

# The Power of Connection

Unlocking Canada's Most  
Valuable Waterfront

DECEMBER 2025





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## About this Report

Toronto's waterfront represents one of Canada's largest untapped economic opportunities, yet unlocking its full potential hinges on one key element: urgent government investment in connectivity. This report highlights the current state of mobility on Toronto's waterfront and identifies the interventions needed to enable mobility across the waterfront.

For more than a decade, the need for the Waterfront East Transit project has been evident and called for by local leaders, and with thousands of new residential units now completed along the shoreline, the urgency has never been greater. Without high-capacity transit, accessible pedestrian routes, and reliable water-based travel, the district cannot grow, compete, or function as a connected economic hub.

This work builds on the findings from the Board's May 2024 *Ripple Effect* report, which identified improved East-West, North-South, and water-based connections as an essential catalyst for long term success. The message remains consistent: Toronto must invest now to realize the full promise of its most valuable shoreline. To get there, the business community must also step forward as an active partner and contributor.

This report was authored and prepared by the Toronto and Region Board of Trade, and incorporates insights and inputs from the Waterfront Coalition. The Coalition represents prominent employers, institutions, infrastructure partners, and destinations that form the economic backbone of Toronto's waterfront. These organizations collectively support thousands of jobs, attract millions of visitors, fuel investment, and animate one of the city's most valuable districts.

The Waterfront Coalition champions the vision of One Waterfront, a connected, high performing, all season district that drives Toronto's growth and global competitiveness.

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# Executive Summary

**T**oronto's waterfront is one of the city's most significant economic, cultural, and recreational assets. It supports more than 100,000 jobs, attracts 18 million visitors annually, contributes 13 billion dollars to GDP, and is on the verge of an unprecedented wave of growth. The eastern waterfront and Port Lands is projected to deliver 75,000 new homes, 130,000 residents, and 50,000 jobs by 2040. Few places in Canada offer this scale of economic potential in such a concentrated geography. But unlocking its potential depends on one thing above all else: building the transit and mobility network that allows the waterfront to function as one connected, competitive district.

Despite its importance, the waterfront faces persistent gaps in transportation and mobility. Impaired by congestion and a lack of complete east-west transit infrastructure, travel across the waterfront is slow and unreliable. The physical presence of the Gardiner Expressway impedes pedestrian access to the waterfront, and the limited reach of the PATH network reduces access. Meanwhile, opportunities for water-based transit, a proven mobility solution in other global waterfront cities, remain underdeveloped.

The eastern waterfront and Port Lands is projected to deliver 75,000 new homes, 130,000 residents, and 50,000 jobs by 2040.

## Six Actions to Connect Canada’s Most Valuable Waterfront

Businesses, workers, residents, and visitors alike would benefit significantly from a waterfront better connected within its districts and to the rest of the city. This demands coordinated action. Governments and the private sector should work together to advance the following six priority recommendations:



### **ACTION 1: SECURE FUNDING FOR WATERFRONT EAST TRANSIT**

Commit federal and provincial capital funding to deliver the Waterfront East transit line, enabling rapid population and visitor growth for the eastern waterfront.



### **ACTION 2: PRIORITIZE FUTURE TRANSIT-PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION ON BATHURST AND DUFFERIN**

Prioritize future implementation plans that enhance transit speeds and connectivity north of Bloor Street West on Bathurst Street and Dufferin Street and interim transit-priority measures to improve service reliability for FIFA 2026.



### **ACTION 3: ENHANCE CONNECTIONS TO KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY**

Establish dedicated transit links that enhance connectivity between major waterfront destinations, including Billy Bishop Airport, and the rest of the waterfront and the city.



### **ACTION 4: EXPAND AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE PATH NETWORK**

Create cost-sharing frameworks between public entities and private property owners to extend PATH connections east and west along the waterfront, while improving public signage and access at street level.



### **ACTION 5: INVEST IN UNDER GARDINER TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES**

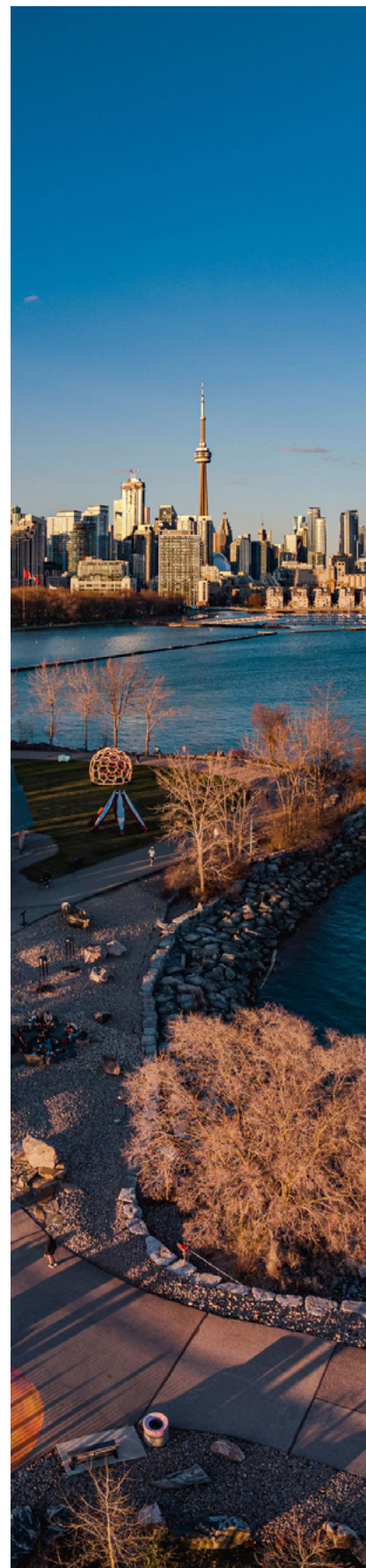
Commit municipal and provincial capital investments, alongside private partners, to transform the spaces below the Gardiner Expressway, into safer, more connected, and welcoming pedestrian and cycling corridors.



### **ACTION 6: ENABLE AND SCALE WATER-BASED TRANSIT**

Support water taxi, seabus and hovercraft services through regulatory coordination, accommodating infrastructure, and innovative partnerships.

Ensuring the waterfront fulfills its potential as a place to live, work, learn, and play requires immediate coordinated action. With the right commitments, Toronto can create a waterfront that is accessible, resilient, and globally competitive.



