Comments on the Eastern Bridge Project Initial Project Description

Reference 90709

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By: John Savage, resident of rue Jacques-Cartier, Gatineau within 200+ meters of proposed bridge

Indigenous Engagement, Community Values, and Local Knowledge

The National Capital Region is home to a large and diverse Urban Indigenous population, yet Urban Indigenous peoples do not appear to have been meaningfully engaged as a distinct stakeholder group in this project. This is not unique to the Eastern Bridge Project. Too often, major planning and infrastructure initiatives proceed without adequately considering how urban development can reflect Indigenous values, relationships with place, and connections to land and water.

Thousands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people live, work, raise families, pay taxes, and contribute to civic life throughout Ottawa-Gatineau. Many maintain strong cultural, recreational, spiritual, and ancestral connections to the Kichi Sibi (Ottawa River). For Urban Indigenous peoples, the river is more than a physical feature. It is part of an ancient transportation corridor that connected Indigenous nations across Canada and remains a powerful symbol of continuity, belonging, and cultural identity.

As the Indigenous population continues to grow and urban Indigenous communities become an increasingly important part of Canada's social fabric, there is a growing need for urban planning processes that incorporate Indigenous perspectives. Infrastructure decisions made today will shape future generations. If Indigenous values are not considered during planning, future residents will inherit a capital city that reflects historical colonial priorities while overlooking our Indigenous cultural, environmental, and community values rooted in Canada.

I provide these comments as a Métis resident of rue Jacques-Cartier in Pointe-Gatineau, a historic waterfront community identified as a vulnerable community within the project documentation. My home, daily activities, community involvement, and cultural interests are directly connected to the section of the Ottawa River that would be affected by the proposed bridge.

My interest in this matter extends well beyond that of a resident or property owner. For more than thirty years, I have been involved in waterfront planning, recreational development, Indigenous place-making, environmental stewardship, historical research, and community advocacy related to the Ottawa River corridor between Chaudière Falls and Lower Duck Island, including Kettle Island.

My work has included advocating for Indigenous heritage recognition, promoting the vision for Gatineau's Place Abinan park to commemorate more than 7,300 years of Indigenous presence in the area, developing paddling and rowing programs that introduced thousands of participants to the Kettle Island waterway, contributing to the City's recreational paddling planning initiatives, and participating extensively in public consultations concerning the future of the river corridor.

These contributions include consultations related to:

- The redevelopment of rue Jacques-Cartier.
- The restoration and reopening of the former Ottawa New Edinburgh Club Boathouse as the NCC River House.
- The Sir George-Étienne Cartier waterfront planning process.
- Other waterfront, parks, and recreation initiatives throughout the National Capital Region.

I also was credited with creating the vision for the Zibi Project, although I was not engaged in that project after I connected the developer with the chiefs at KZA and AOPFN.

Having reviewed the Initial Project Description, it appears that a significant blind spot exists within the project assessment process. The documentation contains extensive discussion of transportation, engineering, and environmental considerations, yet there is remarkably little analysis of how the community actually uses this section of the river.

For example, the documentation does not adequately evaluate the corridor as:

- A gathering place for residents and visitors.
- A centre for paddling, rowing, sailing, swimming, and recreational boating.
- A destination for fitness, wellness, and mental health.
- A place for Indigenous cultural activities and ceremonies.
- An important component of the National Capital Region's heritage identity.
- A refuge where people can experience nature within minutes of Parliament Hill.

Nor does the project appear to have undertaken a comprehensive waterway-use assessment examining how the river functions as a recreational, cultural, heritage, and social space for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The absence of such an assessment is particularly concerning because most major Canadian cities undertake integrated waterfront planning before advancing major infrastructure proposals. Such plans help identify locations best suited for recreation, conservation, heritage protection, tourism, transportation, and economic development. No comparable integrated waterfront strategy appears to have informed this project.

As a result, the bridge is being evaluated largely as a transportation solution rather than as an intervention within one of the most important public waterfront landscapes in the National Capital Region. It makes one wonder, if the project team understood from the beginning what they were destroying, would they ever have proposed it?

Indigenous Consultation Concerns

A second major concern relates to Indigenous engagement.

The project appears to rely primarily on consultation with territorial rights-holding communities. While those consultations are essential, they should not be viewed as a substitute for engaging Urban Indigenous peoples who live in the affected area and use the river on a regular basis.

Urban Indigenous residents possess local knowledge, lived experience, and ongoing relationships with the river that may not be reflected through conventional government-to-government consultation processes. They understand how the area is used today and how it could serve future generations through recreation, cultural programming, environmental stewardship, education, and community gathering.

The consultation process also appears to have overlooked important local Indigenous organizations, including Friendship Centres and Indigenous community service organizations that work directly with urban Indigenous populations.

This omission limits opportunities to understand how the affected area contributes to Indigenous quality of life and how future investments could strengthen Indigenous connections to the river.

Recommendations

To improve Indigenous engagement and strengthen the assessment process, consideration should be given to the following measures:

1. Establish an **Urban Indigenous Project Advisory Group (UIPAG)** to provide ongoing advice to the project team.
2. Increase funding support for Indigenous participation, research, and community engagement activities to cover the greater work required to consult with one another.

3. Work collaboratively with Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg and the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation to encourage broader Indigenous participation in discussions concerning this nationally significant project.
4. Ensure that economic benefits, procurement opportunities, and employment programs remain separate from consultation processes and are not presented in a manner that could create perceptions of influence or conflict of interest.
5. Create culturally safe consultation opportunities for Urban Indigenous participants.
6. Extend consultation timelines where necessary to ensure Indigenous communities have adequate capacity to participate meaningfully.
7. Consider establishing Urban Indigenous representation within governance and advisory structures related to waterfront and National Capital Region planning, including on the board of the National Capital Commission.
8. Review lessons learned from previous consultation processes affecting Indigenous interests in the region to avoid repeating past shortcomings.

Area Affected

The Kettle Island and Duck Islands corridor is among the most significant natural and recreational landscapes in the National Capital Region.

The area functions as:

- A wildlife corridor and migratory bird habitat.
- An important nesting area for Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets.
- A highly valued recreational waterway.
- A cultural and heritage landscape connected to both Indigenous and Canadian history.
- A gathering place that supports community health and well-being.

The NCC River House, rue Jacques Cartier and the surrounding shoreline parks, pathways, and lookouts were developed specifically to celebrate these values. They reflect generations of community investment in public access to nature and the river. Even the future vision for the area as embodied by the Sir George Etienne Cartier Plan celebrate these values, without mention of a bridge that will darken the sky above this special area, interfere with navigation below, and add traffic noise overall.

These assets cannot simply be relocated for a bridge, so it’s imperative that the impact of a bridge needs full consideration.

Navigation and Waterway Impacts

The project also appears to underestimate potential effects on navigation.

Kettle Island sits within one of the most heavily used recreational sections of the Ottawa River. Rowing, sailing, paddling, instructional programs, youth camps, and recreational boating all occur within the proposed crossing area.

Bridge piers would introduce new obstructions within a constrained section of waterway, potentially increasing navigational complexity and safety risks for non-motorized users. These concerns are particularly relevant for rowing programs, where participants have limited rearward visibility and rely on predictable, unobstructed navigation channels.

