

High Park and Parkside Drive: Identifying Problems and Potentials

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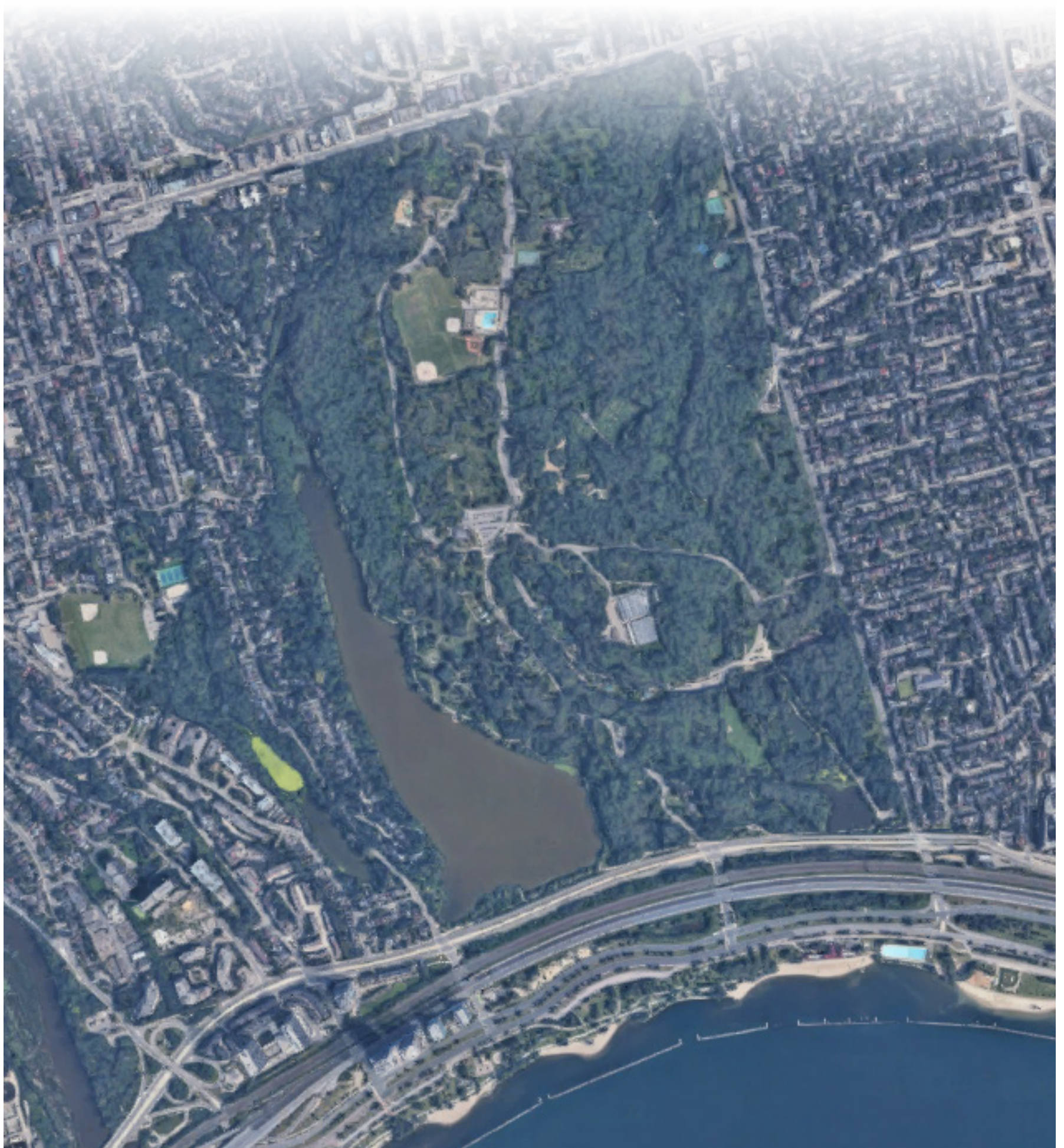


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Introduction

Parkside Drive is rightfully the subject of serious neighbourhood concern. With its asymmetrical relationship to its two sides, Parkside Drive is highly divisive, and with its high-speed traffic, there is no safe public realm. The road is not a “park-side drive” by any means. Parkside Drive still has qualities that reflect the residential nature of the neighbourhood, but whatever greatness Parkside Drive might have had originally has suffered from its widening to four lanes of fast, heavy traffic.

It is our contention that Parkside Drive must be fundamentally redesigned from its southern starting point at Lakeshore Boulevard to its transportation node at Keele Subway Station and beyond.

High Park and Parkside Drive Scope of Work: A City Scale Challenge

High Park, Parkside Drive, adjacent residential streets, TTC bus stops, and other public spaces form a dangerous, entangled set of physical conditions. Added to this deficient condition are the lack of well-built transit linkages and pedestrian and cycling networks from the city’s north-south streets to the TTC’s east-west subway line. The issue is that of a civic scale—there is inoperable infrastructure surrounding this metropolitan, city Destination Park. The overall connectivity of the park is mostly cut off, for example, on its southern edge to the Lake and Waterfront, by a constraining infrastructure of highways and train tracks. These conditions require both modifications and wholesale new solutions that have city scale relevance. The problem is not simple but the situation is urgent. The economics of taking charge of this city building effort involves the full attention of the city’s politicians and a plan of action to implement these improvements within a reasonable period of time. .