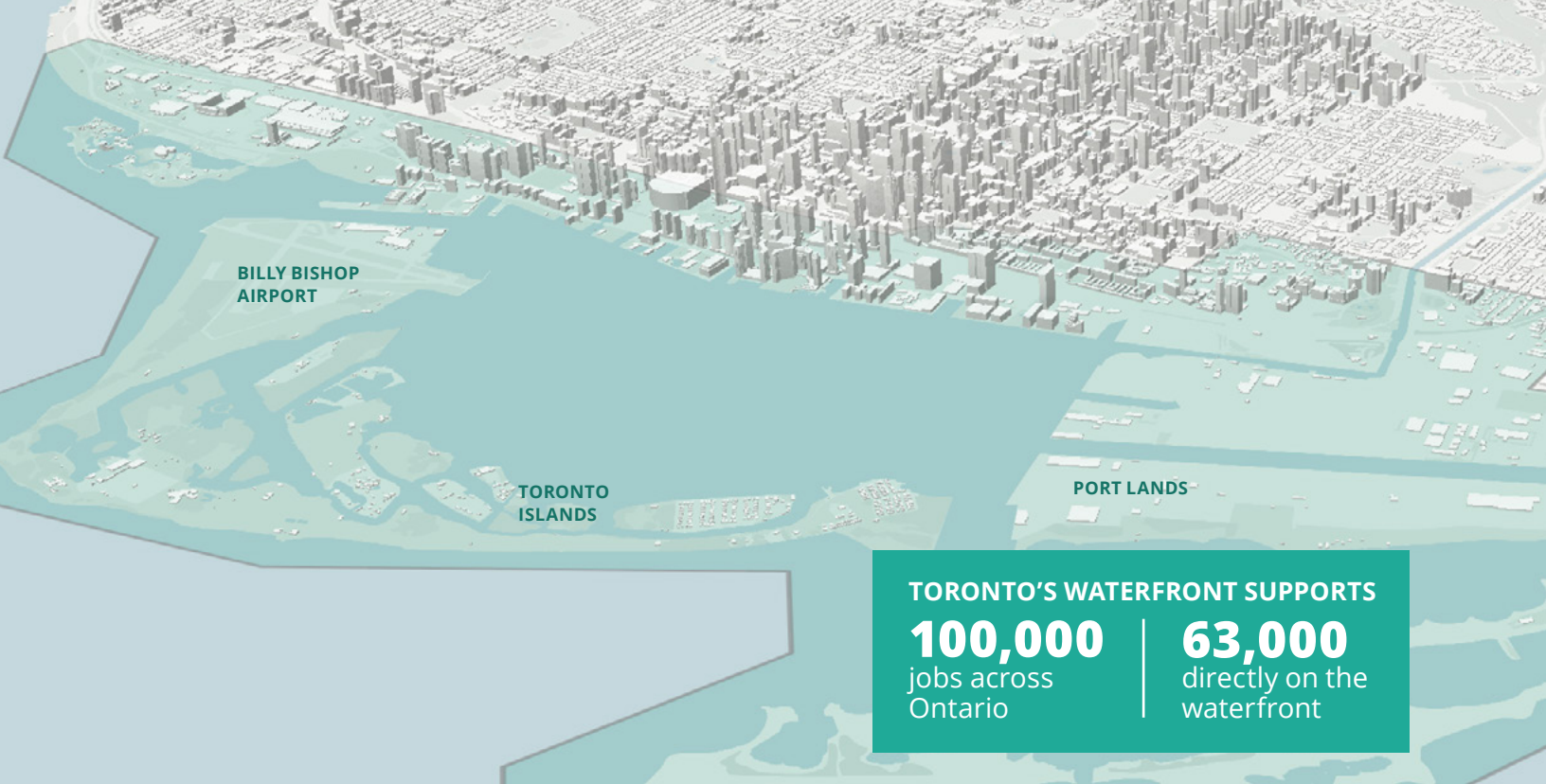


Figure 1: Map of Toronto's Waterfront. Source: Waterfront Toronto.

# Toronto's Waterfront

**T**oronto's waterfront is a dynamic and vibrant economic hub, serving as both a key employment centre and the city's frontier for growth. The area supports 100,000 jobs across Ontario, including 63,000 directly on the waterfront, with potential for tens of thousands more with ongoing developments.<sup>1</sup>

The central waterfront draws over 18 million visitors every year.<sup>2</sup> Key attractions include:

- The **Toronto Islands**, which saw 1.4 million visits in 2024.<sup>3</sup>
- **Exhibition Place** attracts 5.5 million annual visitors and features 1,760 events.<sup>4</sup>
- **Billy Bishop Airport** serves as a gateway to the city, serving over two million passengers per year.<sup>5</sup>
- Future developments, such as **Ontario Place**, will undoubtedly draw more visitors to the area.

All of these assets make the waterfront an invaluable economic and cultural hub for the city.

The waterfront's footprint is expected to grow dramatically. The recently announced \$975 million in funding, with equal contributions from all levels

of government, will accelerate Waterfront Toronto's revitalization plan and advance the transformation of the waterfront on its eastern end. The plan includes the construction of more than 14,000 new homes and the creation of vibrant mixed-use neighbourhoods like Quayside and Ookwemin Minising – a planned mixed-use development projected to host over 15,000 residents, including 2,700+ affordable homes, a new signature events park, and plans for new attractions.<sup>6</sup>

Other developments continue to progress around Lower Jarvis, Queens Quay, and Lake Shore Boulevard, adding thousands of residential housing units and commercial spaces.<sup>7</sup>

On the west end, the Ontario Place redevelopment will include 50+ acres of parkland, a new Science Centre, a Therme waterpark and wellness centre, an amphitheatre upgrade, and a new marina. The main attractions are expected to open between 2027 and 2030.<sup>8</sup>

Other new west end attractions include a new esports stadium, and a new resident WNBA team at the Coca-Cola Coliseum, the Toronto Tempo.



Figure 2: Western Waterfront Developments. Source: Waterfront BIA.

## Challenges Accessing the Waterfront

Drawing people to the waterfront is only half the challenge – ensuring they can actually get there is just as critical. Like the rest of the city, it faces significant challenges with connectivity and congestion. The ability to move around with minimal friction is vital for encouraging people to explore the waterfront and its viability as a residential and working community. Connectivity, therefore, remains a key bottleneck to prosperity at the city's edge and is an issue that will only intensify as population and attractions continue to grow.

The explosive growth of the Greater Toronto Area's population, combined with decades of insufficient investment in transportation infrastructure, has left the city highly congested.<sup>9</sup>

This congestion undermines the speed and reliability of surface level transit such as buses and streetcars operating in mixed traffic, on which the waterfront depends. The waterfront also suffers from spill-over congestion, as two of its major arterial roads

— Queens Quay and Lake Shore Boulevard — serve as key feeder and offloading routes for the Gardiner Expressway. Necessary maintenance and construction work, such as the Gardiner Rehabilitation, often require lane closures, further intensifying congestion<sup>10</sup> and making these arterials difficult to traverse. As is frequently the case in other cities such as with the former Embarcadero Freeway in San Francisco,<sup>11</sup> the Gardiner Expressway also represents a physical barrier separating the waterfront from the rest of the city, and its wide, busy, arterial traffic creates the perception of a hostile space that deters pedestrians.