A dedicated navigation and waterway-use assessment should be undertaken before any preferred crossing is selected.

Respecting Community Values

Finally, the project must give greater weight to community values that have already been documented through decades of public consultation.

The redevelopment of rue Jacques-Cartier, the creation of shoreline parks and lookouts, the restoration of the NCC River House, and the Sir George-Étienne Cartier Plan process all recognized the importance of this area as a scenic waterfront destination and tranquil recreation landscape.

The views, experiences, and opportunities those projects sought to protect remain important today.

A bridge through this corridor could permanently foreclose future opportunities, including:

- Enhanced Indigenous cultural programming.
- Expansion of paddling and recreational boating initiatives.
- Recognition of the corridor as a National Urban Park or protected heritage landscape.
- Strengthened tourism and recreation opportunities.
- Preservation of ceremonial and heritage uses of the river.
- Long-term ecological conservation of the Kettle Island and Duck Islands area.

The question is therefore not merely where a bridge should be built. It is whether this particular section of the river is the right place for major transportation infrastructure at all, given its ecological, cultural, recreational, historical, and community importance.

Before proceeding further, the project should assess not only the benefits of constructing a bridge, but also the value of preserving one of the National Capital Region's most significant waterfront landscapes for future generations.

Points below were made in response to specific statements made in this report:

3.2 Stakeholder and Public Engagement

As noted above, Urban Indigenous peoples must be formally represented in this consultation process. These are the Indigenous people who live, work, raise families, and maintain direct relationships with the lands and waters affected by this project.

Meaningful consultation should focus on listening to Indigenous perspectives, not on emphasizing employment opportunities or procurement set-asides as part of the engagement process. Indigenous participation should be grounded in rights, interests, knowledge, and community values. We need more Indigenous engagement, not less. The project team should work with Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (KZA) and the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation (AOPFN) to co-host and encourage broader participation from Indigenous communities with overlapping rights, interests, and cultural connections to this region in a respectful and welcoming manner.

The project also requires a far greater understanding of the historical, cultural, recreational, and ecological importance of this section of the Ottawa River. Its significance extends beyond transportation considerations and includes its value as a heritage landscape, a recreational waterway, a cultural gathering place, and a potential future destination for initiatives such as a National Urban Park or the tranquil recreation corridor envisioned in the Sir George-Étienne Cartier planning framework.

Without a comprehensive understanding of how the river functions as a social, cultural, and recreational space, decision-makers risk further degrading a waterfront area that already faces increasing pressures from fragmented planning and competing uses in a tragedy of the commons. The loss of views, increased noise, and the introduction of bridge piers in an already constrained navigation corridor could reduce the appeal and safety of the area for paddlers, rowers, sailors, swimmers, and other users. Over time, these impacts could diminish public use of the corridor and reduce the mental, physical, and community health benefits that this unique waterfront environment currently provides.

• Natural and socioeconomic environmental impacts—Participants expressed concerns about how a new crossing might impact the natural environment. Concerns about how increased traffic, noise, and reduced air quality could affect nearby residents were frequently heard from Ottawa residents. Some residents expressed concern about the potential impacts to residential land values. There were also some concerns about how increased traffic could affect schools, hospitals, community centres, and other institutions.

Kettle Island is linked to the Duck Islands as an environmentally protected nature corridor, based in regulations that represent our community values for this area. As I have surveyed for the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the island holds 94 nests of great blue herons and great egrets (one of the largest in Quebec – egrets this far north are rare – easily spooked by noise

that a bridge would bring), bald eagles, and osprey habitat, deer, coyotes, etc. This nature corridor links Gatineau Park via paths and river shoreline to the Kettle-Duck Islands to Greens Creek and Mer Bleue. It is used by deer, coyotes, and birds such as blue jays and ravens as a tree canopy flight path. This is a crossing already, under threat by a human crossing overtop of it. The project team does not seem to understand this relationship of Kettle Island and the Duck Islands in this nature corridor or to each other.

Humans using this area will find that this area that is used as a refuge from the city as a place of meditation, social gatherings, and as a tranquil recreation zone to paddle, sail, or row will be forever made less enticing when traffic noise, bridge piers, and the broad deck of the bridge casts a shadow overtop of the serenity needed to relax and recharge. As a river guide, I ran a program in which people were being referred to it by their psychiatrists to reconnect with nature and the community. This helped them reconnect with both and their success resulted in a number of referrals. I still don't know what psychiatrist was referring them to my program, but I thought it was proof that paddling around Kettle Island could be considered to be a form of medicine to our community.

• Need and justification for a new crossing—Some members of the public requested details about why a new crossing was needed over improvements to public transit. Some opposition to any new crossing of the Ottawa River was encountered from Ottawa residents.

Without integrated planning across all jurisdictions, this project risks becoming an example of one government advancing a solution to a problem that other governments, communities, and stakeholders may not fully support. Rather than resolving regional challenges collaboratively, it may create new environmental, social, cultural, and recreational impacts for communities along the river.

The proposed Route 5 crossing represents a potential **win-lose outcome**: transportation improvements for some users, while residents, waterfront users, Indigenous peoples, recreational organizations, and future generations bear the loss of a unique heritage landscape and tranquil recreation area.

A more balanced approach would seek a **win-win outcome** by locating a bridge or tunnel in a less sensitive corridor while permanently protecting the Kettle Island and Duck Islands area as a National Urban Park, an extension of the Rideau Canal National Park, or another form of conserved heritage and recreation corridor. Such an approach could meet regional transportation needs while preserving one of the National Capital Region's most valuable waterfront environments. It could also be an opportunity to better manage the waterway overall, developing a much needed vision for it on behalf of both sides of the river.

This alternative would allow governments to demonstrate that economic development, transportation planning, environmental stewardship, recreation, heritage conservation, and Indigenous interests can be advanced together rather than forcing a choice between them. It is

the kind of solution that communities, Indigenous peoples, and elected officials could support with confidence because it creates lasting benefits instead of permanent trade-offs.

• Cost—Some participants emphasized the importance of fiscal restraint and suggested that the Project could be funded, or costs recouped, through bridge tolls.

Some say a key deciding factor is cost, yet the government has done nothing to assess total costs that include cost to property values, loss of use cost to the community for a tranquil area forever destroyed, cost to community values destroying a river section used for eons, cost to public health, and the social costs of destroying an area people won't gravitate to as much, etc. As an appraiser, I would like to see more evaluation about the cost to our community losing the special qualities that define this area.

• Truck traffic—Increases in truck traffic on roads approaching the new crossing were a frequent concern, especially for residents around Aviation Parkway, which is currently closed to trucks.

On the Gatineau side of the river, I am concerned that the hill at Blvd Montee Paiement is too steep and slipperly in the winter snowfalls. Trucks may try to avoid the hill by turning down Maloney Blvd and adding to the congestion there. As many of these trucks will be heading to the Gatineau Airport warehouse and air freight district, this will force them to go through more residential areas than if the bridge were located more downriver. Furthermore, as the population expands in the eastern end of Gatineau, the trucks will be increasingly drawn to that section of the city via Maloney Blvd. and Montee Paiement Blvd., which are often quite congested as it is.

