

There's a better route for the Scarborough subway

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A new proposed route for the Scarborough subway would promote development and save taxpayers money.



ALEX CONSIGLIO/TORONTO STAR

The nine Scarborough subway routes being evaluated by the city planning department mostly follow north-south and east-west roads from Kennedy station (pictured) to the terminus at Sheppard and McCowan. A more diagonal path would make more sense, writes Richard Gilbert.

For many years, experts have been criticizing Toronto's transit planning because subway construction has occurred with little thought about associated development. Intensive mixed-use development at subway stations is needed to make the most of our subways. Yet most Toronto subway stations have no such development.

Metrolinx — the provincial agency constructing the Eglinton-Crosstown light rail line — is taking a baby step in the right direction. It intends to facilitate modest development at three of the 25 stations planned for this line, now under construction.

The real test of whether Toronto's transit planning is on the right track is still to come. The proposed Scarborough extension to the Bloor-Danforth subway line needs a large amount of associated

development to justify its \$3.6-billion cost. Properly planned, the 7.6-kilometre extension could cost taxpayers less, have five stations rather than three, and revitalize the area served.

The city of Toronto is responsible for the Scarborough extension. City taxpayers already pay a special levy to cover its more than \$1-billion of costs beyond what the provincial government will fund. City council's decision to build a subway has been called a "billion-dollar boondoggle." Another critic said it was a decision of "almost unprecedented irresponsibility."

These [valid criticisms](#) make council's need to restrain the cost of the subway extension even stronger than usual. Restraint is required too because of predictions that ridership will be far below current projections, making the extension's maintenance and operating costs unsupportable. Good station planning is the key to keeping costs down.

In Toronto, stations are regarded as burdens that raise the costs of construction and operation. But in some cities, notably in East Asia, stations are seen as revenue generators. If substantial station-related development is planned before stations are built, they can become paid-for features of developments, much reducing the cost of the subway line. This is known as the "[Rail + Property](#)" (R+P) model.

A team of transit and real estate experts is applying the R+P model to the Scarborough extension. (Veteran transportation planner Ed Levy is the best-known member of the team.) The R+P team has identified a route that would provide five new stations rather than three and maximize development opportunities.

The nine routes being evaluated by the city planning department mostly follow north-south and east-west roads from Kennedy station to the terminus at Sheppard and McCowan. The R+P team's route takes a more diagonal path, reducing the track distance by 10 per cent. This 10th route should also be evaluated.

The team's route would have stations at Midland and Stansbury, Brimley and Lawrence, Scarborough Town Centre (two stations) and Sheppard and McCowan.

Each of the five stations, and a rebuilt Kennedy station, would be part of substantial new mixed-use development. The most extensive development would be at Brimley station, on part of the huge swath of publicly owned land known as the Gattineau Corridor, now used for hydro infrastructure.

Development of this corridor would require burying the hydro lines in a weather-protected box tunnel, paid for from the sale of the land released for buildings.

The R+P team proposes development of the Gattineau Corridor as far west as the proposed Lawrence station on the SmartTrack line, justifying stronger implementation of that project. With the extension, SmartTrack and associated development, this part of Scarborough could well become the most vital element of the Toronto region by 2030. It would be a true complement to the present downtown.

Pulling it off would require a degree of integration of land-use and transit planning not seen in Toronto. To that end, a Scarborough Transit Development Corporation should be established — a time-limited Crown corporation given all necessary powers and responsibilities. Actual development at and near the

stations would be done by the private sector. Developers would be enormously stimulated by the prospect of working within clear planning and funding arrangements.

The Scarborough extension must not become another of Toronto's transit white elephants. To avoid this fate, advantage must be taken of the best methods for maximizing returns from the billions of dollars to be spent.

The R+P model, and its 10th route alignment, promise to deliver this extension at the lowest price and having the greatest usefulness. Applying the R+P model would pioneer a process for revitalizing our inner suburbs while breaking Ontario's logjam of thinking about transit-related revenue tools.

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