Finally, the water itself though used for recreational boating, cruise ships, and even cargo ships, is not widely used as a mode of intra and intercity connection besides the Toronto Island ferries. In many global cities, water-based mobility serves as a practical and appealing solution to congestion, offering both efficient movement and tourism opportunities.

The imperative is clear: enabling connectivity to and across the waterfront is not optional, but necessary to prevent gridlock and dysfunction, and to ensure the waterfront thrives well into the future.



# Connectivity on the Waterfront

The waterfront is served by various types of transportation infrastructure, including streetcars, buses, automobiles, active transportation, pedestrian paths, and regional rail service. It is also used to access transportation routes to other locations, such as the several north-south roads off Queens Quay that vehicles use to access the Gardiner.

However, connectivity along the waterfront is subject to significant challenges. The first is severe congestion, which affects the entire city and makes travel slow, unreliable, and unpleasant. Secondly, the lack of complete east-west transit infrastructure complicates travel along the length of the waterfront. Third, pedestrians and cyclists are deterred from exploring the waterfront by an unwelcoming, dreary, and uncomfortable experience of walking under the Gardiner Expressway. Finally, key transportation nodes – such as Billy Bishop Airport – and attractions along the waterfront remain poorly connected to the city's broader transit network.

## Ongoing Initiatives

Despite these challenges, there is immense opportunity both in the short- and long-term to enable connectivity both to and across the waterfront. This can be advanced through:



Improving **transit** access, particularly via the Waterfront East Transit, FIFA transportation improvements, and better connections to key attractions and transportation nodes



Improving **pedestrian** access through the PATH expansion and along the Gardiner Expressway, through improved trail connections and improved north-south Gardiner intersections



Expanding **water** transportation options through water taxis, seabuses, and potential hovercraft routes

Each of these issues reinforce pain points in the connectivity system that have not yet been fully addressed. Transit on the eastern waterfront is slow and unreliable because it often runs in mixed traffic and is routinely trapped in congestion on both the waterfront and its north-south connections. Pedestrian access is daunting, having to cross and walk along large traffic arterials like Lake Shore Boulevard and under the Gardiner. Developing water-based transit could offer new mobility options that bypass traditional infrastructure constraints, though such projects depend on financial feasibility and regulatory coordination.

## Transit Connectivity

The population along Queens Quay has grown from roughly 10,000 residents to over 30,000 since 2010.<sup>12</sup> With the anticipated developments along Queens Quay East and Ookwemin Minising, this is expected to increase significantly in the coming years, emphasizing the urgent need for enhanced transit infrastructure.

Streetcars are the dominant transit service for the west end of the waterfront, running on dedicated rights of way allowing them to avoid mixed traffic congestion. Conversely, the eastern waterfront is primarily served by bus routes, carrying thousands of passengers to and from the waterfront every day. However, running mostly in mixed traffic, they are vulnerable to being caught in congestion.

Congestion along the waterfront is some of the worst in the city, likely owing to its proximity to the Gardiner Expressway. A study by Parsons for The Toronto Region Board of Trade’s [congestion action plan](#) indicates that the Gardiner and Lake Shore are two of the three most extensively congested roadways in the city,<sup>13</sup> and another study by transportation analytics firm Inrix indicates that three of the top 10 most congested intersections in the city are all on the waterfront – two of which are on the east end (Lakeshore and Lower Sherbourne, Parliament).<sup>14</sup>

As the present bus service is insufficient, and a subway untenable, the missing piece of this puzzle is the planned, but not yet realized, Waterfront East Transit.

“... a stopgap measure like dedicated bus lanes will not be able to handle the volume of riders that are expected as the area grows, according to the line’s planners. (A streetcar) carries more people, on a more dedicated schedule.”

- Tim Kocur, Executive Director, Waterfront BIA

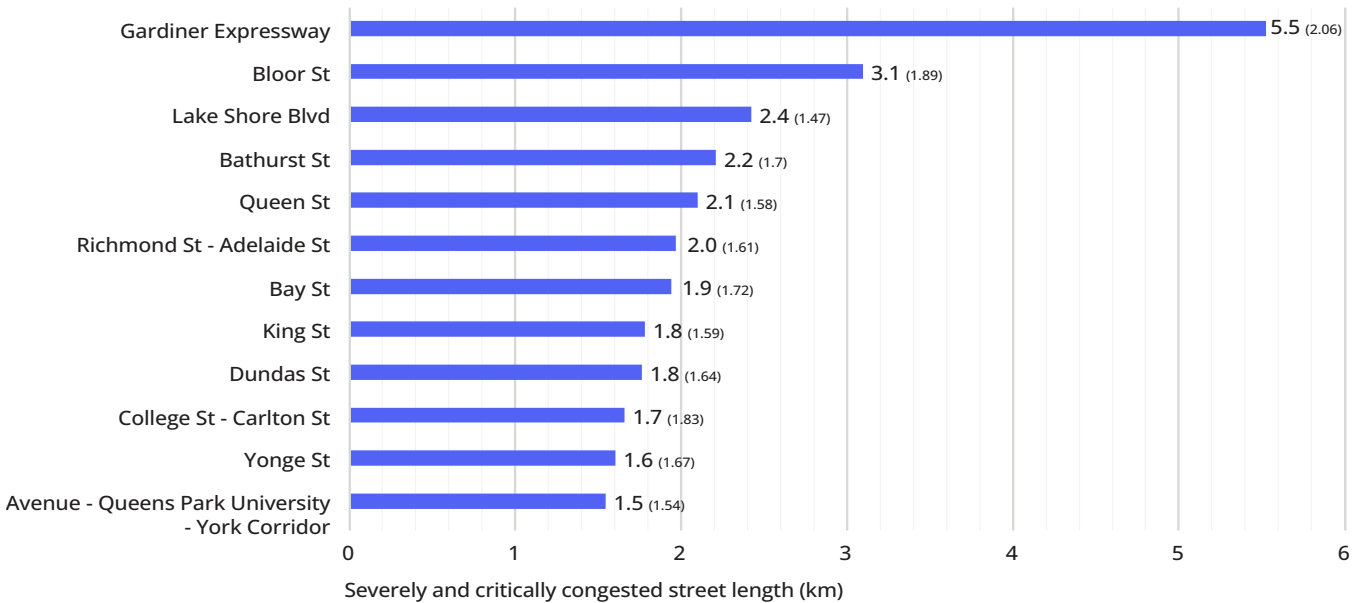


Figure 3: Critically Congested Streets in Toronto. Note: Extent of severe and critical congestion. Here Travel Time Analysis, January 2023 to July 2024. Time Travel Index noted in brackets. Source: Breaking Gridlock – Congestion Action Plan for Toronto, TRBOT, February 2025, p.6