• Design—Participants expressed the importance of design aesthetics and making the bridge a "world-class" structure within the NCR.

No design will be pleasing enough to not notice a bridge blocking the *exceptional views* lauded in various NCC consultations of the past, endure traffic noise, and its piers acting as a navigational hazard in the heavily used section of river by boats. Nature will always look better. No design will please the birds when it obstructs migratory bird flight paths, resident bird flight paths, or interference with one of the largest and important great blue heron and great egret nesting areas in Quebec. No design will be pleasing enough to cast a better shadow over those who traditionally use the beaches on Kettle Island to enjoy summer swims, sunbathing, and picnics. No design will be pleasing enough to convince Indigenous peoples that their rights to access nature and their heritage is overridden, like the Federal government did when it failed to protect the Chaudiere Falls from a crass condo development when the Stephen Harper Government failed to protect that sacred space.

• Urban integration—Some participants expressed the importance of integrating the Project with existing infrastructure and ensuring it improves, rather than impedes, community cohesion.

How does the project reconcile the fact that it will permanently alter the setting and experience of the NCC River House, a facility intentionally designed as a "community cottage" within a natural waterfront landscape overlooking Kettle Island and the Duck Islands?

For more than a century, this site has served as a valued third place where residents and visitors gather to swim, socialize, enjoy meals and refreshments on its upper decks, and experience panoramic views of the Ottawa River. The former Ottawa New Edinburgh Club boathouse, now the NCC River House, was restored and reopened based on extensive public consultation that emphasized its role as a place for recreation, community connection, and engagement with nature.

The proposed bridge would fundamentally change that setting. Increased traffic, noise, visual intrusion, and the presence of a major transportation structure within the current viewshed would diminish the tranquil character that makes the site unique and contributes to its popularity and public value.

This raises an important question about the relationship between infrastructure planning and community values. Previous consultation processes involving the NCC River House, waterfront parks, and adjacent shoreline improvements identified access to nature, scenic views, waterfront recreation, and quality of life as core community priorities. If a major bridge can subsequently override those priorities, residents may reasonably question how earlier public input has been incorporated into long-term planning decisions.

As Mark Carney argues in Value(s), public infrastructure decisions should account for community values that are not easily measured through conventional economic or transportation analyses. Similarly, urban planning writers such as Jane Jacobs emphasized that successful places are shaped by the people who use them and by the social, cultural, and recreational functions they serve. The value of the NCC River House cannot be measured solely as a building. Its significance derives from its relationship to the river, its views, its natural surroundings, and its role as a gathering place.

The experience of the Ottawa Rowing Club offers a relevant precedent. The construction of the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge in 1964 dramatically altered the character of its waterfront setting. While the club survived and continued its rowing programs, the bridge changed the visual environment and diminished some of the qualities that had originally made the site attractive as a broader social and recreational destination. The project team should carefully consider how similar impacts will impact the NCC River House and throughout the Kettle Island corridor, turning people away from the river and the community infrastructure that was designed to enjoy it. If the project team wants to feel what that is like, I recommend going down to the Ottawa Rowing Club and standing on the deck of the old boathouse there to experience the bridge beside it. Then go to the NCC River House and experience the viewshed there, trying to imagine how a bridge in front of it would impact things.

Alternative solutions should therefore be evaluated more thoroughly. Options such as a tunnel, a different crossing location, or a crossing within a less sensitive corridor may better achieve transportation objectives while preserving the recreational, cultural, and environmental values that have guided decades of public investment in this part of the river. Once the views, character, and natural setting of the NCC River House and Kettle Island corridor are altered, they cannot realistically be restored.

Ultimately, the question is not whether transportation infrastructure is needed, but whether this particular location, one of the most valued waterfront recreation areas in the National Capital Region, is the appropriate place for it. A project intended to improve regional mobility should not come at the expense of a nationally significant riverfront landscape that generations of residents have worked to protect, enjoy, and enhance.

• Expropriation criteria—Landowners requested transparency in how lands to be expropriated, if any, would be identified and how compensation would be determined.

Landowners requested greater transparency regarding how properties would be identified for expropriation and how compensation would be determined.

Residents along rue Jacques-Cartier have legitimate concerns about expropriation and property acquisition processes based on previous experiences with government actions, including responses to repeated flooding events. Many property owners are concerned that uncertainty surrounding a potential bridge project could negatively affect property values long before any formal acquisition process begins.

To maintain public confidence, any expropriation process must be transparent, fair, and consistent with recognized best practices. Property owners should be provided with clear information regarding decision-making criteria, valuation methods, timelines, appeal mechanisms, and compensation principles.

Particular attention should be given to ensuring that compensation reflects fair market value without allowing project-related uncertainty, speculation, or the prospect of future expropriation to artificially depress property values. Affected residents should have confidence that they will be treated equitably and that no landowner will bear an unfair financial burden as a result of the project.

Given the significant personal, financial, and community impacts associated with expropriation, the project team should commit to an open and transparent process that prioritizes fairness, accountability, and respect for affected property owners.

3.2.2 Recent Engagement: Public Advisory Groups (PAG)

Representation of Urban Indigenous Peoples and Waterway Users in the Public Advisory Process

The project does not appear to have meaningfully engaged Urban Indigenous peoples through the Public Advisory Group (PAG) process. This represents a significant gap in community representation.

Urban Indigenous residents come from diverse Nations across Canada and now live, work, pay taxes, raise families, and contribute to the social and cultural life of the National Capital Region. Many were displaced from their traditional territories through historical and ongoing colonial processes, yet continue to maintain strong cultural connections to the land, waterways, and

traditional practices. Access to natural areas for activities such as paddling, fishing, gathering, learning, and cultural reflection remains important to many Indigenous people living in urban environments.

Despite growing recognition of Indigenous rights and perspectives in planning processes, Indigenous residents of Ottawa-Gatineau are often not included as stakeholders in the design and management of the urban landscapes they inhabit. As Indigenous populations continue to grow and Canadian society becomes increasingly interconnected through shared ancestry, culture, and community relationships, urban planning should better reflect Indigenous values concerning land stewardship, water protection, recreation, cultural continuity, and connections to nature.

The absence of Urban Indigenous representation within the PAG raises concerns that these perspectives have not been adequately considered in evaluating the future of the Kettle Island corridor. Decisions about major infrastructure should not be based solely on transportation objectives but should also consider how places contribute to cultural identity, community well-being, and access to nature.

There also appears to be limited representation from people and organizations that actively use the river and would be directly affected by the proposed bridge. For example, the PAG does not appear to include representatives from several longstanding boating and rowing organizations, including the Ottawa Rowing Club, which has used this section of the river since 1867 and possesses historic route records documenting more than a century of navigation in the area. Nor does it appear to include representatives from the Ottawa New Edinburgh Club, the Rockcliffe Yacht Club, local marina operators, or other organizations with extensive knowledge of recreational and navigational uses of the waterway.

Similarly, waterfront residents, particularly those living along rue Jacques-Cartier and other shoreline communities, appear to be underrepresented despite being among those most directly affected by potential changes to the river corridor.

As a result, important perspectives may be missing from the assessment process. Local residents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous waterway users, recreational organizations, and waterfront communities possess knowledge of current river uses, historical patterns of use, navigational concerns, recreational opportunities, and future potential that may not be captured through conventional transportation planning exercises.