Park Entrances: Imagine not being able to access one side of Central Park in New York—or High Park in Toronto

How exactly do people from all across the city access High Park? In particular, how does a person arriving from the Keele Subway Station enter the park? Passengers arriving at Keele Station get off the train and enter into a long, almost windowless platform. This dark, enclosed space squanders the opportunity for passengers to see any views of High Park. Long expanses of the precast bridge could be opened to surrender a commanding view of the park and Parkside Drive down toward the Waterfront. Currently, as passengers exit Keele subway station, they encounter a lifeless space underneath the bridge.

The south-west corner of the Bloor-Parkside intersection has an opening into the Park, which requires two points of crossing to access. While this corner is a marked entrance into the park, there is no corresponding access south on Parkside Drive—it’s not clear south of Bloor what choices of entrance are offered to the park visitor. The length of High Park along Parkside Drive has numerous wooded edges and open meadows that lack continuity and

connection between each other, and many park amenities along the Drive’s edge are currently inaccessible and invisible.

Although the residential frontages with their gardens and entrances on the eastern side of Parkside Drive are interesting, the sidewalk is extraordinarily narrow. What alternatives are offered to access the park other than walking as far south as it requires to encounter a crosswalk? Where possible, the east-west residential streets adjacent Parkside Drive can extend into the park. Distinct paving and material markings would clearly communicate this pedestrian crossing and send a message to drivers that they are encountering pedestrian crossing points.

While there are some stretches of formal sidewalk on the west side of Parkside Drive, they are discontinuous and become dirt paths. Dispersed between the expansions of open meadow are thickly treed edges that disappear in a dramatic grade change, creating an unsafe, un-walkable edge. There are numerous unmarked, informal entrances points into the sharply steeped park edge without stairs, landings, or railings. These conditions clearly do not facilitate safe or easy access into High Park along Parkside Drive.

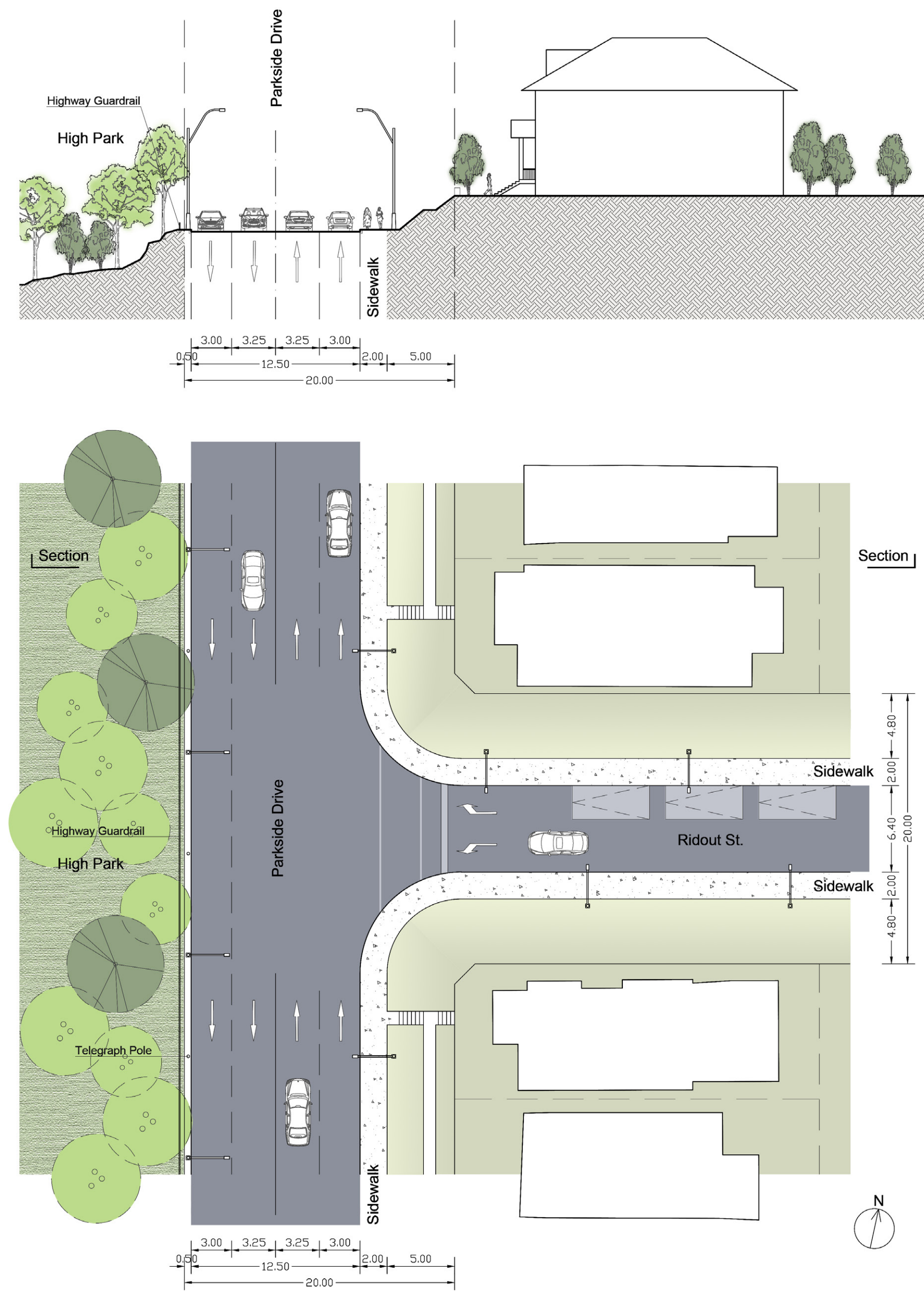
The Need for Improved Public Spaces and Urban Design