## CONNECTIVITY ON THE WATERFRONT

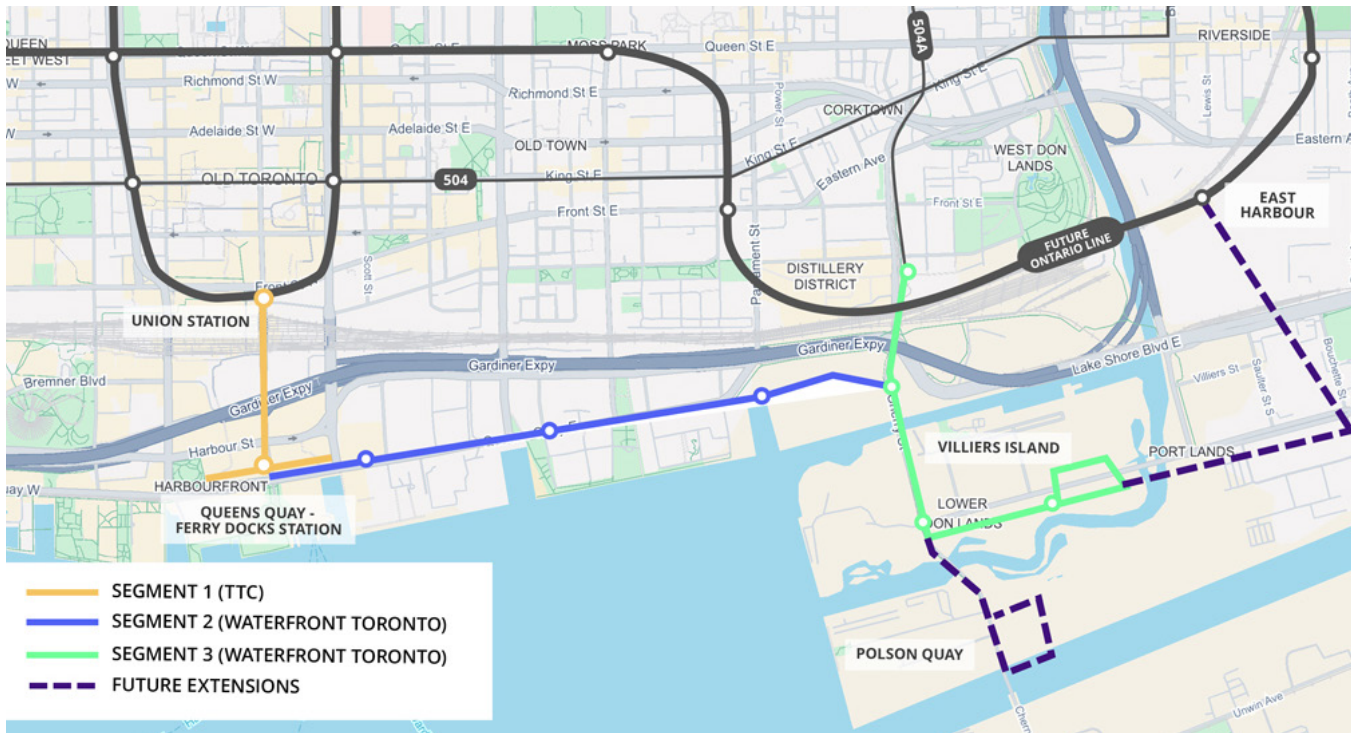


Figure 4: Planned Waterfront East Transit Routes. Source: Waterfront Toronto

## Waterfront East Transit

Waterfront East Transit is a proposed streetcar route that would replace most of the Toronto Transit Commission's 114 bus route, extending across the eastern waterfront and connecting Queens Quay to Ookwemin Minising. The current bus service remains vulnerable to peak travel time congestion, with some recent improvements to service – both time and reliability – due to the implementation of dedicated lanes on parts of the route and scheduling changes.<sup>15</sup> These lanes, however, will not enable the buses to bypass the most congested section of the route – the stretch from Front Street to Queens Quay along Bay Street, where they share the road with an immense number of cars headed from the Financial District to the Gardiner Expressway. However, like its western counterparts, the streetcar would crucially run on a dedicated right of way from Union onwards. It is a vital piece of the connectivity puzzle, running on dedicated tracks and insulated from mixed traffic, being of much greater capacity – up to five times greater than a bus route – and accordingly having a far better driver to passenger ratio to help manage operational costs.

All of these factors are critical to handle the expected boom in travellers along the waterfront. However, as of mid-2025, while project design has reached 60% completion for key segments, major construction funding has not yet been secured.<sup>16</sup> The City of Toronto has formally requested both the provincial and federal governments to provide funding for Waterfront East Transit. While Toronto City Council has endorsed Waterfront East Transit as a priority transit project and significant investment has been made – including securing the space within the rights-of-way along the corridor, undertaking utility upgrades and installing utilities in ways that enable the future right of way, and building the transit bridge which connects to Ookwemin Minising – it requires capital funding commitments from other levels of government.

The construction of the East Harbour Transit Hub (EHTH) will serve as a nexus between the Ontario Line, the Stouffville and Milton GO lines, and will enable a southern extension of the streetcar on Broadview down to the Port Lands, which could connect it to an extended Waterfront East Transit. This would serve as an invaluable intermodal connection to the eastern waterfront for travellers from around the city and the region.



The RapidTO lanes are expected to reduce travel times by up to 29% on Dufferin Street and 13% on Bathurst Street, creating dedicated bus and streetcar corridors to manage the anticipated influx of World Cup visitors.

Seamlessly connecting the East Harbour Transit Hub to the waterfront is critical to optimizing the use of both. It will ensure the eastern waterfront has effective transit capacity along its length and strong connections to the rest of the city and region, anchored by Union Station in the west and the EHTH in the east. Planners and policy makers must also consider transit travel times to ensure the routes are not just nominally connected, but are attractive for potential visitors and commuters.

Without the deployment of rapid transit along this booming area of the waterfront, traffic congestion is likely to reach untenable levels. Additionally, the development and commercial prospects along the eastern portion of waterfront are dependent on unlocking access to the area. A future Waterfront East Transit would also benefit from lessons from existing transit routes, including those suggested by experts for Spadina,<sup>17</sup> that would maximize the value of dedicated transit lanes.