A more representative advisory process would include Urban Indigenous organizations, waterway recreation groups, waterfront residents, heritage organizations, environmental stakeholders, and other community representatives whose interests extend beyond transportation. Such participation would help ensure that the full range of social, cultural, recreational, environmental, and heritage values associated with the Kettle Island corridor are properly considered before irreversible decisions are made.

Ultimately, a project of this magnitude should be informed not only by those who seek to move through the corridor, but also by those who live beside it, recreate on it, derive cultural meaning from it, and envision its future as an important public waterfront for generations to come.

Nature Conservancy of Canada: Bridge Alignment and Environmental Impacts

Concerns have been raised regarding the proposed bridge alignment and its potential effects on the biophysical values protected through the Provincial Nature Reserve designation on private lands.

The assessment should give greater consideration to the ecological significance of Kettle Island, including its role as habitat for nesting birds. The island supports one of the largest local nesting concentrations of Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets in the National Capital Region, in close proximity to some of the proposed bridge alignments. Bald Eagles are also regularly observed using trees and shoreline areas near the proposed crossing locations.

These species are highly sensitive to disturbance during breeding and nesting periods. The introduction of a major bridge corridor could increase noise, visual disturbance, lighting impacts, and human activity, potentially affecting habitat suitability and long-term nesting success. Given the ecological importance of this area, a thorough assessment of potential effects on colonial waterbirds, raptors, and associated habitat should be undertaken.

It should also be recognized that knowledge of Kettle Island's ecology exists beyond formal institutional studies. Long-term users, naturalists, paddlers, residents, and community members have accumulated observations and historical records that can provide valuable information about wildlife use, seasonal patterns, and ecological change. An effective impact assessment should incorporate these perspectives alongside those of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and other environmental organizations.

The same principle applies to the nearby Duck Islands and the broader river corridor, which function as an interconnected ecological and recreational landscape. Understanding the relationship between these areas and the species and people that depend upon them requires engagement with individuals and organizations that have maintained longstanding relationships with the river.

Gaps in the Survey Findings

The Survey Findings (page 21) appear to omit several important considerations that contribute significantly to the value of this river corridor.

These include:

- Recreational uses such as swimming, paddling, rowing, sailing, recreational boating, nature observation, and shoreline recreation.
- The social and health benefits associated with access to a tranquil waterfront environment.
- The opportunity costs associated with the loss or degradation of one of the region's premier scenic and recreational riverfront areas.
- Indigenous perspectives concerning cultural connections to the waterway, access to natural spaces, and opportunities for land- and water-based activities.
- The contribution of the corridor to community identity, heritage appreciation, and quality of life.

A comprehensive assessment should recognize that the value of this area extends far beyond its function as a transportation corridor. The river, islands, and shorelines form a connected landscape that supports ecological, recreational, cultural, heritage, and community objectives.

Gaps in the Questions and Concerns Analysis

Similarly, the Questions and Concerns section (page 22) does not appear to adequately consider the opportunity costs associated with dedicating this corridor to major transportation infrastructure rather that other alternatives for the waterfront.

Alternative future uses that may be more compatible with the area's environmental, recreational, cultural, and Indigenous values should be explicitly evaluated. These could include:

- Designation as part of a **National Urban Park / Rideau Canal Park extension** or other protected landscape.
- Recognition and safeguarding of the corridor as a heritage and recreational refuge associated with the history and ongoing use of the Ottawa River.
- Protection and enhancement of water-based recreation opportunities, including rowing, paddling, sailing, swimming, and nature appreciation.
- Expansion of river-related cultural, educational, and Indigenous programming.
- Preservation of the corridor as a tranquil waterfront destination that complements existing public investments, including the NCC River House, shoreline parks, pathways, and scenic viewpoints.

The assessment should not be limited to comparing bridge alignments. It should also evaluate whether the highest and best long-term use of this section of the Canadian Heritage River is transportation infrastructure at all. A truly balanced assessment would compare the bridge proposal against alternative visions for the corridor that could prioritize the preservation and enhancement its unique ecological, recreational, cultural, and heritage values for future generations.

3.2.3 Plans for Future Engagement (Page 27)

Beginning in Round 2, engagement efforts should ensure that partner organizations and elected officials are provided with a more complete understanding of the historical, cultural, recreational, ecological, and community significance of the Kettle Island corridor. Decision-makers need to understand not only the transportation objectives of the project, but also the values that may be lost if this section of the river is permanently altered.

Elected officials should be informed that the project team has not completed a comprehensive waterway impact assessment and has not fully engaged many of the stakeholders with longstanding knowledge and experience of the river. This includes waterfront residents, recreational users, navigation interests, Urban Indigenous peoples, heritage organizations, and others who rely on or value the corridor for reasons unrelated to transportation.

The Kettle Island corridor is more than a potential bridge location. It is a longstanding gathering place that has served Indigenous peoples, residents, visitors, dignitaries, and public officials for generations. It is part of a Canadian Heritage River and remains one of the most important waterfront destinations in the National Capital Region. The project should therefore evaluate not only direct impacts, but also the opportunity costs associated with losing or degrading an area that provides substantial recreational, cultural, environmental, and social benefits.

Decision-makers should also be made aware that alternative crossing locations may exist that would have fewer impacts on community and environmental values. For example, alternatives located within more heavily industrialized or already-disturbed sections of the river corridor may affect fewer residences, encounter fewer recreational conflicts, and attract broader public support. These alternatives deserve careful consideration before irreversible changes are made to one of the region's most valued waterfront landscapes.

The engagement process should explicitly address the value-in-use of the Kettle Island corridor, including its contribution to public health, recreation, tourism, cultural heritage, wildlife habitat, and quality of life. It should also consider the cumulative impacts that a bridge could have on a waterfront area that has benefitted from decades of public investment, including the NCC River House, shoreline parks, lookouts, pathways, and the redevelopment of rue Jacques-Cartier as a premier waterfront destination.

Partners and elected officials should understand that there are alternatives capable of producing broader public benefits. One such alternative would be to protect the Kettle Island and Duck Islands corridor through a conservation framework such as a National Urban Park or extension to the Rideau Canal National Park, protected heritage landscape, or similar designation, while directing any future crossing to a more suitable location. Such an approach could preserve the area's unique environmental, cultural, and recreational assets while still addressing regional transportation needs.

The assessment should also consider tunnel options and other alternatives that could reduce impacts on established communities and waterfront destinations. In particular, opportunities to reconnect urban communities to the riverfront should be evaluated wherever transportation investments are being contemplated. Because existing assets such as the NCC River House, residential neighbourhoods, parks, and recreational facilities cannot realistically be relocated, it may be both more practical and more cost-effective to select a transportation solution that avoids these impacts altogether.

Lessons from other jurisdictions should also be examined. Many cities are now reassessing transportation decisions made decades ago that prioritized road capacity through significant parks and waterfront areas. These experiences demonstrate the importance of evaluating long-term community impacts, preserving valued public spaces, and considering alternatives such as tunnels, bypass routes, ring roads, and integrated transit systems before making permanent changes to important recreational landscapes. Our National Capital Region should be an example in today's best practices, not yesterday's mistakes.

