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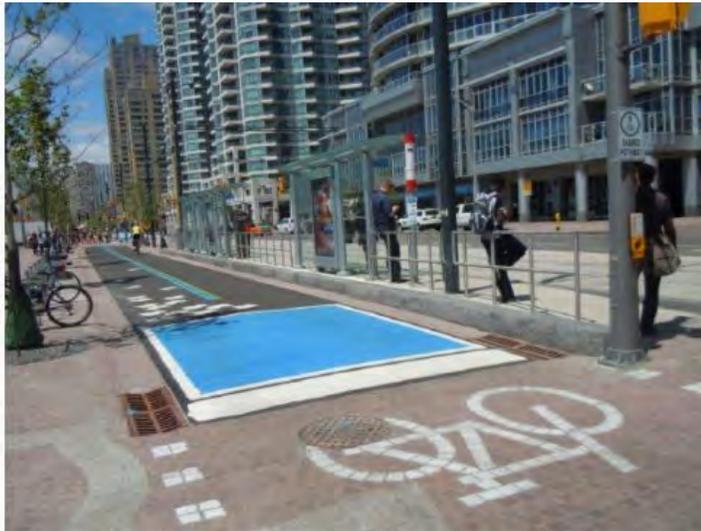
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New Queens Quay a redesign for everyone: Hume

Queens Quay has been civilized, writes Christopher Hume.

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CHRISTOPHER HUME

New Queen's Quay, looking west from York St.

By: Christopher Hume Urban Issues, Published on Sun Jun 21 2015

Democracy is messy; just take a look at the new Queens Quay. The recently-opened stretch between Bay and Spadina isn't just the best new street in Toronto, it's the most democratic.

Open polycard for Mayor John Tory

Perhaps for the first time, the city has built a **thoroughfare for everyone**. That means pedestrians, cyclists, skate boarders, roller bladers, babies in strollers, transit passengers, wheelchair users and, yes, drivers.

It will take some getting used to.

Under the rigidly enforced hegemony of the car, the streets of Toronto are a no-go-zone to anyone not enclosed in several tonnes of speeding steel and plastic. The new Queens Quay says otherwise. It argues that the city is a place for all. It upends the conventional hierarchy and returns this critical part of the public realm to the people.

In Toronto, that makes it a radical intervention. It strikes at the heart of a city that measures its success by vehicular congestion rates. And yet the mayor himself showed up for the celebration Friday night to smile and bask in the glow of a rare display of civic enlightenment. That would be the same John Tory ([open John Tory's polycard](#)) whose plan to expand the [Gardiner Expressway](#) will set the city back decades. The same John Tory who appointed his deputy, Denzil Minnan-Wong ([open Denzil Minnan-Wong's](#)

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policard), to the board of Waterfront Toronto simply to block its progress whenever possible.

Some might say it took some gall on Tory's part to appear at the event, but at least we know now that he has seen the future. And although this is what he has been fighting against since he took office, it is also where the dynamic, unified city he talks about is unfolding. On Friday night, at least, he was there to see it with his own eyes.

Let's hope he was paying attention. Though two-thirds of the \$130 million was spent underground – sewers, pipes, cables, irrigation troughs, etc – people only see what's above. That's unlike anything Torontonians are used to. Streetcars hum as they move along rubber mounted tracks laid on the south side of Queens Quay, not down the middle. Sidewalks, double and triple the usual width, form a long linear plaza lined with rows of trees. The Martin Goodman Trail is now a two-way bike lane, fully marked and already busy. Traffic, which formerly had four lanes, now has two. In other words, Queens Quay has been civilized. Naturally, drivers will be confused. This time, they must share.

The ground, paved in red granite blocks, has a feel of spaciousness and permanence. Standing or walking here, you feel not only that you belong but that it was meant for you. Which, of course, it is.

Interestingly, some of the property owners decided against participating in the revitalization program and have ended up with their shabbiness fully exposed. The most painful example is the Radisson Admiral Hotel, an unpleasant modernist box best ignored. Its stretch of the sidewalk, cracked and crumbling, looks worse than ever. It is adamantly not a part of the change, but defiantly ratty and indifferent. On the other hand, the facade of one of the most wretched condo towers on the north side of Queens Quay is undergoing a make-over.

“The project was about uniting many different spaces,” says Dutch landscape architect, Adriaan Geuze, whose firm West 8 won the Queens Quay redesign competition a decade ago. “But the interface of public and private is difficult. Every block has to be negotiated. The legal and political issues made it almost impossible. But this is the future.”

So be brave, Mayor Tory, even your chosen Torontonians, those focused on parking and property values, will benefit. And, please, tell Denzil to stop swinging from the umbrellas. He'll only hurt himself.

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