

Plan would swap Gardiner for highway under park

By Mike Funston
TORONTO STAR

Toronto architect Julian Jacobs has a plan to dismantle the Gardiner Expressway and replace it with a surface highway hidden by an elevated park.

"You reach a point in the evolution of a city when the time comes to make a quantum leap. If nothing is done, the city retrogresses," Jacobs said in an interview.

"I believe Toronto is at a crossroads and if we don't make some bold decisions about the future of our downtown, then soon it will be too late. We'll be too boxed in by development."

David Crombie, head of the royal commission on the future of Toronto's waterfront, has recommended tearing down the Gardiner and replacing it over 20 years with improved arterial roads and public transit.

Since Crombie's initial report was released last September, the commission has launched a major feasibility study of the engineering, transportation,

financial, environmental and other issues involved in removing the Gardiner.

Until that study is released this fall, the commission, which has been briefed on Jacobs' plan, will neither endorse nor reject any such proposals, said David Carter, Crombie's senior director of special projects.

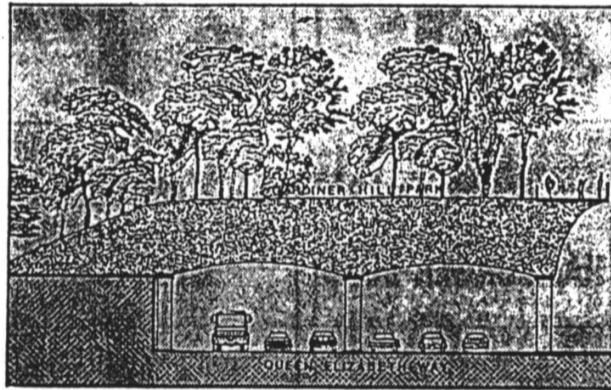
Metro officials, such as transportation commissioner Doug Floyd, say Jacobs' idea to turn the Gardiner into a city-wide "river of green" is probably technically feasible.

Highlights of the proposal include:

- Building a 10- to 12-lane surface extension of the Queen Elizabeth Way, along or beside the Gardiner's alignment, while demolishing the elevated expressway Crombie considers to be a barrier to the waterfront.

- Concealing the northern side and top of the surface highway with a concrete structure, leaving the southern side open to the air.

- Covering this structure, which can be built in sections as



PROPOSED VIEW: Dismantling expressway would be "a quantum leap," architect Julian Jacobs argues.

financing permits, with a mammoth berm, in part using recycled debris from the demolished Gardiner.

- Covering the berm with topsoil and turning it into a 14-kilometre-long (9.3-mile) park by planting thousands of trees and shrubs to act as an urban lung, producing oxygen

and filtering pollution.

- Building a boardwalk and bicycle path along the top, offering a spectacular view of the waterfront and skyline.

- Providing improved pedestrian access to the waterfront with wide promenades on overpasses at intersections with north-south

arterial roads. These crossover points could have majestic fountains, cultural pavilions, cafes and other amenities.

- Splicing existing waterfront roads such as Lake Shore Blvd. and Queen's Quay, to improve traffic flow and create a grand marine drive.

While other tear-down-the-Gardiner proposals have been floated over the years, including developer Bill Teron's idea to build a tunnel under the lake and add more parkland in a trade for development rights along the expressway, Jacobs believes his is better.

"Toronto can have its cake and eat it, too," Jacobs said.

He said his plan would cost about \$1 billion, significantly less than Metro's estimate of \$2 billion to \$3 billion (Teron's estimate is \$1 billion) to build a tunnel.

The proposal recognizes that an efficient expressway is crucial to Toronto's economic lifeblood as well as the public's and Crombie's desire for a greener, more accessible

waterfront, Jacobs said.

It's not tied to any sweetheart deals with developers and is consistent with the goals of the recently released Metro Council strategic plan, which places great emphasis on the environment.

Even Floyd, who has been skeptical about such proposals; won't dismiss Jacobs' as being "too impractical."

But it's too complex to evaluate without more detailed scrutiny, Floyd said.

"I'm trying to be as positive as I can. If there's enough money around, we can do some wonderful things by removing the Gardiner," he said.

As with other such proposals, he emphasized there would be tremendous traffic disruption during construction.

"There are ways of alleviating this congestion on an interim basis but it would be extremely expensive, which brings us back to the fundamental question of where the money is going to come from."

That's a question Jacobs doesn't address in detail.