



September 29, 2023

Phil Verster

President & Chief Executive Officer

Metrolinx

97 Front St. W.

Toronto, ON

M5J 1E6

Mr. Verster,

On January 30, 2023 the ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency, American Indian Movement, and a coalition of concerned citizens began a Ceremony for the Fish, Grasslands, Trees, Water, Animals, Birds, and People impacted by the Metrolinx Eglinton Crosstown West Extension (ECWE). The 1485 trees that Metrolinx plans to clearcut are key from Indigenous perspectives to the health and wellbeing of all those relations. From our perspectives the least we can do for those tree relatives is honour each one of them through Ceremony for four days and four nights as we do all our relations.

When you came to meet with us on February 20, 2023, you shared your desire for a “win-win” situation that would benefit the community for the next 200 years. From Indigenous perspectives here around the Great Lakes we have been maintaining relationships through these same Ceremonies for 64,000 years. In your letter you cite references to Canadian Law which has only been part of Canada since 1982 and was only articulated by settler Canadians in the British context since 1867. What we are describing to you is our relationship to Natural/Anishinaabe Law which has been maintained on this Sacred Territory since before the previous ice ages.

Our Ceremony and position has not changed. We have clearly communicated our expectation that these Indigenous perspectives be acknowledged and considered in assessing the environmental impact of your proposed construction. Since we first met with you we have asked for your construction process to stop until we finish our Ceremony and have time and resources to conduct an Indigenous-led environmental assessment to determine the best way to support a transit solution for this culturally-important and environmentally-sensitive ecosystem around the Humber River.

Metrolinx has yet to demonstrate any commitment to work with us around the construction plan and design. Instead, you have expropriated the land on which we have been holding Ceremony, paid off the First Nations Treaty partners, and only asked us to help you pick up the pieces of the environmental destruction you are proposing through ‘community consultation’. You have yet to show that you have heard any of our requests.

In your letter you claim that you “engaged the broader community through 18 open houses, 68 pop-ups, 90 canvasses, over 120 meetings with First Nations and community groups, and four surveys.” Please share the full details of these engagements – how were they publicized to the community, exactly what meetings you had with which First Nations and when and what was discussed. Was there ever an opportunity for the Urban Indigenous or York South Weston communities to collaborate on the alignment or did every single one of those actions only discuss restoration after destruction?

Now, in the midst of Truth and Reconciliation Week in Canada, where settler organizations are just starting to grapple with the devastation of the genocidal policies of the Canadian state, you are telling us to remove our Ceremony from ‘your’ land? Instead of acknowledging the American Indian Movement as the leader of this coalition, you address your letter and threat of legal action to our Indigenous Youth? Not only have you failed to collaborate, now you are antagonizing an already delicate situation and threatening to remove people who are conducting Ceremony following our Anishinaabe Laws that within the municipality of Toronto have been ratified under the Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We have repeatedly shown we are willing to work with you, but you have yet to commit in writing to even the least of our requests. From our perspective, we need a written commitment to honour and respect this ongoing Ceremony and our request for meaningful dialogue in shaping any construction plans.

We and our allies are committed to continuing to exercise our Charter rights with our Sacred Fire Ceremony and protecting it from being extinguished before the Ceremony is complete.

We would also like to remind you and emphasize that the Firekeepers are in peaceful ceremony and expect all Metrolinx interactions to be peaceful and respectful.

As the Indigenous community is in ceremony we have asked our coalition partner, Neiland Brissenden, to act as our spokesperson until further notice. Please send all communications to him at stopthetrainsinourparks@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Smoke
President
Southern Ontario Chapter, American Indian Movement

CC
Cynthia Bell, Executive Director, ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency
Dr. Hopi Martin, Edge of the Bush
Rock Trudeau, Turtle Island Carers of Fire
Jamie McQuaig, Turtle Island Carers of Fire
Neiland Brissenden, Stop the Trains in Our Parks
Mike Mattos, President, Mount Dennis Community Association
Rick Ciccarelli, Mount Dennis eco-Neighbourhood Initiative
Kim Bradshaw, Greenbelt Guardians