### Transportation Enhancements on Bathurst and Dufferin

FIFA World Cup 2026 will present a unique and extraordinary transportation challenge for the city, but these challenges are also opportunities. The event presents an opportunity to make permanent infrastructure improvements to enhance mobility in the city beyond the tournament.

Preparation includes the RapidTO Surface Transit Network Plan, specifically targeting Dufferin Street and Bathurst Street corridors leading to BMO Field. City Council approved priority transit lanes on both

streets south of Bloor Street West in July 2025, with implementation scheduled to be operational before the 2026 tournament.<sup>18</sup>

The RapidTO lanes are expected to reduce travel times by up to 29% on Dufferin Street and 13% on Bathurst Street,<sup>19</sup> creating dedicated bus and streetcar corridors to manage the anticipated influx of FIFA visitors. These improvements directly connect to the broader under-Gardiner enhancement strategy by improving access routes to the transformed intersection spaces.

However, these interventions can be taken even further. In July 2025, City Council authorized the bus lanes to be implemented between King and Bloor streets, a compromise from the original proposal that extended the lane all the way up to Eglinton after the proposal generated considerable controversy.<sup>20</sup> The City should continue to prioritize future implementation plans that enhance transit speeds and connectivity north of Bloor Street West on Bathurst Street and Dufferin Street. Longer-term planning could consider potential extensions toward major destinations such as Lawrence or Yorkdale. Such extensions would align with established City transit priorities while improving connections to key destinations and east-west transit stations. In advance of the FIFA tournament, the City should prioritize interim transit-priority measures, such as time-of-day use, to improve service reliability during the tournament. Effective implementation will require the City to work closely with local businesses, residents, and transit users to develop solutions that support faster and more reliable transit across these corridors.

## Transit: Calls to Action

Transit is the backbone of urban mobility. Without efficient, reliable, high-capacity transit that can avoid the strictures of congestion, connectivity on the waterfront will only become increasingly degraded and stifle the viability and livability of the area. To avoid this, we recommend the following measures:



### 1. SECURE FUNDING FOR WATERFRONT EAST TRANSIT

The Waterfront East Transit project is the critical missing piece to transit on the eastern waterfront. It could serve as a vital intermodal connection linking the waterfront to the rest of the city and region's transit systems and become a key enabler for the development and livability of the area. Federal and provincial commitments must be secured immediately to advance construction and unlock the economic and community benefits this project promises.



### 2. PRIORITIZE FUTURE TRANSIT-PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION ON BATHURST AND DUFFERIN

While the bus priority lanes on Bathurst and Dufferin will be a great benefit to the efficacy of north-south transit connectivity to the western waterfront, future transit enhancements north of Bloor Street West will be crucial for intersecting them with other east-west transit connections. Making these connections to the western waterfront faster, easier, and accessible to a larger portion of the city is vital to ensuring the success of the attractions slated for the waterfront well beyond FIFA.



### 3. ENHANCE CONNECTIONS TO KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY

While planned and proposed transit initiatives will help improve connectivity, key nodes of activity including Billy Bishop Airport and major attractions have limited connectivity to the rest of the waterfront. Future plans must consider enhanced connections to key areas of activity along the waterfront that are currently inadequately serviced by public transit.



## CONNECTIVITY ON THE WATERFRONT

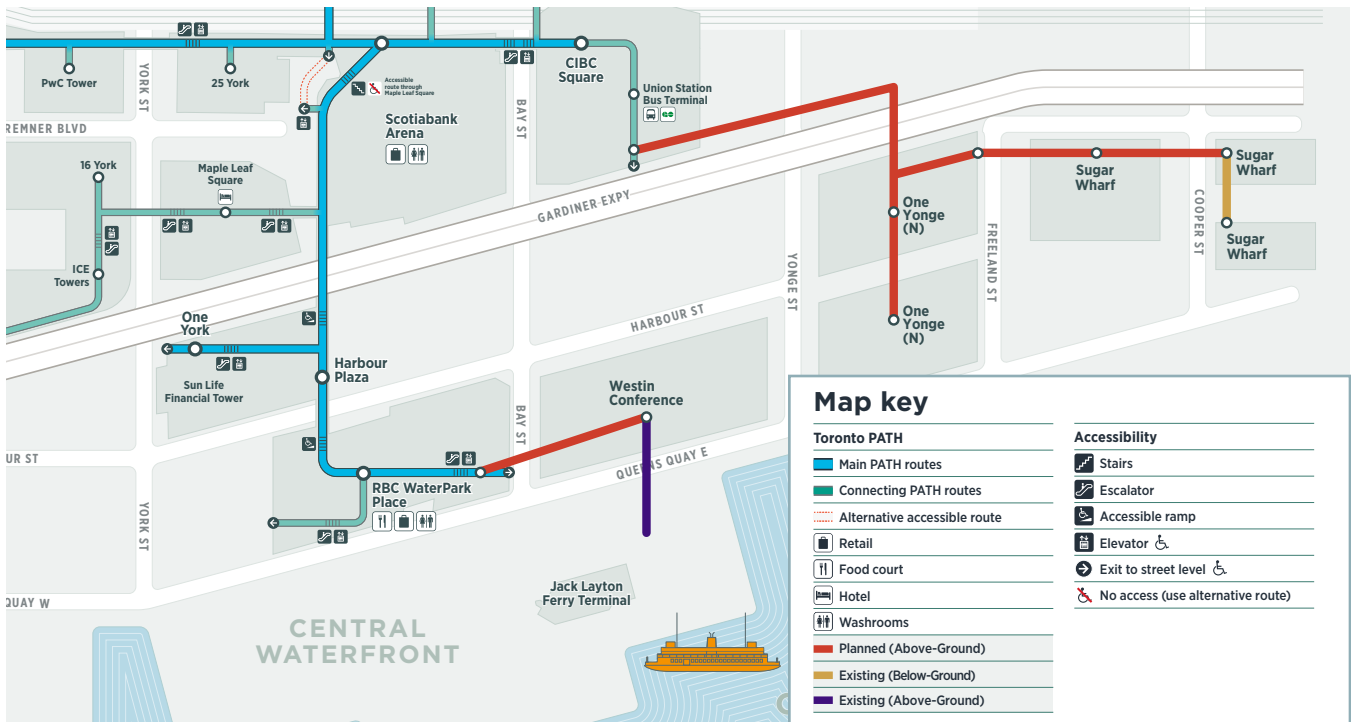


Figure 5: PATH Extension Network. Source: Waterfront BIA/PATH Network

## Pedestrian Connectivity and Safety

Significant investments have been made into improving the pedestrian experience along the waterfront. However, the Gardiner presents a key challenge for walking to and from the waterfront on north-south roads.

