

Ryerson University

Urban Waterfront Motorways

By Alex Gaio

Urban waterfront motorways are not worth our time or investment anymore. Studies have shown that they are an unnecessary, inefficient piece of infrastructure. The successful removal of San Francisco's Embarcadero, New York's West Side Elevated Highway and Seoul's Cheonggye Elevated Highway show that with adequate planning, it is no big deal¹.

From 1950, for about 35 years, cities were building motorways that disconnected downtowns from their waterfronts. Today, there are few arguments to keep waterfront motorways in their current form because of the high cost of car ownership. There are even fewer arguments when walking, biking and transit is factored in.

One of the first things I notice in places I visit is the waterfront. In Brisbane the feature that lines its waterfront is a motorway. I am careful not to call them freeways or expressways because, in most cases, neither term accurately describes the glacial pace that motorists move during rush hour. So, what do we do with waterfront motorways given that we know there are significantly more efficient and healthier ways of moving people and that the space they occupy could be used in better ways?

The city that first got me to pay attention to the issue of waterfront motorways was Brisbane, Australia. In 2014, Brisbane council published an updated master plan where it made "embracing the river" one of its priorities².

Toronto can learn from Brisbane. It is a city that is desperately trying to reconnect with its waterfront and a big thing that is standing in the way is the Gardiner Expressway.



Riverside Expressway in Brisbane. Here, it's stacked on top of the Riverwalk

IMAGE COURTESY OF ALEX GAIO



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We have a choice to make that will help determine the future livability of Toronto and I think it's why the Gardiner can join the long list of freeways without futures. ([#freewayswithoutfutures](#))

As more people gravitate to urban environments, they will increasingly demand more efficient uses of space, like finding alternatives to waterfront motorways, which includes urgent improvements to walking, biking and transit infrastructure.

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Endnotes

- 1 SDOT: Urban Mobility Plan – Briefing Book. (2008). Retrieved May 11, 2015, www.seattle.gov/transportation/briefingbook.htm
- 2 Brisbane City Centre Master Plan: A Vision for our Open City. (2014). Brisbane, QLD: Brisbane City Council.



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