As noted elsewhere, future Public Advisory Group activities should include Urban Indigenous residents, particularly those who live in the National Capital Region, use the area regularly, and will be directly affected by project outcomes. Indigenous engagement should recognize both the rights of Indigenous Nations and the perspectives of Urban Indigenous peoples whose cultural, recreational, and community interests are tied to the river corridor. Their interests could be shared with the other primary territorial rights holders, so that there is a greater understanding of each other's needs. That should conform better to Indigenous consultation traditions.

Future engagement should also include targeted meetings with stakeholder groups that have direct knowledge of the area and its uses, including:

- Waterfront residents and neighbourhood associations.
- Rowing, paddling, sailing, swimming, and recreational boating organizations.
- Urban Indigenous organizations and Indigenous river users.
- Environmental and naturalist groups familiar with Kettle Island and the Duck Islands ecosystem.
- Tourism and recreation organizations that understand the area's value to visitors and active tourism.
- Users of the NCC River House and adjacent waterfront facilities.
- Heritage organizations with expertise in the cultural and historical significance of the river corridor.

Finally, future consultations should provide updated visualizations that accurately depict how each bridge alternative would affect viewsheds, waterfront access, paddling routes, rowing courses, sailing activities, wildlife habitat, and the overall character of the river corridor. These visualizations should be directly compared against the visions previously presented to the public

during consultations related to the NCC River House, rue Jacques-Cartier redevelopment, shoreline parks, lookouts, and the Sir George-Étienne Cartier planning initiatives.

Local residents and community organizations have invested considerable time and effort over many years participating in public consultations related to this section of the Ottawa River. These processes informed major public investments, including the redevelopment of the NCC River House, the revitalization of rue Jacques-Cartier, and the Sir George Etienne Cartier Plan all concerning shoreline parks, pathways, lookouts, and other waterfront amenities intended to enhance public access to and enjoyment of the river.

If the proposed bridge would substantially alter the vision that was presented and supported through those earlier planning and consultation processes, our community deserves clear, transparent, and comprehensive illustrations of those changes. Meaningful public engagement requires that participants fully understand how the project could affect views, recreation, boating navigation, access to the waterfront, environmental quality, and the community values that previous plans sought to protect and enhance.

Failing to provide a better understanding how this bridge will impact on other projects we supported, risks undermining public confidence in both the current assessment and the consultation processes that preceded it. Many residents may question whether their previous participation was genuinely considered if a major infrastructure project is advanced that appears inconsistent with the vision developed through earlier public consultations. To maintain trust, decision-makers should clearly explain how the proposed bridge aligns with, modifies, or departs from the objectives and commitments associated with those previous plans and public investments.

4. Summary of Engagement with Indigenous Communities

The engagement process appears to have focused primarily on the recognized Algonquin rights-holding communities whose traditional territories include the project area. While their participation is essential, the consultation record suggests that Urban Indigenous peoples living in the National Capital Region (NCR) have not been meaningfully engaged as a distinct stakeholder group.

This represents a significant gap in the consultation process. Thousands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people from across Canada live, work, pay taxes, raise families, and contribute to community life in Ottawa-Gatineau. Many maintain strong cultural, recreational, spiritual, and ancestral connections to the Ottawa River and its surrounding landscapes.

The Kichi Sibi (Great River) is more than a local waterway. For many Indigenous peoples, it symbolizes an enduring connection to home communities throughout Canada. Historically, the river and its interconnected waterways formed part of a vast transportation network through which Indigenous peoples travelled, traded, gathered, and maintained relationships across the continent. Even today, the

river serves as a powerful reminder of those connections and of the shared Indigenous history that binds communities together.

As a result of historical displacement, educational opportunities, employment patterns, and other social and economic factors, the National Capital Region has become home to a large and diverse Indigenous population. These residents bring with them perspectives, traditions, and cultural values from Indigenous communities across the country. Their interests, experiences, and relationships with the river may not be fully represented through consultations with territorial rights holders alone. Meaningful engagement should therefore include Urban Indigenous peoples as a distinct stakeholder group whose voices can contribute to a more complete understanding of the cultural, recreational, social, and spiritual importance of the Kettle Island corridor.

The National Capital Region is Canada's capital and should reflect the values and aspirations of all Canadians, including the diverse Indigenous peoples who reside here. Yet Urban Indigenous residents appear to have little formal representation in the consultation process and no dedicated presence within advisory structures associated with the project. While the Indigenous rights and interests of territorial rights holders must remain central to decision-making, this should not prevent the meaningful participation of Urban Indigenous peoples whose daily lives, recreational activities, and cultural connections may be directly affected by the project.

The consultation process also appears to have overlooked important Indigenous service organizations operating within the National Capital Region. Notably absent are organizations such as local Friendship Centres and Indigenous community service providers, including those that support urban Indigenous residents through cultural, educational, health, recreational, and community programming. These organizations may offer important perspectives regarding current and future uses of the area, particularly opportunities to connect Indigenous youth and families with the river through paddling, cultural education, recreation, and environmental stewardship initiatives.

Urban Indigenous communities possess knowledge and perspectives that complement those of territorial rights holders. Indigenous residents who live alongside the river often have direct, day-to-day experience with the affected lands and waters. Their understanding of how the area is currently used, how it contributes to community well-being, and how it might be used in the future represents valuable information that should inform project planning.

The current approach raises concerns that consultation has focused largely on meeting procedural requirements while overlooking Indigenous residents who have a direct and ongoing relationship with the Kettle Island corridor. Meaningful engagement should include those who use the area regularly and whose quality of life, recreation opportunities, cultural activities, and sense of place may be affected by project decisions.

A further concern is that the consultation process appears to have limited opportunities for dialogue between Urban Indigenous people and territorial rights-holding communities. Such engagement could help build a more complete understanding of local conditions, community values, and contemporary Indigenous uses of the area. Urban Indigenous residents often possess detailed knowledge of the river corridor that could assist other Indigenous communities in evaluating potential impacts and opportunities associated with the project.

This issue is particularly important in the National Capital Region, where Indigenous residents bring perspectives from many Nations and cultural traditions across Canada. Their experiences enrich public discussion and can contribute to a more inclusive understanding of how Indigenous values relate to urban planning, waterfront access, recreation, heritage preservation, environmental stewardship, and place-making.

Future engagement activities should therefore be expanded to include:

- Urban Indigenous residents as a distinct stakeholder group.
- Local Indigenous organizations and service providers.
- Friendship Centres and Indigenous community hubs.
- Indigenous recreational, environmental, and cultural organizations operating in the NCR.
- Indigenous individuals who regularly use the Kettle Island corridor for recreation, cultural activities, education, and community programming.
- Group paddles around Kettle Island in big canoes with project team members.

Such an approach would strengthen the legitimacy and completeness of the consultation process by ensuring that decision-makers hear from both territorial rights holders and the broader Indigenous population that lives within, uses, and contributes to the National Capital Region. A project affecting an area of such cultural, environmental, and recreational importance should be informed by the full diversity of Indigenous perspectives connected to the place, not only those represented through existing government-to-government consultation processes.