### The PATH Network

The PATH offers a convenient pedestrian access option, being both insulated from the weather and grade-level traffic, providing a pleasant, climate-controlled, safe, and efficient means of walking downtown at any time of year. It is particularly valuable for its connection to Union Station, allowing pedestrians moving south from Union to bypass the Gardiner safely and quickly.

The PATH network is intermittently extended in Toronto, including both underground pedestrian network expansion and related transportation infrastructure improvements. As of August 2025, several major developments have transformed Toronto's underground connectivity landscape, including extending connections to TD Terrace, CIBC Square, and RBC Waterpark Place. Who pays for these developments often depends on where on the network they lie – typically, when the PATH is under a commercial development, it is supported by funding by the private developer of the building itself.



Author: Andrevuas | WikiCommons



Figure 6: Above-ground PATH connections between Union Station and Queens Quay. Source: Waterfront BIA

Despite a lack of visibility and accessibility, the above-ground path extension south from Union to the waterfront at Waterpark Place sees significant commuter flows (particularly during weekday rush hours). However, the path network has not yet been extended east or west from Waterpark Place. The above-ground connections to Sugar Wharf aren't expected to be completed before 2031. This represents a significant missed opportunity for connecting the offices and institutions along Queens Quay to the greater PATH network. The growing waterfront communities will become increasingly important as an economic hub of the city in the coming years, and so will require efficient means of accessing regional transit hubs like Union Station by all available means.

Funding remains a key barrier for unlocking the extension and the status of future PATH developments remains unclear. Resolving a funding arrangement between building owners, developers, and government partners, would help unlock the full economic potential of the commercial developments along the eastern waterfront by increasing its year-round connectivity to the downtown core. Additionally, future PATH connections above-ground should include public access at the points they're visible crossing a street. At present, the connections appear to only connect two buildings, but there is no signage that they are public commuter streams.

The growing waterfront communities will become increasingly important as an economic hub of the city in the coming years, and so will require efficient means of accessing regional transit hubs like Union Station by all available means.

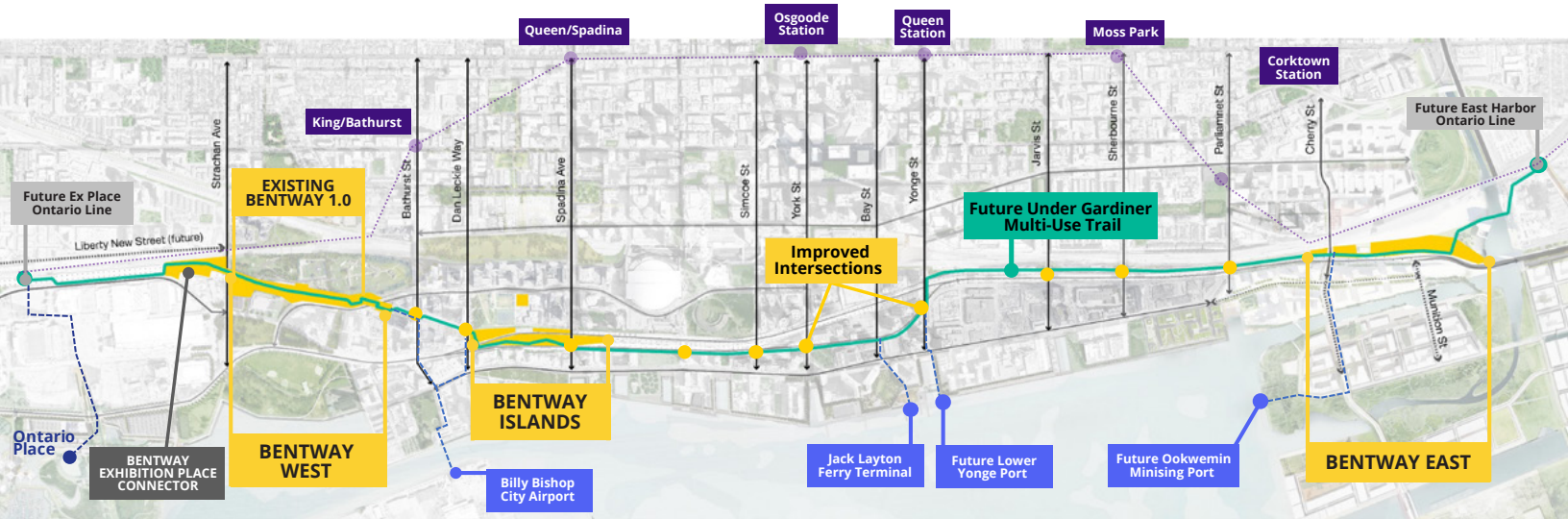


Figure 7: The Bentway Growth Plan. Source: The Bentway.

### Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan

Toronto is looking to upgrade the vibrancy, atmosphere, and safety of the spaces under the Gardiner to enable activation and encourage mobility along and underneath the highway. Developed by the Bentway Conservancy in partnership with the City of Toronto, and approved by Toronto City Council in April 2024, the [Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan](#) (PRP), establishes the foundational framework for infrastructure enhancement under the Gardiner. The plan presents a comprehensive vision for the entirety of the underutilized public spaces below and adjacent-to the Gardiner Expressway, from Dufferin to the DVP.<sup>21</sup>

Informed by the Under Gardiner PRP, The Bentway is advancing plans for expansion, consisting of two new hub sites and an expansion of the existing Bentway site on the west. The Bentway Islands project represents the most significant expansion of under-Gardiner public space. This initiative transforms three large-scale traffic islands spanning 11,600 square metres (125,000 square feet) between Dan Leckie Way and Spadina Avenue into a new vibrant public space.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the Bentway is working closely with the City to lead the continued transformation of the Under-Gardiner, bringing corridor-wide improvements to fruition.

The Bentway Islands project represents the most significant expansion of under-Gardiner public space. This initiative transforms three large-scale traffic islands spanning 11,600 square metres (125,000 square feet) between Dan Leckie Way and Spadina Avenue into a new vibrant public space.

Hub Site	Location	Description
Expanded Bentway West	Bathurst St. - west of Strachan Ave.	A creative destination with best-in-show cultural programming, linking directly to Exhibition Place Station and Ontario Place.
Bentway Islands	Spadina Ave to Dan Leckie Way	Steps away from the waterfront, a new signature space for urban recreation, sport, adventure, and play — all year-round.
Bentway East	Cherry St. – east of Munion St.	Key gateway to the Port Lands, where DVP meets the Gardiner, a living lab for urban ecology and creative exploration.

