

February 26, 2024

Impact Assessment Agency of Canada
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GEORGINA ISLAND FIXED LINK PROJECT 83539

On behalf of the First Nation residents who reside on Georgina Island who oppose the bridge construction, I would like our comments to be published on the IAAC website and be shared with all decision makers as we believe this project should not be approved without a full Impact Assessment. A petition outlining these concerns has been circulating in our community since February 20, 2024. We plan to keep collecting signatures to raise awareness among Lake Simcoe stakeholders about the impacts of this project.

We understand WSP intends to file a Detailed Project Plan in the near future. The Initial Project Plan that was filed with IAAC included a number of misrepresentations.

We attended a meeting recently with WSP and Cambian Indigenous Professional Services (CIPS) to sell us on the reports they have prepared to submit to the IAAC. In summary the study areas presented are only a very small portion of the lake and lands that will be affected by building a 1.2 kilometer causeway. Equally concerning is our local knowledge of the lake and lands leaves us to believe that these studies are not accurate. We heard a number of responses to our questions which included responses like "we will review", "we will mitigate", "there will be adverse environmental impacts", "measures will be taken to reduce environmental impacts", "we will compensate", "our models show....", and "we are still at a very preliminary stage in this long process".

As concerned citizens who have read the LSCRA's review of the Georgina Island Fixed Link Project and recent technical studies, we support all 36 technical comments that were recommended to Cambium and the Fixed Link Project team. We would like to add to recommendation #35 that comparisons be made to include anticipated impacts from a causeway vs. a bridge *and also a new ferry boat*.

We have heard repeatedly that the health and safety of the island residents is the primary reason for the fixed link. In the past 20 years we have not had any medical issues that could not be dealt with in a timely manner. We have our own emergency services on the island, including fire, police and first response. Our existing ferry has been operating year-round for the past two years, even though it is not technically an ice breaker. We are being told that the bridge will improve our quality of life, but Georgina Island quality of life is second to none.

We also have access to York Region's resources as well as Ornge helicopter services if they are ever needed. Personal service workers help to take care of our elders daily, and all community members have access to doctors and nurses at our well-staffed Health Centre. We

have a new Wellness Building for Mental Health Workers and therapists. We have a new water plant delivering clean water to all residents. We are in the process of building a \$10 million school that was funded with support from the Federal Government.

According to the Georgina Island Homeland Declaration, “we will continue to raise our voices and concerns in solidarity to speak for the lands, waters and all our relations. Through the guidance of the Creator, we will do what is necessary to protect the waters, lands, animals and air in our territory.” We are clearly not protecting our environment with this project, and we should insist on a full environmental study.

Currently over 57% of Georgina Island is owned by Certificate of Possession Holders, meaning individual band members own and lease their own private property on the island. The remaining 43% of the land is owned by the Band. The personal properties comprise most of the lands on the waterfront. The bridge could put the community at significant risk economically and environmentally by exploiting environmental and land use development. These impacts along with the loss of our ferry will significantly hurt our local economy as 20+ jobs will be lost, including ferry boat drivers, engineers, deck hands and maintenance staff. Other social impacts will be the uncontrolled development that will occur once the price of cottages and lake front property increase due to the bridge.

We are told the Federal government will fund most of this \$500 million dollar project but approximately \$100 million of it will be a loan. If we are concerned about our economic future, why borrow \$100 million? This amount will put us at a significant disadvantage for our future generations.

Many of us that live/work on Georgina Island like it the way it is, the only thing we would all like to see is a new ferry that is built to operate in the ice. Despite other representations, our existing ferry has recently had a full inspection with no issues and was recertified for another 5 years, giving ample time to either complete a full impact assessment or order a new ferry. A study to research alternative solutions, including a new ferry boat would provide more information so we could compare the costs, environmental effects, social and economic impacts.

We do not feel that our current situation has been properly reflected in the filing made with Impact Assessment and the Detailed Project Plan you are about to receive is not sufficient to allow this fixed link to be approved. We respectfully ask that the IAAC request a full impact assessment that includes other transportation options that are economically and environmentally feasible, to ensure our concerns are addressed and to allow us more time to address the other alternatives that are available.

Respectfully,

Ian Big Canoe
Georgina Island Fire Chief

Georgina Island Land Use Committee Member