

January 2026

The Sheppard Subway Problem

All of Toronto faces a road congestion problem that will worsen as the population of the GTA core increases rapidly over the next 30 years. It is a brutal situation that must be met head-on by attracting many more people to public transit. Unfortunately, planned rapid transit expansions contained in the government of Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan and incremental transit efforts by local municipalities, and increases in walking and cycling, will likely not be enough to reduce traffic congestion.

Highway 401 is being widened in Peel Region, and the GGH plan includes a stated priority to add road capacity to the highway in Toronto. This now includes a vision for a new highway tunnel under the existing Highway 401, for which a feasibility study is underway. Unfortunately, adding road capacity will result in more traffic in Toronto that will clog city streets that cannot be widened, resulting in longer periods of traffic gridlock and misery. The solution to road congestion is to provide transit alternatives.

Getting quickly across the northern half of Toronto by rapid transit is where the focus of funding needs to be. People must be able to easily and seamlessly traverse all of Toronto by rapid transit from east to west, and be able to make connections to north-south transit. The Eglinton LRT will try to do that for the southern half of Toronto. For the northern half of Toronto, a single new rapid transit line is needed that is cross-boundary, from Pickering and into Mississauga. The **401RT Express** is a concept for rapid transit that has evolved over several decades to provide that kind of service. It is envisaged as an 85-kilometre rapid transit line, with up to 50 stations, that can compete directly and effectively with Highway 401. The 401RT Express would be aligned elevated above grade along the south edge of Highway 401 from Liverpool Road in Pickering to Derry Road in Mississauga, plus a branch extending west of Islington Avenue at Highway 401 to Pearson International Airport and its surrounding employment megazone, and from there through downtown Mississauga.

Unfortunately, there has been no indication that such a rapid transit line across the core of the GTA is being considered. Instead, a great deal of time and money will be spent on incremental projects, including the extension of the 5.5-kilometre **Sheppard Subway**, which will generate few new transit users in Toronto.

Scarborough residents should have access to more and better rapid transit. However, extending the Sheppard subway is far from the best solution for Toronto. West to east, the northern half of Toronto is 40 kilometres wide. A 9-kilometre Sheppard Subway extension to Scarborough Centre (at McCowan Road) will be just 14 kilometers long, and may cost \$7.5 billion to build, at a very high cost per new transit user (view illustration below). Extending it to the Sheppard West subway station would add just 4.4 kilometres and may cost \$3.7 billion to construct.

Importantly, the Sheppard Subway will fail to provide seamless service to destinations such as Pearson International Airport and its huge adjacent employment areas, or to Mississauga or Pickering, all of which are very significant trip origins and destinations in the Toronto area. For points east of the planned Sheppard Subway extension, Toronto is planning to rely on an Eglinton East LRT to improve transit service, principally to the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus and to the Malvern community.

Even after the Sheppard Subway extension to McCowan Road is built, a trip by transit from Scarborough to the Pearson airport or its adjacent employment areas would take a brutally long time. For example, a person traveling from Markham Road at Finch Avenue would have to ride a bus to Sheppard Avenue, wait for a Sheppard bus (or LRT), take it to the Sheppard subway, wait for a train, ride the train to the Line 1 subway, wait for a train, ride it northward to Finch, wait for the Finch West LRT (if extended to Yonge), ride the Finch West LRT to Highway 27, and wait for a bus to the final destination. All in all, almost a two-hour trip. That is not acceptable, and would be a highly effective deterrent to transit use.

New rapid transit must enable Scarborough residents ***and all Torontonians*** to quickly and comfortably access myriad destinations across ***all*** of Toronto, and not be largely focused on Scarborough. It is ***not enough*** to give Scarborough residents more comfortable and faster rides within Scarborough or to get to/from the Line 1 subway, the Ontario Line, or to the extended Line 2 subway to Sheppard Avenue East or Scarborough Centre. That is especially so when it is possible for a single continuous city-wide ***401RT Express*** (or similar east-west rapid transit line) to give travelers all of the key benefits that the Sheppard extension would do for them, almost everything the Eglinton East LRT will do for them, and much, much more. (illustration below)

The effects of the ***401RT Express*** would be transformative. Its speed of service, seamlessness, connectivity across the region, affordability and high visibility would produce massive modal shifts to transit. It would draw enough ridership to rescue Highway 401, 427, the Don Valley Parkway, the Pearson airport area, and many streets in Toronto from worsening congestion. It would reduce congestion in downtown Toronto. It will significantly increase employment opportunities across the core of the GTA for Scarborough residents, and create rapid access to 100+ north-south transit services in the region.