Funding Indigenous participation:

Funding is being made available by PSPC to ensure the Indigenous communities and organizations have the capacity to participate throughout the Project. (page 29)

My consultations with different communities suggest that the funding process is too complicated. Whether or not this is true, it undermines this statement by the project team.

Budget funds have been allocated over a multiyear period. The IPT began working with primary group Indigenous communities in 2025 to develop collaboration agreements that will include five- year budgets and work plans. These agreements will support the community's ability to plan and make commitments for activities. It is understood that the funding and work plans will be revisited as the Project evolves. It is expected that regular meetings with primary group communities will occur once collaboration agreements are signed. ***Indigenous Participation Support*** *will be provided to Indigenous communities and organizations as they seek funding, collaboration, and other forms of support from other Government of Canada departments and agencies, other levels of government, training and educational institutes, unions, and contractors to increase the economic participation of their members. (page 29)*

Other activities include identifying community-led activities in support of information gathering for the Eastern Bridge Project. This involves confirming the budget and timing to arrange community activities, as well as undertake or participate in studies. **(page 29)**

What are these *community-led activities* referred to? I have led community activities that have included Jane's Walks, a recent Ottawa Architecture Week presentation, and canoe excursions including inviting politicians, Indigenous peoples and local residents to paddle with me and learn about how this bridge will damage our local environment.

I have also produced a documentary on paddling in the area from a Metis perspective that I could shared in this consultation at some point. Without an Urban Indigenous Project Advisory Group, that would be hard, wouldn't it?

A workplan was included in the Collaboration Agreement with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation (AOPFN) to ensure funding is available to support community engagement and to fund several studies that the community wishes to undertake to assess potential impacts to Indigenous rights. Efforts are underway to provide similar opportunities to Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (KZA) through the development of a Collaboration Agreement. Engagement and outreach will continue through all phases of the Project. (page 30)

Consultation Timing and Capacity of Indigenous Communities

Over the past several weeks, I have been in contact with representatives of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (KZA), and it appears that the community is still in the process of organizing its capacity to participate fully in this consultation. As recently as this week, KZA hired a new staff member to assist with consultation-related matters. This suggests that the community is still building the resources and internal processes necessary to engage effectively with a project of this scale.

Elsewhere in this submission, I have recommended extending consultation timelines to accommodate municipal and provincial election-related commitments. For similar reasons, consideration should also be given to extending the current consultation phase to allow KZA sufficient time to organize, review project materials, establish internal priorities, and participate meaningfully in the process.

It is difficult to reconcile the project's stated commitment to Indigenous participation with the fact that KZA has not yet entered into a Collaborative Agreement comparable to that established with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation (AOPFN). Proceeding to subsequent phases of consultation before these foundational arrangements are in place may create the perception that the process is moving ahead faster than Indigenous communities can reasonably respond.

Meaningful consultation requires more than providing opportunities to comment. It requires ensuring that Indigenous communities have adequate time, capacity, information, and

resources to participate effectively. Advancing the process before key consultation structures are fully established risks undermining both the quality and credibility of Indigenous engagement.

This concern extends beyond KZA alone. Many Urban Indigenous residents and organizations look to KZA, as a principal rights-holding community in the project area, for leadership, guidance, and collaboration on matters affecting the region's lands and waters. If KZA is not provided sufficient time and capacity to engage, the effects may be felt more broadly by Indigenous individuals and organizations seeking to work with and support the community's efforts.

For these reasons, the project team should carefully consider whether the consultation schedule allows for meaningful participation by KZA and other affected Indigenous interests. If additional time is required to ensure that consultation obligations are met and that Indigenous perspectives are thoroughly considered, extending the timeline would strengthen both the integrity of the process and the quality of the project's decision-making framework.

Again, these engagement activities did not appear to include:

- **Indigenous individuals who currently use, or may wish to use, this section of the Ottawa River** for activities such as paddling, fishing, harvesting, nature observation, cultural learning, personal reflection, or ceremonial purposes.
- **Métis Nation of Ontario citizens, Non-Status First Nations individuals, and other Indigenous people with historical and contemporary connections to the river corridor.** For generations, Indigenous peoples travelled through this section of the Kichi Sibi as voyageurs, traders, guides, fishers, hunters, and workers whose livelihoods depended upon the river. These perspectives appear to be absent from the consultation record.
- **Urban Indigenous residents of the National Capital Region**, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who live, work, raise families, and pay taxes in Ottawa-Gatineau, and who have a legitimate interest in seeing urban planning and waterfront development reflect Indigenous values and perspectives. Their interests extend beyond the exercise of territorial rights and include access to nature, protection of culturally meaningful landscapes, recreation, community well-being, and opportunities to maintain connections to Indigenous traditions within an urban environment.

As noted by the **Canadian Institute of Planners**, planning is strongest when it is inclusive, respectful of diverse perspectives, and responsive to the cultural values of all communities. The National Capital Region should therefore seek to incorporate Indigenous perspectives not only through consultation with rights-holding communities but also by engaging the Indigenous people who live in and help shape the region today.

For many Urban Indigenous residents, the Kichi Sibi remains a symbolic and practical link to communities across Canada. Historically, its interconnected waterways allowed Indigenous peoples to travel throughout vast portions of the country by canoe and portage. Today, the river continues to provide opportunities for cultural connection, recreation, learning, and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and values to future generations.

A consultation process that excludes these voices risks overlooking important perspectives regarding the present and future use of the river corridor. Meaningful engagement should therefore include Urban Indigenous peoples and organizations as a distinct stakeholder group whose experiences, knowledge, and interests can contribute to a more complete understanding of the project's potential impacts and alternatives.

5 Environmental Studies, Regional Plans and Assessments (page 31)

A significant gap in the current assessment is the absence of any comprehensive analysis of how the proposed bridge will affect the Ottawa River waterway and the people who use it. The project documentation addresses land use extensively, yet provides little consideration of navigation, recreation, waterfront access, shoreline activities, or the broader public interest in the river itself.

Without a comprehensive waterway plan or a dedicated waterway impact assessment, how can the project team, partner agencies, and elected officials adequately understand the effects of a Route 5 bridge on current and future waterway users? This includes impacts on navigation, swimming at Kettle Island's beaches, use of the NCC River House, municipal recreation initiatives, shoreline infrastructure, and residents' rights to safe and equitable access to the river.

The planning documents referenced in Table 5-1 appear overwhelmingly land-focused. This reflects a longstanding deficiency in planning throughout the National Capital Region. Remarkably, our nation's capital lacks a comprehensive waterway plan despite being situated at the confluence of three major rivers. By contrast, cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Halifax, and Saskatoon have developed policies, plans, and regulatory frameworks that recognize waterways as essential public assets. These municipalities have established measures to support recreational paddling, rowing, swimming, and other water-based activities. In some cases, Transport Canada's Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations (VORR) establish speed limits and protected zones for non-motorized users.

Ottawa-Gatineau has no comparable integrated vision. Neither municipality, nor the National Capital Commission, has developed a comprehensive waterway management strategy or

pursued VORR protections for one of Canada's busiest and least regulated urban waterways. This raises a fundamental question: can a city truly be planned responsibly when three major rivers run through its centre, yet those rivers remain largely absent from major planning decisions?