The current state of urban design and park elements at High Park is very poor and the multitude of users eclipse the park’s facilities. There are serious problems with its infrastructure that must become more responsive. This design challenge needs to take an inventory of user needs, identify new uses, and invent new repertoires that meet present day requirements. The traditional park elements including public washroom buildings need a revolutionary approach.

The Public Park Bench

This inventory must see the public as “agential realists” capable of organization abilities that could form part of a new invigorated urban repertoire. For instance, the multitude of new users fall into differently sized matrices of groups that are not suited to one spatial scale, but require a matrix of smaller and more democratic spatial ways of organization. For instance, if we take an element like a public bench, what determines its size and dimension? Why are benches in High Park placed alone and without supporting elements like lighting or spatial modifiers? Climate-responsive elements such as shade canopies must be designed to create enjoyable outdoor spaces through various weather conditions. Is this a moment in which these inventive new urban design tools can be showcased to both meet public safety needs and emphasize the improvements required of public space?

Parkside Drive: Existing Conditions in Plan and Section



Parkside Drive in Context



View 1. Parkside Drive facing south toward the Waterfront.



View 2. Parkside Drive facing south where it encounters the Gardiner Expressway and Lakeshore Boulevard West.

Parkside Drive: At Bloor St. Intersection

Where Parkside Drive encounters Bloor Street, it becomes indistinguishable, lost in a sea of asphalt. The four corners of the Parkside and Bloor intersection fail to constitute anything remotely like an urban street intersection. Except for the south-west corner, where High Park begins, the corner locations at this intersection lack an urban identity. This intersection is currently underbuilt, but has potential to be transformed into a significant gateway location with greater density.

A new corner public space could be imagined here: the three urban corners at this intersection could be the site of new buildings that fill in the gaps as well as build over the existing subway station:

- The north-east corner that currently has a gas station could become an open courtyard building that creates a fronting condition onto the street. This new building could also extend over the top of the adjacent Keele subway station where space becomes available.
- The north-west corner currently has a standalone, five-storey seniors’ residential building that could be carefully integrated with a higher density courtyard building that can also be built over top of the existing subway bridge. As well, Keele Street north of the station has Keele Street Public School and Lithuania Park. Both of these institutions, the TTC’s Keele Subway Station, and High Park must form a more responsive network of public spaces.
- On the south-east corner, the existing 19th century buildings could be maintained, with new buildings built over top of them. This corner would not have an open space, but buildings to the lot lines.
- The south-west corner with its entrance to High Park could be reconfigured to produce a more open public space that responds to the other corners. The south-west corner is key as it can initiate and re-state the edge of the entire park face along Parkside Drive with a well-marked, public entrance and new lighting.



View 3. Looking south at Bloor and Parkside Drive at a wide expanse of asphalt, an open corner of High Park on the south-west corner, and low, two-storey commercial and residential buildings on the south-east corner.

Parkside Drive: At Bloor St. Intersection



View 4. Looking east at Bloor and Parkside with the open corner of the gas station, temporary bike lane infrastructure, and low-key corner commercial and residential buildings.



View 5. North of Bloor, Parkside Drive vanishes into Keele Street with a major expanse of asphalt. Raised subway track over Keele Street is a precast, vertical surface that presents a flat, bleak frontage. This intersection shows an impoverished public realm.

Parkside Drive: At Bloor St. Intersection



View 6. Looking south under the Keele Station bridge. The impoverished and hostile space under the bridge and its distant framed view of Parkside Drive and asphalt to the south.



View 7. Looking west at Bloor and Parkside Drive at traffic-dominated expanse of asphalt, a five-storey residential setback building and an open corner to High Park.

Re-Imagining and Intensifying the Edges of High Park and Parkside Drive

The current low level of urban design is certainly to do with the four lanes of traffic that dominate the Drive, resulting in only one narrow pedestrian sidewalk along its eastern edge. We can subtract at least one lane of traffic to introduce new potentials and expansion opportunities.