An extended Sheppard Subway will not be able to do that. Nor will it be affordable to tunnel the Sheppard subway west of the Sheppard West subway station through the planned Downsview community and beyond; moreover, it would not be near the jobs and services that are located along Highway 401. Tunneling the Sheppard Subway to the 401RT Express at Highway 401 would be a diversion that slows the 401RT Express's overall speed of travel. The 401RT Express would be designed to travel at relatively higher speeds between stations than the Sheppard Subway.

The 401RT Express would have the capacity to absorb all travel demand growth for Highway 401 for decades beyond 2055. Overall, by 2051 it could be carrying close to 400 million transit trips per year, plus boost ridership on GO Transit and on enhanced bus services. A full description of the 401R Express concept is at www.401rt.ca.

People need and deserve the kind of relief from road congestion that the 401RT Express can provide, and that the Sheppard Subway and Eglinton East LRT cannot provide.

The Sheppard Subway extension to McCowan Road, the Eglinton East LRT, plus a Sheppard Subway extension to Sheppard West subway station may cost approximately \$15.7 billion; extending the Sheppard Subway to Morningside Avenue would add another \$3.7 billion. Comparatively, the elevated 401RT Express can be built from the Yorkdale shopping mall and Yorkdale subway station to Morningside Avenue at Highway 401 would cost approximately \$15.4 billion, and would include new stations at Yonge, Bayview, Leslie/GO, and Don Mills.

With a 401RT Express, the Malvern community would continue to be served by bus routes that would connect to the Neilson, Morningside, Markham, and McCowan 401RT stations; this would create superior access to and from Malvern and all of Toronto. This also affects the Eglinton East LRT.

Highly important is that, for the rapid transit segments identified, and based on the approximate number of *new* transit trips estimated, the 401RT Express would be approximately five times as cost-effective as the Sheppard subway extensions and the Eglinton East LRT (table below). It should be noted that the new transit ridership estimate for the 401RT Express is based on the Yorkdale-to-Scarborough Centre segments of a *completed, full length 40RT Express (85 kilometres)*.

The cross-boundary 401RT Express or similar rapid transit line across the core of the GTA is **essential** if there is to be any hope of reducing road traffic congestion from today's unacceptable levels. It must be a higher priority than local rapid transit improvements, including the Sheppard Subway and an Eglinton East LRT.

Therefore, the question is, to what degree will the Sheppard Subway or the Eglinton East LRT be necessary, or be duplicative and a hindrance to the development of a 401RT Express?

The 401RT Express will draw significant volumes of ridership from the Sheppard Subway – transit users on north-south bus routes would opt to ride to the closely parallel 401RT rather than to the Sheppard Subway. Travelers who would use the proposed Eglinton East LRT to access Malvern or the University of Toronto Scarborough campus from west of Scarborough would more easily use the faster 401RT Express. Extending the Eglinton East LRT by 7.6 kilometres to the Eglinton/Kingston Road intersection is an option (\$1.7 billion) that can reduce travel times for local residents; however, the remainder of the Eglinton East LRT would be unnecessary. Other points to consider:

1. An extended Sheppard Subway from Yonge Street to McCowan Road will continue to be too short to be of use to more than a small minority of commuters in Scarborough.
2. A proposed integration of subway Lines 4 (Sheppard) and 2 at or north of Scarborough Centre would be a mistake. It would terminate the possibility of extending Line 2 northward to Finch Avenue East.
3. Line 4, Line 2, and the proposed Eglinton East LRT will not reduce traffic congestion on Highway 401. This is important because dependence on travel by automobile on Highway 401 is a principal cause of traffic congestion in downtown Toronto and throughout all of Toronto. Maintaining the functionality of the highway is essential for all travelers who are dependent on it, and particularly for the transport of goods/freight and other commercial traffic.
4. Because of its relatively slow speed compared to travel by automobile, the Eglinton East LRT extension to UTSC and Malvern would not generate a volume of modal shifts to transit that would reduce road congestion in Scarborough. The operating speed of the Eglinton East LRT may not be significantly faster than buses along the same route.
5. The 401RT Express will attract a much larger modal shift to transit than the same length of Sheppard Subway. Notably, the Yonge-to-McCowan segment of the 401RT Express would draw *far* more transit users than the Yonge-to-McCowan Sheppard subway because of the 401RT Express's seamless longer length.
6. The 401RT Express shortens the planned Durham-Scarborough BRT: its western terminus would change from the Line 2 subway at Scarborough Centre to Pickering Town Centre at Liverpool Road, and would boost DSBRT ridership east of Liverpool Road.
7. Because it would be almost entirely above ground, the pace of construction of the 401RT Express per kilometre would be faster than for tunneled Sheppard subway extensions.