The absence of a federal waterfront commission further contributes to this problem. Many major urban waterfronts benefit from dedicated governance structures that coordinate planning, navigation, recreation, environmental stewardship, and public access. In the National Capital Region, responsibility is fragmented, resulting in waterfront decisions being dominated by short-term, land-based considerations while the waterway itself receives inadequate attention.

The federal government cannot justify this planning gap by pointing to the complexity of coordinating between two municipalities, two provinces, and Algonquin rights holders. Those challenges make comprehensive planning more important, not less. Had a robust waterway strategy existed at the outset of this process, it is doubtful that Kettle Island would have emerged as the preferred bridge location.

I also note that Table 5-1 omits municipal waterway recreation plans. This is surprising because I participated in consultations on the City of Gatineau's recreational waterway plan several years ago. That plan specifically supported expanded use of this stretch of river by paddlers and rowers and proposed a non-motorized boating facility and public launching docks at Baie Bord de l'Eau, near 1267 rue Jacques-Cartier. City Council approved funding for this initiative, although it has yet to be implemented.

Without a comprehensive waterway plan that fully evaluates how the proposed bridge would affect this section of a Parks Canada-designated Canadian Heritage River, decision-makers risk proceeding without understanding the broader consequences. In short, the government would not be building smartly and strategically, but rather planning and building without sufficient knowledge of the waterway it is altering.

Any future waterway plan should recognize and protect the multiple values of this river corridor, including:

- Its role as a heritage river procession route, recalling the historic 1860 royal visit when approximately 150 canoes met and escorted the Prince of Wales to the foot of the Rideau Canal at the beginning of his visit to Bytown.
- Its potential role as part of a National Urban Park network and as a natural extension of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site.

- Its importance as a shared waterway that supports quiet recreation and safeguards safe navigation for established institutions such as the Ottawa New Edinburgh Club, the Rockcliffe Yacht Club, and the Ottawa Rowing Club, all of which occupied and used these waters long before more recent motorized boating facilities were developed.

Until such a framework is in place, the assessment remains incomplete because it evaluates the bridge primarily as a transportation project rather than as an intervention within one of the National Capital Region's most important public waterways.

We need a Waterfront Commission:

This project is exposing weaknesses in the governance of our waterways by multiple jurisdictions. Unlike Toronto, which has Waterfront Toronto, a dedicated tri-government agency responsible for coordinating waterfront revitalization and planning, the National Capital Region has no equivalent waterfront authority or waterway governance body. Responsibility for the Ottawa, Gatineau, and Rideau waterways remains fragmented among multiple agencies and jurisdictions, contributing to the absence of a comprehensive waterway strategy and limiting consideration of cumulative impacts on navigation, recreation, heritage, and public access. Without a plan or such an authority, this bridge is being built blind to the needs of those who have interests in using and protecting the waterway.

Citizens cannot do it alone. In 2023, I organized a dozen marina owners, commercial boating operations, and non-profit boat clubs to design a plan for a shared waterway. Unfortunately, that citizen led intiative was paused due to the municipal election and was not restarted since, due to distractions from flooding. We need the Federal government to create a Waterfront Commission to include Indigenous people in the preservation and planning for it.

A ring road study should be considered

A regional ring road study should be completed before a final bridge location is selected. Such a study would allow governments to evaluate transportation needs at the scale of the entire National Capital Region rather than within a limited corridor. It would provide an opportunity to assess the relative merits of urban crossings, bypass routes, freight corridors, transit investments, and demand-management measures as part of an integrated transportation strategy. Without this broader analysis, there is a risk that the Eastern Bridge Project will address localized traffic issues while failing to identify the most effective long-term solution for regional mobility, freight movement, environmental protection, and community well-being.

One fear I have as a resident, is that a bridge along Route 5 at Kettle Island will merely draw more and more people into the downtown, creating more congestion, rather than more evenly spread traffic that I suspect a ring road would help alleviate.

7 Project Purpose and Need (page 37)

The stated project purpose does not appear to include protecting or respecting existing community values, cultural landscapes, or other factors associated with the area's social, recreational, heritage, and environmental significance. The project should explicitly recognize that infrastructure decisions affect places that communities value for reasons extending beyond transportation efficiency.

Similarly, the project purpose does not prioritize locating a bridge within sections of the river corridor that have already been substantially altered or degraded, rather than within areas that possess significant heritage, recreational, ecological, and cultural value. The assessment should explain why locations with established community and heritage importance should bear these impacts before less sensitive alternatives have been fully examined.

The discussion of future transportation needs is also incomplete. While population growth is identified as a driver of demand, there is no acknowledgement that a significant portion of Gatineau's projected growth is expected to occur farther downstream and east of the Kettle Island corridor. This raises questions about whether the proposed bridge location best serves the region's long-term growth patterns and transportation requirements.

The project purpose should also consider how transportation infrastructure affects traffic distribution throughout the National Capital Region. There is no stated objective to encourage more balanced, bi-directional traffic flows across the regional network. Instead, the proposed crossing may function as an additional funnel, attracting commuters from the north, west, and future eastern growth areas toward an already congested urban core. Funneling traffic into concentrated corridors can create new bottlenecks and increase pressure on surrounding roadway infrastructure.

If the bridge primarily draws more vehicles into central Ottawa-Gatineau along routes that already experience significant congestion during peak periods, its ability to solve regional transportation challenges may be limited. In contrast, a comprehensive ring-road strategy could distribute traffic more evenly throughout the region, provide additional route choices for commuters and freight operators, and reduce dependence on a cluster of closely spaced urban crossings.

Another important project objective should be regional resilience and public safety during emergencies. Transportation infrastructure plays a critical role during natural disasters, major accidents, security incidents, and other crises. Concentrating bridge crossings in a relatively small downtown area may reduce network resilience compared to a more distributed system of crossings. A ring-road approach

could provide alternative routes, reduce vulnerability to disruptions at any single crossing, and improve the movement of emergency services, essential goods, and the public during emergencies.

The assessment should therefore consider whether defence, emergency management, and public safety experts have been consulted regarding the strategic placement of interprovincial crossings. As Canada seeks to strengthen its resilience to future emergencies, transportation redundancy and network security should be important considerations. Recent events, including the 2022 convoy occupation, demonstrated how disruptions affecting a small number of centrally located bridges can have significant regional consequences. A more geographically distributed crossing network could potentially improve regional security, resilience, and operational flexibility.

For these reasons, the project purpose should be expanded beyond traffic capacity and travel efficiency to include community values, heritage protection, regional traffic distribution, emergency preparedness, transportation resilience, and long-term regional planning.

Gatineau's Population Growth: (page 33) and

***Governance and Coordination—While agencies collaborate on cross-river transit, there remains opportunities to improve regional collaboration and coordination to help guide and prioritize transportation capital investments*. (PAGE 34)**

The assessment notes that Gatineau's working population is expected to continue growing beyond 2055 and that many residents will need to commute across the Ottawa River. However, this raises an important question: if population growth is expected to continue at a significant rate, why is the National Capital Region not planning a public transit system capable of accommodating that growth?

Ottawa-Gatineau today is roughly comparable in size to Toronto in the late 1950s, when Toronto was making major investments in rapid transit infrastructure to support long-term population growth and regional mobility. If planners anticipate continued growth comparable to that experienced by other major Canadian metropolitan areas, greater emphasis should be placed on developing a comprehensive, high-capacity public transit network rather than relying primarily on additional road infrastructure.