While reducing the lanes of traffic is key to the Drive’s re-design, the real potential is to re-imagine the Drive’s relationship to High Park. As is typically the case in Toronto parks, the perimeters

are ignored—most of High Park’s elements and amenities are located in the centre of the park. This requires a rethinking of what elements, programs and landscapes are capable of performing along this edge. The edge of High Park needs to be re-tabulated to balance the needs of cyclists, motorists and pedestrians and equipped with new programs and amenities. This can be achieved by bringing High Park’s existing and new programming to the park’s edge.

Parkside Drive: Moving South Toward Waterfront



View 8. Parkside Drive facing south near Bloor Street. On the west side is the immediate inside edge of the park with overgrown bushes, tree cover, a discontinuous sidewalk, and highway guard rails.



View 9. Parkside Drive facing south at Indian Valley Crescent. The entrance in to High Park is poorly defined and ambiguous. The pedestrian crossing leads into a traffic light pole and a landscape edge wall. There is a “mean,” isolated bus stop, but no street lighting, benches, or any public amenities.

Parkside Drive: Moving South Toward Waterfront



View 10. Parkside Drive facing south approaching Howard Park Avenue, with highway guard rails and minimal sidewalk space. There is no proper public space to balance the dominant space of the road.



View 11. Parkside Drive facing south at Howard Park Avenue with the streetcar entrance into the park called the “High Park Loop.” The convergence of the pedestrian crossing, the extension of Howard Park Drive, and the pedestrian entrance lacks a clear articulation for the different infrastructures for cars, pedestrians, and transit vehicles.

Parkside Drive: Moving South Toward Waterfront

Howard Park Avenue and the High Park Loop: A Better Public Transit Station and Space

Howard Park Avenue cuts diagonally across Parkside Drive into High Park, where the TTC’s Carleton streetcar enters the High Park Loop, the route’s terminal station. Beside the streetcar tracks, Howard Park Avenue extends into the park with an asphalt surface and raised concrete curbs, but is reserved for service and emergency vehicles only. Forming a third parallel “string” of movement, a pedestrian sidewalk also leads toward the streetcar stops, but discontinues before entering the park.

The Loop itself is a semi-circular space surrounded by oak trees, with a washroom building that doubles as a streetcar stop. Here, a handful of TTC users can wait under a small canopy. There is one bench and a fountain to acknowledge this area as a public space.

This entire assemble of roads, pathways and washroom facility does not do justice to this as a place, nor does the architecture reflect well on the TTC’s design ambitions. In particular, the washroom building, notwithstanding its crude design and locked doors, needs to be redesigned to rise to the occasion of a significant park entrance and public space. The new articulated street cars are the only part of the infrastructure here that stands out in any positive way.

We must rethink the entire space around the Loop and consolidate the separate “strings” of movement. This would create a qualitative new organization that facilitates a proper connection between Parkside Drive, the High Park Loop, and High Park itself.

The existing pedestrian pathway could form the alignment of a new shade canopy off Parkside Drive. This “event” canopy could extend into the park and connect to a new, expanded public washroom, gardens, and an entrance courtyard. These urban design improvements could make arriving in the park a more memorable, civic-scale moment. These changes would also introduce new programming potentials and business opportunities. Somehow the idea of an outdoor transit station has been given low design priority. The task is to create a set of new infrastructural elements that enrich the park’s history and future potentials.

The Carleton Street car travels horizontally across the city from the east end to the west end and arrives families and individuals to a location inside the park as an anticipated end to a streetcar journey.

Dimensional and Spatial Expansion to Parkside Drive: A New Repertoire of Elements on the Park Edge

The current right of way on Parkside Drive is approximately twenty metres. Of the four lanes on Parkside Drive, three are currently used for traffic, while the most eastern lane is reserved for parking. A number of modifications could improve the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure along Parkside Drive. If the

three lanes of traffic could work without the parking on the east side, the bi-directional centre driving lane would be required to support peak-hour traffic and turning lanes onto the east-west streets. This design assumes three traffic lanes of 3.2 metres in width, totalling 9.6 metres. The eastern side of Parkside Drive is expanded by two metres, which creates space for a line of trees at the curb edge.

The west side currently has insufficient space to accommodate pedestrians or any sort of formal access. The western edge of Parkside Drive needs to be expanded inside the perimeters of the Park for better pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. More of space needs to be re-oriented toward this expansion. There are both opportunities and constraints along High Park’s edge: geographic conditions include open, flat meadows as well as dramatic grade drops into the ravine. These open meadows present no difficulty for expansion, and trees removed from these areas would be compensated for with new plantings.

The new park boundary would start with a marked, one-metre space from the edge of the adjacent traffic lane. A 0.4-metre-wide raised concrete edge would form a boundary with the three-metre-wide, bi-directional bike path. When this asphalt cycling and pedestrian surface encounters intersections, the material changes into a concrete surface across the street’s right of way, creating a highly contrasted space that communicates to drivers that they are entering a pedestrian crossing zone.

