why wasn't this approach used in this stage of the process to share the potential impacts on people's homes with council discretely, instead of sharing it broadly with the public in a way that harms property owners? We asked City staff this question during the Information Sessions hosted on Monday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, and we did not receive a complete answer to this question. Claims of providing transparency for taxpayers needs to be balanced with protecting those paying taxes.

This process has been frustrating, and we certainly need to do better. These projects are large and complex, and we know that it takes a lot to get these projects off the ground. This project is about safety and arguably, the City should be investigating options. However, the community members impacted by the study in our neighbourhood, seem to have been an afterthought for those passing through our neighbourhood either on roads or rails.

### The Methodology

Our concerns with the methodology, seem to be consistent across all members we have discussed this with in our neighbourhood. The impact of the CN rail traffic on the CN and Guelph Junction Railway lines just 200 metres down the road and the increased speeds of the GO trains on the Metrolinx line do not appear to have been included in the study. The members of our neighbourhood that live here and experience the rail traffic daily, can not understand why these factors were not included in the datasets analyzed.

The CN rail traffic on Edinburgh Road closer to Paisley is a major impact on the Edinburgh Road traffic disruption. When trains enter the newly upgraded rail yard, they frequently are forced to cross both Edinburgh Road, Paisley Road and sometimes other roads in order to shift into the appropriate lanes. The process causes road disruptions that can last 10 to 20 minutes, and anecdotally, they also tend to happen during higher traffic times of the day. When asked about

the impacts of these multiple intersections with roadways just 200 metres away from the study area, we were told that they were outside of the study scope. This was a frustrating response as the CN and Guelph Junction Railway lines tie into the Metrolinx tracks where the Edinburgh underpass is being proposed and crosses over the Alma study area also just a few hundred metres away. The City's new Transportation Master Plan in Part 6.4 on "Goods Movement" in Section 3, identifies that both the Edinburgh Metrolinx at grade crossing and the at-grade intersections of the Guelph Junction Railway on Edinburgh as locations that should be subject to further study. With these at grade crossing in such close proximity and the Transportation Master Plan identifying both as priorities for study, it is concerning that the City considers those other rail lines as out of scope. This proposal would be constructing an underpass at Edinburgh Road under the Metrolinx line, only to have car riders move through quickly just to stop couple of hundred metres away when the CN trains are shunting. This should have been included in the study's scope as other environmental influences.

Finally, the increased speeds of the GO trains need to be added into the scope. The queuing times for cars at the crossing used pre-pandemic traffic patterns to establish a baseline. However, from October to December 2021, Metrolinx slowly increased the GO trains speeds passing through our community. Originally, the GO trains were limited to passing through Guelph at 16km/hr, and in October Metrolinx slowly started to increase the train speeds to today's speed of 72 km/hr. This change has brought with it quieter and obviously faster trains passing through our neighbourhood. The queuing today where the Edinburgh underpass is proposed is a fraction of the time that we have traditionally experienced. Looking out our window, we routinely only see a few cars queuing for the trains, and much of the wait time for cars is spent after the train has already passed. This also should have been included in the study scope as the new baseline.

#### Our Final Thoughts

This has been a tough experience for us as a family, and I know through conversations with other neighbours at the park, this has been tough on them as well. We have always considered ourselves to be lucky to have the home we have. There are so many in our community that cannot afford the home they have and many others that cannot afford a home at all, and we again consider ourselves fortunate that we were able to purchase our home when we did. Our home is where we intend to raise our family and share experiences with family, friends, neighbours, and where we intend to grow old. We invest in our home with the idea that our investments are long-term and that we can take advantage of the investments for their useful life, and we have spent lots of money trying to make this century home energy efficient doing our duty for the environment. The ways in which this study has rolled out has put all of that into question. Now, over the next number of years, we must wait and see if any of our past or planned investments in our home for our family still make sense. Worse of all, this study happening the way it did, has taken away our family's choices. We do not want to leave this neighbourhood, but situations change and sometimes families need to move, and we no longer

have that flexibility. This process has placed a literal red mark on our home for any potential home buyer in the future. Our hope is that City staff find an alternate solution that, in a timely manner, will keep our community together and remove the red mark from our homes, and that processes are changed in the future so that other families do not experience this. There are some many ways to improve our community with \$50 million dollars (plus expropriation costs) and tearing down 20 century homes for a potentially flawed underpass is not on the list.

Respectfully submitted

Andrea and Mark Poste