Initiative	Scope	Description
Under Gardiner Intersections	12 key north-south connections	Safer, well-lit, and more inviting under-Gardiner crossings at all 12 intersections to better connect pedestrians to key attractions and economic districts.
Under Gardiner Off-Road Multi-Use Trail	7 km continuous east-west trail	Pedestrian and cycling path offering consistent wayfinding, lighting, and public assets, with first-mile/last-mile connections from Exhibition Place to East Harbour.

The Waterfront ReConnect program represents the most visible current manifestation of intersection improvements under the Bentway’s initiatives. Two projects have already been implemented at York Street and Simcoe Street intersections, showcasing how creative design can transform car-centric spaces into welcoming pedestrian environments.

Boom Town, located at York Street, employs vibrant colours, and environmental lighting to improve safety and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists. Pixel Story at Simcoe Street uses colour, iconography, and storytelling to address the multiple vantages and speeds from which people experience the Gardiner, creating a cultural connector that draws attention to the intersection.<sup>23</sup>

These temporary interventions, which will remain operational until mid-2027 when Gardiner rehabilitation work commences, demonstrate innovative approaches using colour, pattern, environmental lighting, and storytelling to transform spaces built for cars into more welcoming areas for pedestrians and cyclists.

Moving forward, the goal is to create a consistent approach to intersection improvements. As an example, pedestrian-oriented lighting was identified as a key recommendation from the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan, supporting a more welcoming and walkable city while promoting better connections between the waterfront and downtown core. The Under Gardiner Lighting Project represents a crucial safety component of intersection improvements. Working with Light Bureau (Norway), the Bentway is implementing creative lighting strategies at Dan Leckie Way and Lake Shore Boulevard West to transform dark, disconnected spaces into safe, inviting waterfront gateways.<sup>24</sup> These lighting improvements address one of the most significant barriers to pedestrian use of under-Gardiner spaces.

These interventions to date are only the first steps for urban revitalization along the Gardiner. The long-term vision includes renovating 12 intersections, but funding is required to see it through, and to advance studies to determine the next steps. Ideally, new interventions are pursued in coordination with the Gardiner rehabilitation.

Having the means of collecting the necessary data to determine success – such as pedestrian headcounts, or public opinion polling – will be a useful tool for measuring the efficacy of these interventions. Other potential measurements such as ambient temperature, noise, pollution, and traffic incident data can also infer aspects of street-level comfort that encourage or dissuade people from the public realm of the impacted areas.

Seeing that these projects are brought to life through funding commitments and integration with other activations will be invaluable in connecting people to the waterfront and attracting further investment for growth.

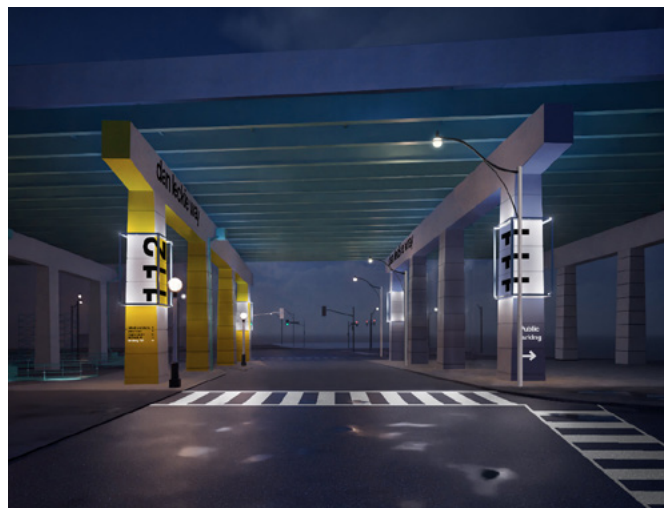


Figure 8: Under Gardiner Lighting Project. Source: The Bentway.

## Pedestrian Realm: Calls to Action

The physical presence of the Gardiner severs the waterfront from the rest of the city. Finding solutions to address this challenge is key to enticing people to explore the waterfront. To that end, we recommend action on two initiatives:



### 1. EXPAND AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE PATH NETWORK

Establishing a defined and pragmatic funding solution for extending the PATH eastward, as well as upgrading street-level signage and wayfinding, will greatly improve access and navigation for commuters and travellers to the waterfront.



### 2. INVEST IN UNDER GARDINER TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES

The necessary rehabilitation work on the Gardiner must be paired with municipal and provincial capital funding, along with private investment, to deliver pedestrian-focused improvements along the Gardiner and at key intersections. These investments will be critical for enabling connectivity, activity, and follow-on investments along the waterfront.





