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The Gardiner Expressway: Give It a Rest

by Stephen Otto

In the New Year's Day edition of the *Globe and Mail*, 2010, architecture critic Lisa Rochon said of the newly-chosen design for the Fort York Visitor Centre, "Once Torontonians accept that the Gardiner Expressway is here to stay for years (perhaps decades), the possibilities for its reinvention are endless. That's why the winning scheme for the new visitor centre at Fort York National Historic Site, designed by Patkau Architects Inc. of Vancouver with Kearns Mancini Architects Inc. of Toronto, is worth celebrating."

And now that this impressive and exceedingly handsome building has opened in the shadow of the Gardiner, infusing the fort's nemesis from the 1950s with new relevance, The Friends of Fort York call upon Torontonians to set aside their criticisms of the portion of the expressway between the north side of Exhibition Place and Lakeshore Blvd. Accept that the new Visitor Centre has given it purpose as an arcade over the front of the building and the adjacent parking areas. Concede that the vistas formed by the structure's piers have opened the possibilities of acres of sheltered walks along Fort York Blvd., warmed year-round by the sun because of its inclination. And allow that this section of the Gardiner has become a shining example of something Torontonians do well: self renewal. As the *Star's* Chris Hume remarked recently, "It has never been shown to better advantage than here in the shadow of the Gardiner Expressway."

Continue to advocate taking down the section of the Gardiner east of Jarvis Street. Consider plans for humanizing and beautifying the middle section for the tens of thousands who must endure this styx of an experience every day. Recognize that while we may never be rich enough to replace the Gardiner with a US \$24 billion tunnel like Boston, we must never again let the maintenance budget for the structure fall so far behind that chunks are falling from the deck above.

But let's resolve to give rest to criticisms of the Gardiner where it passes Fort York, and put our energies to better use.

Stephen Otto is a founder of The Friends of Fort York and the current co-chair of its board of directors.

"Melting Point", 2014, by LeuWebb Projects
with Jeff Lee and Omar Khan, Toronto.

