



## Royal Orchard Ratepayers' Association

### *An OPEN LETTER TO PREMIER FORD*

March 29th, 2021

Dear Premier Ford,

Re: Yonge North Subway Extension (Option 3) through Royal Orchard neighbourhood

We are writing on behalf of residents of the Royal Orchard neighborhood in Thornhill to express our grave concern regarding Option 3 of the Yonge North Subway Extension Plan announced by your government on March 18<sup>th</sup>, and to ask for a review of the option as presented by Metrolinx. Our community is not against expansion of the transit system. But this plan, if implemented under the proposed option, would adversely impact the health and well-being of thousands of residents in our neighborhood for decades to come. It is also a well-known fact that our homes will be “blighted” financially if the subway runs under them.

The plan, as proposed by Metrolinx, would see the Yonge North subway line run north under Yonge Street up to Royal Orchard Blvd, veer east of Yonge Street, and travel under 60 homes through the heart of our established neighborhood, while impacting hundreds more.

For our community, still struggling with the isolation, anxiety and depressive impacts of COVID-19, this news has been received with shock and disbelief. And, before we could even begin to understand its implications, Metrolinx was making a presentation to the Markham City Council, grossly minimizing or ignoring the drastic impacts of their proposal on our neighborhood. The fact that our local municipal councillor first heard of this plan only one day prior speaks to the total lack of consultation with the community in its development.

Built in the 1960s, Royal Orchard neighborhood is not a greenfield site for development. Three elementary schools make it popular for families. Housing styles range from detached houses, townhouses, apartments, condominiums and co-operative subsidized housing. Its residents include parents, working people and retired people who have made Canada their home from all over the globe. Many grew up in the neighbourhood, and others have lived here for decades.

Here are some of the obvious impacts we see for our community:

1. Years of noise, vibrations, tremors and possible property damage,
2. Exacerbation of issues relating to mental health, hypertension, sleep disorders and other chronic health conditions, and
3. Reduction in property values, the primary mode of savings for life events and retirement for many families.

***Essentially a deterioration in our overall quality of life.***

Metrolinx's presentation to the Markham City Council suggests that under our homes, the base of the subway tunnel would be anywhere from 15-30 meters below ground level, with a tunnel height of 6 meters. For homes where the base would be 15 meters below ground level, and considering a basement of 3 meters, **the top of the subway tunnel structure would be a mere 5 to 6 meters below our basements.** Mr. Premier, it is impossible to comprehend that trains weighing hundreds of tons, and running at high speeds for up to 16 hours a day, would not create severe and unacceptable vibrations, noise and tremors for the homes sitting above. Damage to the structural integrity of homes both during the construction and operating phases would be an additional major risk for our residents. **The ongoing mitigation suggested by Metrolinx to keep residents comfortable and homes safe may prove too expensive, or impossible to achieve.** There are just too many unknowns to assure us that our homes will continue to be safe and comfortable.

Disruption to Royal Orchard residents would not be limited to the initial construction period. It is a well-known fact that the TTC is struggling with a significant deferred maintenance and a capital availability challenge. According to its 2019-2033 Capital Investment Plan, for the subway portion alone, it shows a required investment of \$18 billion, of which only about \$4.5 billion is funded. How exactly the TTC (designated operator) will have sufficient funds to maintain the subway trains, tunnels, and all of the safety and operating mechanisms for this extension, is a serious concern. More specifically, **how are our residents to have any confidence that problems caused by subway operations will get prompt attention from the TTC, and provide urgent and appropriate relief for them?**

Metrolinx provided a few examples to Markham City Council of "similar projects" in North America, citing the Northgate extension in Seattle, the Canada Line in Vancouver, and the Vaughan subway extension. Even a cursory review of these would indicate that they are not comparable to our situation. **In Seattle and Vancouver, the trains are Light-Rapid-Transit of 2-3 train cars weighing a fraction of the weight of a Toronto (heavy-capacity rail) subway.** The Vancouver LRT does not travel under homes. In Vaughan, the subway was also not built under people's homes.

Finally, the financial damage to our residents, in terms of the economic value of their homes, cannot be understated. For all of the eight to ten years it would take for the subway line to be built, it would be near impossible for any resident to receive full pre-Option 3-announcement market value for their property should they need to relocate. And, what about our older residents who hope to use the residual equity in their homes to support them in the later stages of their lives? Once the subway is in operation, market values of properties will still very much depend on the noise and vibrations experienced by homes above and in the vicinity of the subway lines. Potential impact on mental and physical health of our residents during this entire period cannot be minimized.

Dear Premier, all of the above leads to only one inescapable conclusion — subway extension Option 3 is fundamentally flawed and should be rejected. We urge you to take this decision before it is too late. Allowing Option 3 to proceed will needlessly cause unimaginable havoc and suffering in the lives of thousands of residents in Thornhill. The health and wellbeing of the community will be negatively impacted. As a community, we are not against the expansion of the transit system to meet the needs of current and future residents of GTA. We are asking for the opportunity to speak to you and request a review of the available options so that the Province can achieve both the goal of expanding transit while minimizing harm to its residents.

Sincerely,

*The Royal Orchard Ratepayers' Association*

Cc:

The Honourable Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation  
Ms. Gila Martow, Member of Provincial Parliament  
His Worship, Mr. Frank Scarpitti, Mayor of the City of Markham  
Mr. Keith Irish, Councillor Ward 1 Thornhill, City of Markham  
The Honourable Peter Kent, Member of Parliament



*The Royal Orchard Ratepayers' Association (RORA) is a volunteer-led, membership-based organization. Formed in 2016, we are a voice and an advocate for the Thornhill (City of Markham) community defined geographically by Yonge Street on the West, Bayview Avenue on the East, Ladies' Golf Club of Toronto on the South, and The Holy Cross Cemetery on the North. Our board is comprised of residents of this area. [www.royalorchardra.ca](http://www.royalorchardra.ca)*