A danger is that the \$12 billion to \$19 billion Sheppard Subway extension and Eglinton East LRT will proceed to be built, only to be realized too late that once the essential 401RT Express is built, the Sheppard subway and Eglinton East LRT will have become expensive operationally non-viable “white elephants”.

Although it is a dramatic change from current plans and processes, the entire Sheppard Subway should be closed once the 401RT Express is completed between Yonge Street and McCowan Road.

A mixture of express and local bus services along Sheppard Avenue could serve Scarborough residents just as well as the subway, and could include seamless/continuous services from Port Union Road to Weston Road.

Land no longer used for the Sheppard Subway could be sold, or can be repurposed for higher density non-profit housing for seniors, much-needed rental housing for households that cannot afford to buy a home, and people who need health and social supports. This would be a benefit as a contribution to reducing the housing affordability crisis.

This is a discussion for the public that should happen. The Sheppard and Eglinton East initiatives are still in investigative stages. The 401RT Express or similar rapid transit concept should be introduced to the public. The public should not be kept unaware of the drawbacks of proceeding with current plans, and aware of the transformative benefits of the alternatives; the choices are highly different and highly significant. A potential \$18.9 billion mistake must be avoided.

Comparing Current Plans With The 401RT Express Scenario

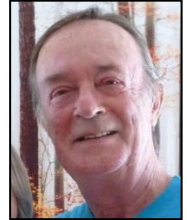
N.B. Figures are approximates.

	Gross Cost (\$millions)	New Trips per Year	Cost / New Transit Trip	Kms.	Cost/Km (\$millions)	Stations or Stops
Choice A: Recommended						
millions						
401RT - Yonge/401 to DonMills/401	3,500	24.7	\$142	5.4	\$653	3
Decommission Sheppard Sbw; net	800					
401RT - Don Mills station to Scarborough Centre	5,100	49.3	\$103	8.0	\$638	6
401RT - Scarborough T.C. to Morningside	3,195	24.7	\$130	5.5	\$581	3
401RT - Yorkdale to Yonge/Hwy 401	2,805	24.7	\$114	4.4	\$638	3
Totals	15,400	123.3	\$125	23	\$662	15
Choice B: Current Plans for Toronto						
Sheppard Sbw Extension DonMills to Scarb TC	7,500	6.3	\$1,183	9.0	\$830	6
Eglinton E LRT Kennedy to Malvern	4,500	8.7	\$519	15.1	\$297	21
Eglinton E LRT - Malvern to McCowan	800	2.3	\$352	4.0	\$202	3
Potential Sheppard Sbw extn to Morningside Ave	2,400	2.4		3.3	\$732	4
Potential Sheppard Sbw extn to Sheppard W stn	3,700	4.9	\$755	4.4	\$836	4
Totals	18,900	24.6	\$770	36	\$527	38
Other potential extensions:						
Eglinton East LRT to Kingston Road (optional)	1,700	3.3	\$515	7.6	\$224	
401RTX - Morningside to Pt. Union	2,700	24.7	\$109	4.4	\$614	3
401RTX - Port Union Rd. to Pickering Town Centre	4,000	24.7	\$162	7.3	\$548	3
Totals	8,400	53	\$160	19	\$435	6

N.B. 401RT Express trip numbers assume the synergistically positive ridership effect of a full-length 401RT Express. Both choices assume that MTO's GGHTP includes an extension of the Ontario Line to Sheppard Avenue E. This extension is essential to avoid the 401RTX overloading the Line 1 subway at Yonge Street.

Prepared by John Stillich. Please contact me for more information; I'd be delighted to speak with you. Please, also access www.401rt.ca for a detailed description of the 401RT Express concept.

