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## FEATURES



### Leslieville not feeling the L(u)RV

BY JIM KELLY February 14, 2011 12:02

For the past few years, we've been [seeing several reports](#) about how Leslieville is an up-and-coming neighbourhood. But it appears not all development in the area is welcome—some residents are up in arms about a plan to build a new TTC maintenance yard there.

Despite community objections and local city councillors' requests for time to examine other options, on Feb. 2 the TTC voted to move ahead with its Ashbridges Bay [Light Rail Vehicle](#) (LRV) storage yard. The \$345 million facility at the southeast corner of Lake Shore Boulevard and Leslie Street will house about half of the 204 light rail vehicles that are on order to replace the TTC's iconic but aging streetcar fleet starting in 2013.

Once the yard is operational, every morning between 5am and 7am about 85 LRVs, each nearly twice as long as current streetcars, will roll up Leslie Street (about one every 90 seconds), through four sets of tightly spaced traffic lights, then turn west on Queen Street and head to Broadview, where they'll disperse to their respective routes. Many of them would be returning to the yard in the overnight period.

Among concerns voiced by residents are the impact the LRVs will have on already-congested traffic in the area (especially at the busy Leslie and Lake Shore intersection), the noise and vibrations for residents along Leslie Street, and safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists. Supporters say the project needs to proceed as planned because further delays may jeopardize the scheduled delivery of the LRVs to relieve the overburdened downtown streetcar fleet.

I hit the streets to see what area residents are saying about the prospect of having the new TTC yard in their 'hood.

Venturing down Leslie south from Queen Street, I found Annette Parent returning to her townhouse doorstep from a shopping trip. The 12-year area resident is also a member of a community group that's spent the past year opposing the TTC plan.

A daily TTC rider, Parent has many concerns about the plan, particularly its potential to devalue properties. "Leslieville is finally picking its feet up and making a nice neighbourhood out of something that's never been so nice," she says.

Parent also feels the TTC didn't adequately consider concerns raised by the community. "I'm not against having [the facility]," she says. "What I'm against was the process. They failed miserably on that.

"They never really saw this as a neighbourhood, and that's part of the problem," she adds. "It is a neighbourhood—it's our neighbourhood."

Later, I knocked on the door of Caron Court, who lives in the southernmost house on Leslie, the closest to the yard site. She's been very active in opposing the project and is also very critical of the TTC's public-consultation process.

"It was just a sham from the start," says Court. "We didn't find out until last February. That was when they first gave notice to the people that were actually directly affected."

The TTC maintains that it provided ample opportunities for community feedback. They point to 48 public meetings or consultations of one kind or another since May 2008.

And while that may be true—although it's not exactly clear how many of the 48 meetings mentioned actually involved residents—Court isn't buying it. "You go to these meetings, and they're called open houses, but it's basically just display boards," she says. "They don't actually want open dialogue. They just want to tell you what they're going to do, and do it."

The TTC says they're committed to helping Leslie Street residents who may experience unacceptable levels of noise or vibrations once the LRVs start rolling. Mitigation measures could include upgrading residents' windows, installing air-conditioning in homes so windows could stay closed in the summer and any other assistance that might help minimize noise. But the promise of such after-the-fact remedies didn't do much to appease the residents I spoke to.

At the Feb. 2 meeting, the TTC did agree to re-examine the Leslie Street routing; seeing as community-suggested alternate routing options were rejected once already, it's doubtful anyone's holding their breath.

But residents will be holding their breath—quite literally—as 400,000 cubic metres of contaminated soil are removed from the site (at a further cost of at least \$50 million). That's now the TTC's biggest priority because the task needs to be completed before April, lest they run afoul of the [Migratory Bird Conventions Act](#). The federal legislation stipulates that between April and August vacationing birds get to rule the roost. While it's never easy to reconcile the needs of the city's populace with the impositions placed on individual neighbourhoods, there is apparently one thing everyone agrees on: we can't inconvenience the birds.

Perhaps city residents need to start sprouting feathers to get their voices heard? Maybe then they wouldn't end up feeling like they're getting dumped on after plans have already taken flight.

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