The inside edge of the cycling path would also be marked by a raised, 0.5-metre-wide concrete edge with a line of closely spaced bollards that form a clear yet porous boundary. A three-metre-wide zone of trees would form another line of elements. A new public fence could also run the length of the park. The steel fence could be utilized in a number of ways and could reflect on some of High Park’s existing entrances. The park fence can also take advantage of the many east-west streets that terminate at the park and could attain a representational edge to the street’s vista toward the park.

The open meadows could also take on new responsibilities. These open spaces could become properly defined access points to the currently unmarked paths into the park, and could help bring more social and cultural opportunities to the park-street boundary.

This new expansion into the adjacent park boundary would improve both street space and park space and provide benefits for not only the adjacent streets and neighbourhoods, but for the many people arriving from the subway and taking advantage of a new park edge and access points. The park as a city destination would be able to then overcome the spatial limitations of its current right of way and rebalance the needs of cars, transit, cyclists, and pedestrians in a more equitable distribution.

Parkside Drive: Moving South Toward Waterfront



View 12. Parkside Drive facing south near Westminster Avenue with “slow down” signs, an assortment of scattered trees and openings, a low wall and an informal pathway.



View 13. Parkside Drive facing south at Spring Road, the site of a one of many tragic accidents. The park’s treed and often sparse edge is unclear as to its design intention. The park’s edge does not facilitate any relationship with the street.

Parkside Drive: At Highway Intersections



View 14. Parkside Drive facing south as it approaches Lakeshore Boulevard West and access to the waterfront. This unfriendly space is very narrow for pedestrians and does not facilitate safe or easy access to the Waterfront.



Ray Delahanty

@Nerd4Cities

It’s pretty jaw-dropping how much ingenuity (and funding) goes into super-convoluted interchange designs, and how little goes into simple things like making cities more walkable. The worst of the worst, coming at noon Pacific (or maybe the best if you’re into Cities Skylines?)



10:57 AM · Oct 19, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

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(Source: Ray Delahanty via Twitter)

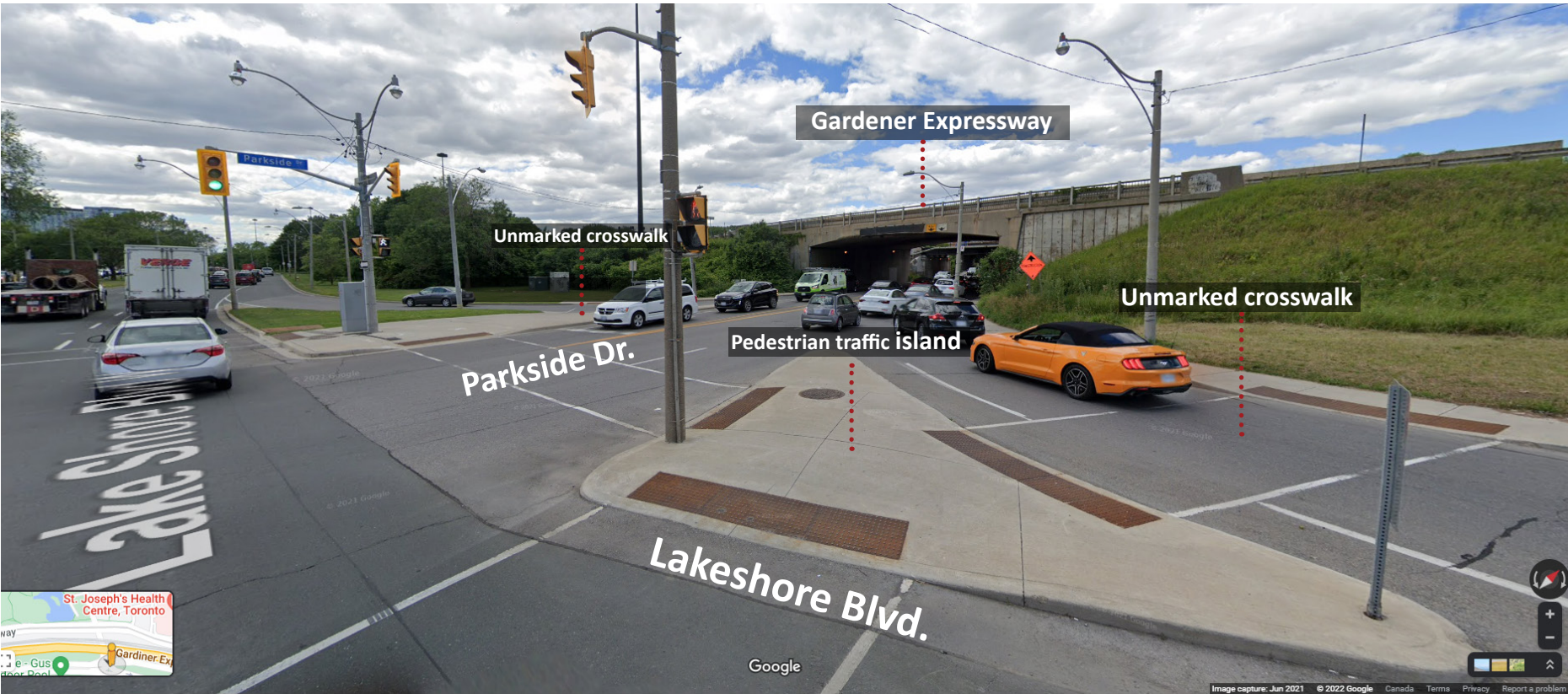
Views of Parkside Drive: Parkside Drive at Highway Intersections