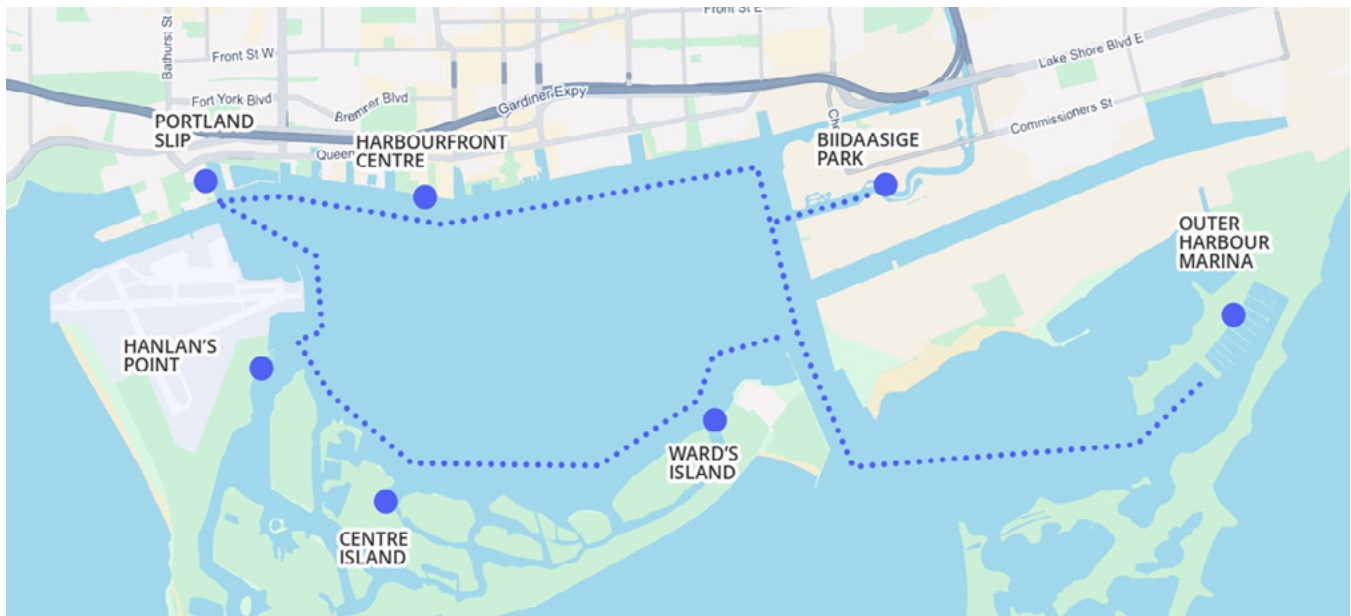
## Water Connectivity

### Water Taxis and Seabus

The Toronto waterfront is an underserved opportunity for non-traditional connectivity innovation – one that would give travellers along the waterfront an option to bypass road-bound congestion entirely. Water-based mobility schemes have proven successful in major cities worldwide; Vancouver’s SeaBus carries around 16,000 weekday passengers across Burrard Inlet;<sup>25</sup> New York’s expanding ferry system moved a record 7.4 million riders in 2024;<sup>26</sup> and London’s Uber Boat by Thames Clippers continues to grow profitably while diversifying revenue streams.<sup>27, 28</sup> Well-planned water transit can deliver reliable ridership and serve as an innovative and dependable addition to urban mobility. It can also serve as a tourist attraction and facilitate connections between multiple tourist destinations, making Toronto’s tourism offerings feel more integrated. To that end, Waterfront Toronto is leading the push to expand the existing water taxi network. Public partners are already investing heavily in the future of marine mobility in the inner harbour. The City of Toronto and CreateTO, with support from Waterfront Toronto and other partners, are delivering the most significant upgrade to the ferry system in a generation: a \$150-million program that will introduce two new electric ferry vessels by 2027 and modernize the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal.

Water-based mobility schemes have proven successful in major cities worldwide; Vancouver’s SeaBus carries around 16,000 weekday passengers across Burrard Inlet; New York’s expanding ferry system moved a record 7.4 million riders in 2024.

## CONNECTIVITY ON THE WATERFRONT



**Figure 9: Potential Seabus Route.** Source: Would you take a boat to work? The CEO of Ports Toronto says commuter seabuses to the suburbs are a possibility, Toronto Star.

Waterfront Toronto is spearheading near-term enhancements to marine passenger transportation as part of its long-term Marine Strategy, with coordination through the Waterfront Coalition and in consultation with partners like PortsToronto and the City of Toronto.<sup>29</sup> The Seabus Feasibility Study modeled potential routes, ridership, and costs, and concluded that there is enough anticipated demand in 2026 to justify a pilot.<sup>30</sup> The service could be launched as early as summer 2026 and lay the groundwork for a future high-capacity, fixed-route Seabus system, similar to typical commuter bus systems.

The pilot envisions a new east-west harbour connection linking the central and western portions of the inner harbour with destinations on Ookwemin Minising. Operations would be small-scale and flexible in the short-term, to gauge passenger demand and market response to the new service. Key elements of the pilot project will include providing reliable, frequent operations and giving clear passenger-facing information such as wayfinding and signage.

Beyond serving FIFA spectators, the pilot is positioned as a strategic catalyst for expanding marine mobility along Toronto's waterfront. If successful, the pilot could form the basis for expanded services via a full harbour-wide seabus network, as ongoing development raises demand.<sup>31</sup>

In this way, the 2026 pilot is intended not just as a short-term transportation solution, but as a long-term investment in sustainable, connected waterfront transit.

### Hovercraft Proposal

Hoverlink Ontario is advancing a proposal to launch a high-speed passenger hovercraft service across Lake Ontario, directly linking downtown Toronto (Billy Bishop Airport) with Port Weller in St. Catharines, Niagara Region. The crossing is designed to take only 30 minutes, offering a dramatic reduction in travel time compared to 1.5 - 2 hours for existing car, bus or train routes,<sup>32</sup> and is projected to operate year-round, even in poor seasonal conditions. The proposal includes two large, climate-controlled hovercraft, with a capacity of 180 passengers each, making 48 daily crossings 18 hours a day, every day of the year. Pricing details have yet to be finalized but are expected to be competitive with GO Transit and private shuttle fees. Estimated to launch in 2027, it is projected to remove 8,000 vehicles from the QEW highway.<sup>33</sup> Despite feasibility challenges, the proposal offers an exciting and innovative opportunity that City and Provincial authorities could support by clearing potential red tape impediments. Additionally, they could identify suitable docking locations to best integrate the hovercraft with existing transportation systems.



## Water Mobility: Calls to Action

Water-based mobility needs to be able to offer a compelling and useful service that is both competitive with, and complementary to, existing connectivity options. However, despite the challenges they face, they are a demonstrably viable connectivity solution that would benefit the waterfront as an economic hub and enable seamless travel across its entire length.



### 1. ENABLE AND SCALE WATER-BASED TRANSIT

For Toronto's emerging water-based mobility initiatives, the City of Toronto and Province of Ontario can play a key enabling role by ensuring supportive regulations and accommodating infrastructure, while the business community can add value through innovative water-based mobility solutions, advocacy, sponsorships, and creative partnerships. By working together to raise the profile of these services and highlight their potential, Toronto can build the awareness and demand needed to make water-based transit a lasting part of its legacy.



# Conclusion

**T**oronto's waterfront is one of the city's most dynamic and defining assets. Initiatives such as Waterfront East Transit, the FIFA 2026 transit enhancements, expanded water mobility services, and improved pedestrian connections through the PATH and the under-Gardiner transformations together create a vision of a waterfront that is accessible, connected, and welcoming. Each project represents more than infrastructure – it is an investment in the city's future prosperity, sustainability, and global profile. To achieve this vision, these initiatives must be delivered with urgency and ambition. Together, they can transform how people live, work, learn, and play along the waterfront.

Government has an essential role to play as an enabling partner—aligning priorities, unlocking funding, and fostering collaboration that allows these projects to flourish. For the business community, this is a moment to lead by example. By lending advocacy, partnership, and support, businesses can help ensure that the waterfront becomes a place where commerce and culture thrive, where visitors from around the world experience the best of Toronto, and where residents enjoy a connected, resilient cityscape. By undertaking all six of these actions, we can unlock Canada's most valuable waterfront and set its transformation in motion. Together, these efforts can secure a legacy that extends far into the future—a waterfront that embodies Toronto's ambition and potential for generations to come.

## Six Actions to Unlock Canada's Most Valuable Waterfront:



**1. SECURE FUNDING FOR WATERFRONT EAST TRANSIT**



**2. EXTEND THE DUFFERIN AND BATHURST BUS PRIORITY LANES**



**3. ENHANCE CONNECTIONS TO KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY**



**4. EXPAND AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE PATH NETWORK**



**5. INVEST IN UNDER-GARDINER TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES**



**6. ENABLE AND SCALE WATER-BASED TRANSIT**

## Endnotes

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