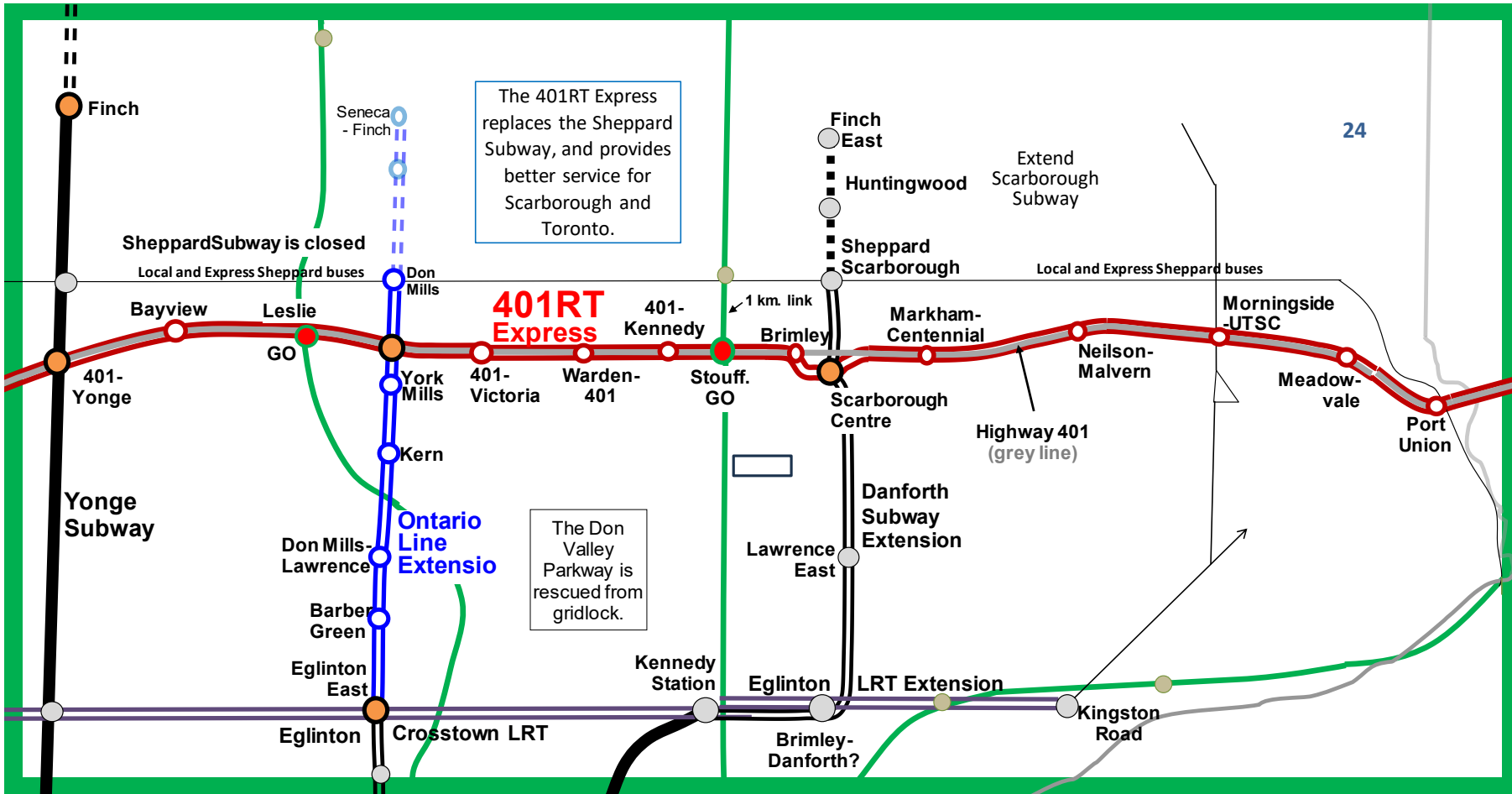
About me: My background until retirement was a career as a corporate financial analyst at Queen's Park for the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, focusing on program expenditure analysis and planning, budgeting for several ministry programs, and coordinating budget processes. After my retirement, I have focused my attention on sustainable transportation and land use planning, including having worked with a small (no longer active) organization called the Sustainable Urban Development Association. I also produced a document entitled "Newburg: Embracing High Density at the Urban Fringe". In 2018, my wife and I moved from Mississauga to Innisfil, where we live near our daughter and her family.



(Illustrations next pages)

401RT Express As Better Rapid Transit For Scarborough And Toronto

401RT Express replaces the Sheppard Subway.