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Parkside Drive: At Highway Intersections



View 15. Lakeshore Boulevard facing north-west with high-speed cars turning off from the highway north onto Parkside Drive. This barren interchange of roadways, turn lanes, and pedestrian islands is a result of a single focus on vehicular circuitry at the expense of pedestrian movement.



View 16. Lakeshore Boulevard facing south-west with cars going from the highway north to Parkside Drive with pedestrian traffic islands acting as “stepping stones” toward the Waterfront.

Parkside Drive: At the Waterfront



View 17a. Aerial view of Parkside Drive as it encounters the Waterfront.



View 17b. Aerial view of the Waterfront near Parkside Drive.



View 17c. View of Sunnyside Beach south of Parkside Drive.

Parkside Drive: Does it connect to the Waterfront for Pedestrians and Cyclists?

The current series of highway interchanges at the bottom of Parkside Drive is exceptionally dangerous and clearly not designed for pedestrians. There is no proper linkage to the waterfront, only a series of dangerous traffic islands that act as “stepping stones” for pedestrians to use through speeding traffic.

Parkside Drive’s southern edge at Lakeshore Boulevard begs some serious questions—why is it that this interchange facilitates high speed transition from the highway onto Parkside Drive? What other forms of highway-to-street transitions could be imagined? What international examples or current practices can be brought to bear on this problem?

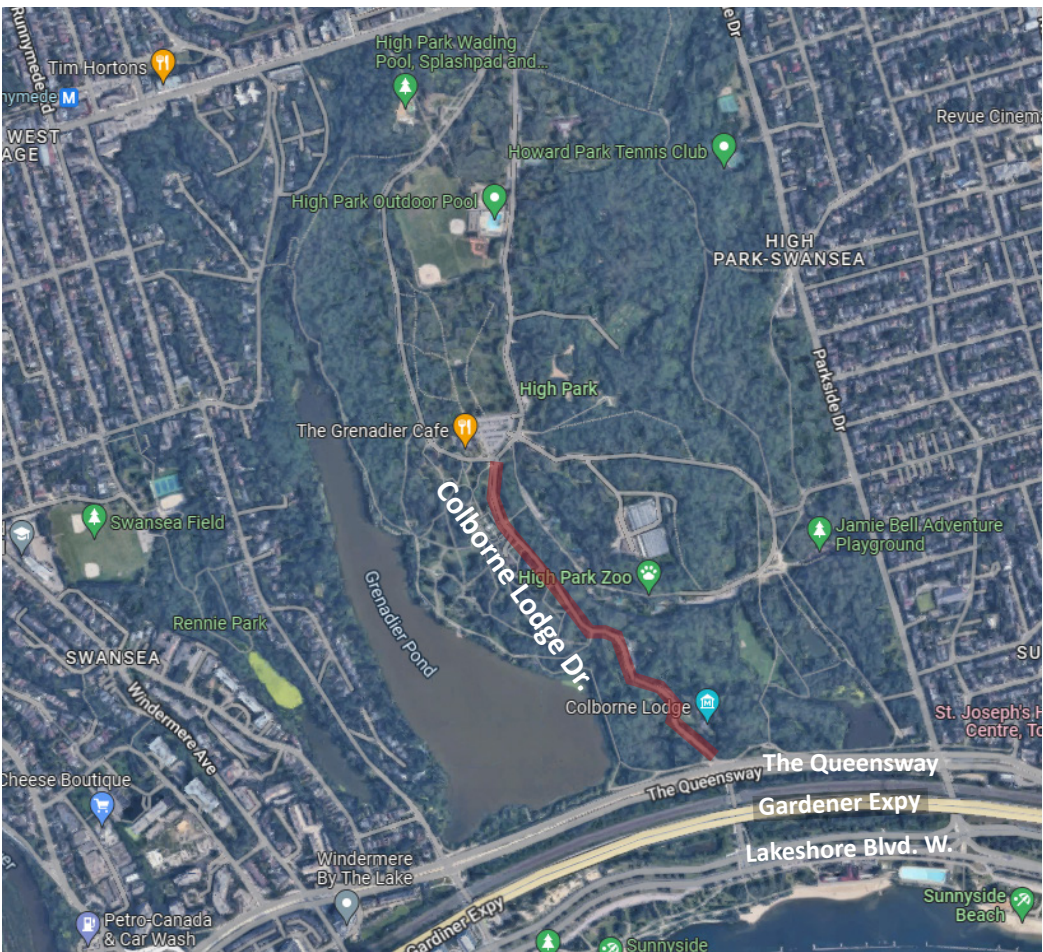
Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York has many parallels to this case. For example, Flatbush Avenue leads into a public entrance plaza before leading to Prospect Park proper, slowing down traffic. Dufferin Street in Toronto is another comparative precedent—where Dufferin transitions through the CNE, cars are forced to slow down. These examples suggest that a better “City Building Idea” needs to be entertained for Parkside Drive.

