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Province approves reducing Queens Quay to two lanes

By Kelly Grant

From Tuesday's Globe and Mail

But much of the \$192-million project remains unfunded, leaving waterfront business owners worried a half-finished makeover could scar the street

The plan to eliminate two lanes of traffic on Queens Quay Boulevard and transform the thoroughfare into a grand promenade has received final approval from the province.

However, three-quarters of the \$192-million project remains unfunded, leaving waterfront business owners worried a half-finished makeover could scar the street.

"I'm hoping that the city has learned a lot of lessons from the [controversial streetcar project on] St. Clair," said Kevin Currie, chair of the Waterfront Business Improvement Area, which represents about 300 merchants and commercial tenants on Queens Quay between Yonge and Bathurst streets.

"You have to have a decent plan from the get-go, which I think Waterfront Toronto has the capacity to do properly. I think it's just a question of whether there'll be political will to fund it to the level that it needs to be."

The first \$48-million phase of the makeover is paid for. It includes design of the full three-kilometre route from Parliament Street to Spadina Avenue and construction of the first 800 metres, a yet-to-be-determined stretch between York and Spadina slated to break ground next spring. It's expected the first phase will take 18 months to complete.

The rest of the money is supposed to come from developing valuable shoreline land - Waterfront Toronto has so far signed two development deals and is poised to ink a third this summer - and senior government largesse.

John Campbell, president of the tri-government agency redeveloping Toronto's waterfront, said he hopes the countdown to the Pan Am Games in 2015 will accelerate private development and government funding needed to revitalize the street.

"It would be nice if the focus of the Pan Am Games inspired people to provide more funding," he said.

The Queens Quay revitalization envisions converting the four-lane road into a two-lane road, with east-west lanes running north of the Harbourfront streetcar's separated right-of-way. South of the streetcar line would be a tree-lined granite pedestrian boulevard and a running and biking path that would fill in the gap in the Martin Goodman Trail.

"It'll convert Queens Quay to being our signature," Mr. Campbell said. "We believe it'll turn it into one of the best pedestrian streets in the world."

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Cutting in half the number of lanes on Queen's Quay isn't expected to jam traffic. The street is so poorly designed now - with its lack of left-turn lanes and lay-bys for tourist buses - that a smart makeover could speed vehicles along.

"We can actually improve the traffic flow from what it is today. It seems counterintuitive," Mr. Campbell said, adding that Queen's Quay was never meant to be an arterial road.

Instead, it is supposed to carry an extended light-rail line. The Harbourfront streetcar, which runs on a dedicated right-of-way from Spadina to Bay and into an underground portal to Union Station, is already scheduled for major repairs.

Extensions of the line to the east and west are part of the Transit City program the first phase of funding of which the debt-racked provincial Liberals decided to postpone in their recent budget. But the extensions, known as East Bayfront and Waterfront West, were already far down the list with no groundbreaking dates or cost estimates.

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