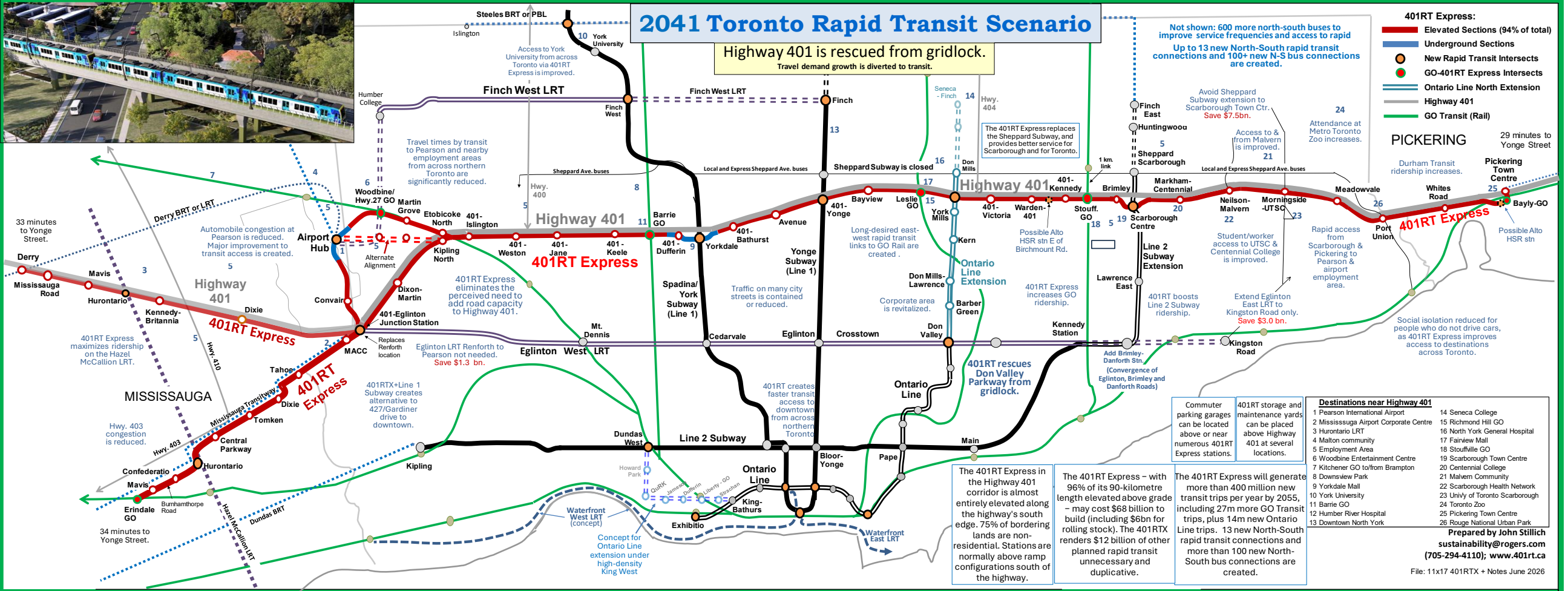


2041 Toronto Rapid Transit Scenario

Highway 401 is rescued from gridlock.
Travel demand growth is diverted to transit.

Not shown: 600 more north-south buses to improve service frequencies and access to rapid
Up to 13 new North-South rapid transit connections and 100+ new N-S bus connections are created.

- 401RT Express:**
- █ Elevated Sections (94% of total)
 - █ Underground Sections
 - New Rapid Transit Intersects
 - GO-401RT Express Intersects
 - █ Ontario Line North Extension
 - █ Highway 401
 - █ GO Transit (Rail)



PICKERING
Durham Transit ridership increases.
29 minutes to Yonge Street

Destinations near Highway 401

1 Pearson International Airport	14 Seneca College
2 Mississauga Airport Corporate Centre	15 Richmond Hill GO
3 Hurontario LRT	16 North York General Hospital
4 Malton community	17 Fairview Mall
5 Employment Area	18 Stouffville GO
6 Woodbine Entertainment Centre	19 Scarborough Town Centre
7 Kitchener GO to/from Brampton	20 Centennial College
8 Downsview Park	21 Malvern Community
9 Yorkdale Mall	22 Scarborough Health Network
10 York University	23 Univ. of Toronto Scarborough
11 Barnes GO	24 Toronto Zoo
12 Humber River Hospital	25 Pickering Town Centre
13 Downtown North York	26 Rouge National Urban Park

The 401RT Express in the Highway 401 corridor is almost entirely elevated along the highway's south edge. 75% of bordering lands are non-residential. Stations are normally above ramp configurations south of the highway.

The 401RT Express - with 96% of its 90-kilometre length elevated above grade - may cost \$68 billion to build (including \$6bn for rolling stock). The 401RTX renders \$12 billion of other planned rapid transit unnecessary and duplicative.

The 401RT Express will generate more than 400 million new transit trips per year by 2055, including 27m more GO Transit trips, plus 14m new Ontario Line trips. 13 new North-South rapid transit connections and more than 100 new North-South bus connections are created.

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