The exchange where Parkside Drive encounters the Lakeshore Boulevard must be re-imagined as a city space with better, safer access to the Waterfront.

Connecting High Park to the Waterfront: A City Building Challenge

There is potential to improve Parkside Drive at its intersection with Bloor Street and transform it into a major public space that could begin to initiate changes along the west edge of the Drive. At the same time, there needs to be a solution for the entanglement of highway interchanges at its most southern point and potentials to contact the Waterfront. The best strategy may be to side-step a re-design of this convoluted interchange with an alternative approach. We are suggesting an elevated pedestrian walkway that travels over the highway infrastructure and arrives at a new Waterfront facility. This bridge would ensure a safe connection from High Park to the Waterfront.

Colborne Lodge Drive



View 18. Colborne Lodge Drive in context.

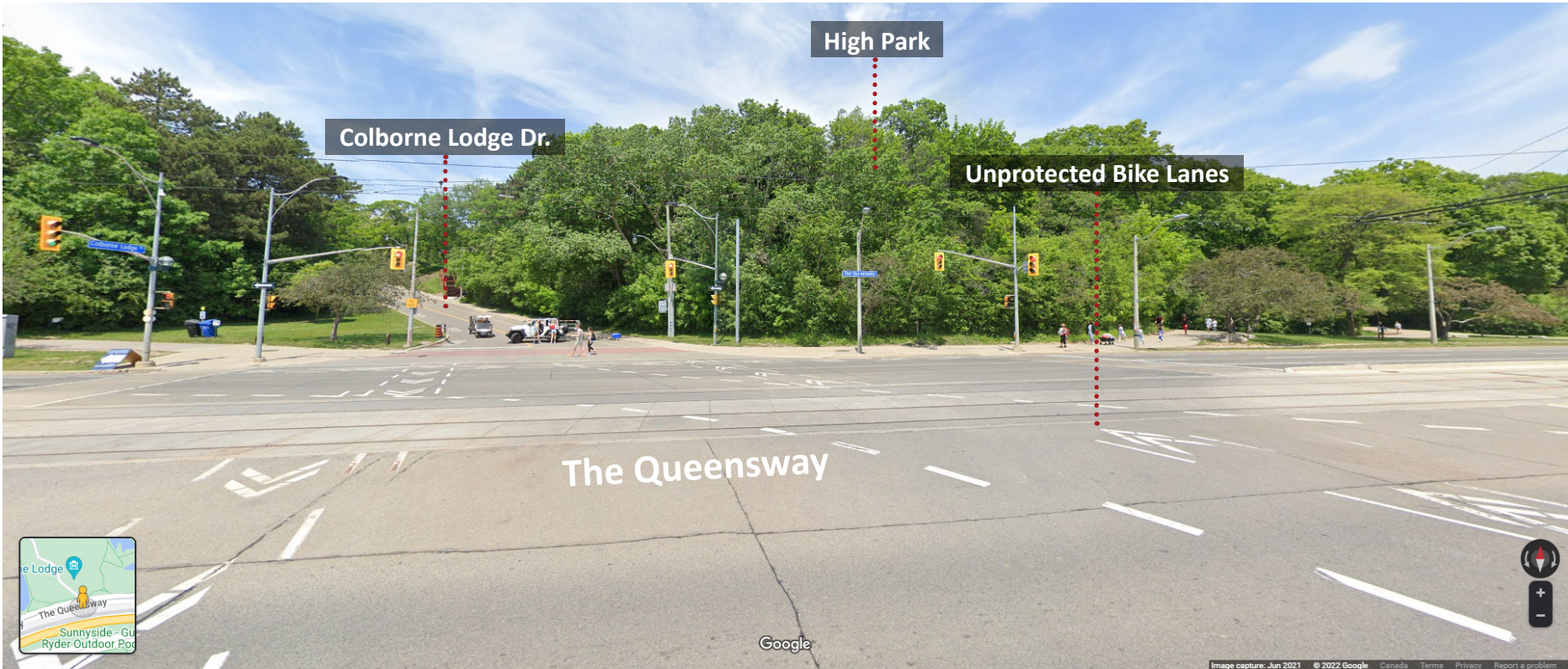


View 19. Colborne Lodge Drive at its intersections with the Queensway, the Gardener Expressway, and Lakeshore Boulevard West.



View 20. View of Colborne Lodge Drive moving south toward the Waterfront.

Colborne Lodge Drive



View 21. View of Colborne Lodge Drive where it meets the Queensway.



View 22. View of Colborne Lodge further south where it encounters Lakeshore Blvd.



View 23. View of Lakeshore Boulevard facing south-west toward the Waterfront.

Precedent: Nichols Bridgeway

Millennium Park, Chicago, IL



Precedent 1d. Detail at the pedestrian ramp to upper bridge.



Precedent 1e. Aerial view of the Nichols Bridgeway adjacent a highway.

Precedent: Nichols Bridgeway

Millennium Park, Chicago, IL



Precedent 1a. The bridge floats seemingly without support above the roadway. The bridge’s profile, robust hand rail, and glass edges create an enhanced and dramatic pedestrian experience above the city.



Precedent 1b. Bridge at ramp transition. Metal surface of bridge, robust steel hand rail, framing trees parallel to walkway



Precedent 1c. Transition ramp affords the bridge a lesser gradient/slope required to elevate itself. The ramp starts within the park, adjacent a major walkway up on top of a raised mound.

Precedent: Av. Gambetta Bike Lane

Père Lachaise, Paris, France

The new protected bike lane running the length of Père Lachaise on Ave Gambetta is how a real city park edge should function. The new bike lane is consolidated on one side of the street with two-directional movement. The raised road edge has a marked concrete edge and small separate space with another bike lane. On the side of the bike lane is another raised concrete edge with a parallel line of closely spaced bollards. Adjacent this line of bollards is a single line of trees. Running parallel to this line of trees and safely inside is a pedestrian space that isn't necessarily wide, but perceptually extends into the treed line.

The painted steel fence that borders the landscape also makes this linear edge of park work and look fantastic. With respect to the steep incline along certain sections of the park along Parkside Drive, a similar fence could provide a greater sense of safety and extend design qualities to the park space beyond.

Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure along Parkside Drive

Safe cycling lanes on Parkside Drive are fundamental. Given the potential reduction of traffic lanes, we are able to re-evaluate the entire public realm as well. There are several advantages to providing a single, bi-directional bike lane on Parkside Drive. The wide, two-way cycling infrastructure lane opens up better ways of connecting into the park's interior network of pathways and other infrastructure.

At a detail scale, the combined cycling route is raised and separated from the adjacent road. This asphalt track intersects with concrete surfaces that register and mark the east-west streets. The raised edges of the cycling track then are separated from the park by a line of trees, bollards, lighting poles and a concrete curb. The remaining space forms the pedestrian walkway with a raised steel fence at the site perimeter, separating the exterior of the park from its interior.

The pedestrian surface and its perceptual width extends across the treed bollard space and extends to the edge of the cycling route. Both pedestrians and cyclists can cross through the bollard and tree boundary. Storm water collection is incorporated into the raised curb detail at the edge of the cycling track with a conduit connection to the line of trees and the adjacent ravine.



Precedent 2. Bi-directional bike lane adjacent a sidewalk and park in Paris, France.
(photo by Marcel Moran via Twitter)

Urban Design Insights from Jane Jacobs:

Activist and Author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

The Uses of Sidewalks

“To keep the city safe is a fundamental task of a city’s streets and its sidewalks.” (p. 107)

(Source: https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1961_Jacobs_TheUsesof-Sidewalksby_excerpt.pdf)

Sidewalk Safety

The purpose of the sidewalk is not only to carry pedestrians to and from places, it is a public space in itself and for a district to be successful, pedestrians need to feel safe and secure on sidewalks. For this to happen sidewalks must have three main qualities;

- “Clear mark of private and public space
- Eyes must be on the street at all times, and
- Sidewalks must have users on it fairly continuously.”

If eyes are fixated on interior spaces (e.g., High Park), there is a false sense of security on the sidewalks.

Jacobs describes parks as ‘volatile spaces’ and like sidewalks, need ‘eyes’ and continuous usage, but vast open spaces make this much more difficult to resolve.

“Forces of Decline and Regeneration”

Using the West side of Central Park, New York, Jacobs states that the easiest of borders to correct are those that could encourage much greater use of their perimeters.

Characteristics of Economically Successful and Pleasant Areas

Jacobs discovered that the most economically successful areas, as well as those that were the safest and most pleasant to be in, had these four characteristics:

1. There were various types and ages of buildings.
2. There was a high concentration and density of uses.
3. The uses were mixed, not just all one kind of thing.
4. There were frequent streets and very few long blocks.

(Source: <http://architectureandurbanism.blogspot.com/2012/03/jane-jacobs-death-and-life-of-great.html>)

‘Border Vacuums’

- Transportation infrastructure (e.g., roads, railroads) are prime offenders for producing dead-end city streets.
- “An edge may be more than simply a dominant barrier, if some visual or motion penetration is allowed through it—if it is, as it were, structured to some depth with the regions on either side. It then becomes a seam rather than a barrier, a line of exchange along which two areas are sewn together.”
- Jacobs points to Central Park as an example of a place that could have become a border vacuum if big buildings or wide streets had lined its edges.

(Source: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-09/understanding-border-vacuums>)



(photo by Frank Lennon/Toronto Star via Getty)

Parkside Drive, Keele Street and Bloor Street