If interprovincial transit planning remains difficult because of jurisdictional boundaries, then the region should consider lessons from metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C., where multiple jurisdictions cooperate through an integrated regional transit system. The residents of Ottawa and Gatineau would benefit from a unified approach to transportation planning that treats the National Capital Region as a single metropolitan area rather than as separate systems divided by a river.

The shortcomings of the current transit network are evident in the daily experiences of commuters. For example, a receptionist at my father's retirement residence, who lives near Gatineau Hospital and works near the intersection of Metcalfe and Isabella Streets in Ottawa, spends nearly 90 minutes travelling to work each day by public transit. The same trip can typically be completed by car in approximately 25

minutes. Such disparities discourage transit use and demonstrate the need for a more efficient, reliable, and regionally integrated transportation system.

Accordingly, the project should not focus solely on accommodating future automobile traffic. It should also consider how investments in improved interprovincial public transit could reduce congestion, support sustainable growth, expand transportation choices, and better serve the commuting needs of a growing population. Long-term regional mobility will ultimately depend on a public transit system that is planned and built at a scale appropriate for the National Capital Region's future growth, rather than on road expansions alone.

***Heavy truck traffic routed through downtown neighbourhoods to access interprovincial crossings has negative impacts on residents' health, safety, and quality of life. The LTIICP explores various alternatives to reduce impacts from heavy trucks in the downtown core. A new interprovincial crossing in the East, combined with multijurisdictional policy measures to limit heavy trucks from targeted corridors, would be the most effective means of diverting heavy trucks from the core area. Improving logistics for the movement of goods and shifting deliveries to smaller trucks and different times of day were also highlighted as a means of reducing impacts*. (PAGE 38)**

This project appears to shift many of the same negative health, safety, and quality-of-life impacts currently experienced in the King Edward Avenue corridor onto communities in Gatineau and Ottawa's eastern waterfront. Rather than resolving these impacts, the proposed bridge risks transferring them to areas that residents value precisely because they provide opportunities for recreation, restoration, and a high quality of life in a relatively peaceful setting.

The premise that an eastern bridge will solve problems in the King Edward corridor is also questionable. As the region's population grows, the demand for interprovincial travel is likely to continue increasing. The bridge may redistribute some traffic, but it will not eliminate the underlying pressures that have historically affected King Edward Avenue.

It should also be recognized that residents and property owners along the King Edward corridor purchased or developed their properties with full knowledge of the existing traffic conditions. Property values in that area have long reflected those circumstances. The solution to longstanding transportation challenges should not be to impose similar impacts on other established communities in the hope of improving property values or redevelopment opportunities elsewhere.

Neighbourhoods such as Manor Park, Rockcliffe Park, Viscount Alexander Park, Wateridge Village, and Pointe-Gatineau were not designed as major transportation corridors. Their character, land use patterns, recreational spaces, and residential environments are fundamentally different from areas that have historically functioned as arterial roadways. Introducing a major truck and commuter route through these neighbourhoods risks undermining the very qualities that attract residents and visitors.

Retrofitting a regional transportation artery through established residential and recreational areas is not necessarily an appropriate solution to transportation problems created by planning decisions made elsewhere decades ago. Infrastructure should be located where it is most compatible with surrounding land uses and community values, rather than transferring impacts from one community to another.

In effect, the project risks exchanging one set of affected neighbourhoods for another, rather than addressing the root causes of interprovincial transportation challenges through a comprehensive regional transportation strategy. And, it risks destroying a highly valued part of the river that people and animals use together.

12 Project Alternatives (page 56)

Alternative Approaches That Should Be Considered

Rather than proceeding with a bridge at Kettle Island, the project should more fully evaluate alternatives that better balance transportation needs with environmental protection, community values, and long-term regional planning objectives. These alternatives could include:

Expanding east-west transportation capacity through improvements to Highway 50 and related regional corridors.

Establishing a more comprehensive ring-road strategy that promotes bi-directional traffic distribution across the National Capital Region rather than concentrating traffic flows toward the urban core.

Investing in an integrated interprovincial public transit system capable of accommodating projected population growth and reducing dependence on private vehicles.

Designating the Kettle Island corridor as part of a National Urban Park or as an extension of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site and associated protected landscapes, thereby preserving the area's ecological, cultural, recreational, and heritage values for future generations.

Locating a new interprovincial crossing in a more heavily industrialized and already-disturbed section of the river corridor, such as areas farther downstream near existing wastewater treatment facilities, trucking and air freight warehouses, and the Gatineau Airport. Such locations may offer advantages including reduced impacts on residential communities, lower impacts on recreational users, gentler approaches to Highway 50, and potentially fewer effects on property values and community cohesion.

Deficiencies in the Evaluation of the Kettle Island Alternative

The assessment notes that the Kettle Island Bridge alternative scored relatively well with respect to visual intrusion and Indigenous interests but performed less favourably on several other evaluation criteria. It further acknowledges that, because of its location near established urban communities, the project could negatively affect community cohesion and social equity.

However, the assessment appears to underestimate the broader significance of this area as a recreational, cultural, and social destination. The corridor is not simply a potential transportation route. It is one of the most important waterfront gathering places in the National Capital Region, where residents connect with the river, nature, recreation, and one another.

This section of the Ottawa River forms part of a designated Canadian Heritage River and possesses exceptional historical significance. It served as a ceremonial waterway during the 1860 Royal Visit, when approximately 150 canoes escorted the Prince of Wales to the Rideau Canal. It also hosted royal observations of rowing and boating events during the 1901 visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall. Nearby lies a nationally important archaeological landscape with evidence of Indigenous presence dating back approximately 7,300 years. Today, Indigenous peoples, residents, and visitors continue to use and enjoy these waters.

The area has evolved into the region's premier aquatic recreation district. Paddlers, rowers, sailors, swimmers, recreational boaters, and shoreline users routinely enjoy the waters around Kettle Island and the surrounding waterfront. The corridor already contains infrastructure developed specifically to support these values, including the NCC River House, shoreline parks, lookouts, pathways, beaches, and the scenic redevelopment of rue Jacques-Cartier.

Importantly, many of these public investments were deliberately designed to celebrate and showcase the river's exceptional views, natural character, and recreational opportunities. It is therefore difficult to reconcile these investments with the proposal to introduce a major bridge carrying significant commuter and truck traffic through the same landscape.

By comparison, alternative locations farther downstream are already characterized by industrial and utility uses, including wastewater treatment facilities and freight-oriented development. These areas have substantially lower recreational, cultural, scenic, and social value and may therefore provide opportunities for transportation infrastructure with fewer impacts on community well-being and heritage resources.

Need for a More Comprehensive Assessment of Community Values

A fundamental concern is that the evaluation framework does not appear to adequately account for the full value of this river corridor to the community. The weighting system emphasizes transportation objectives while giving insufficient consideration to cumulative social, recreational, heritage, cultural, and waterfront-use values.

Had a comprehensive waterfront or waterway plan been developed before selecting a preferred crossing location, this section of the river may well have been identified as a priority area for conservation, heritage interpretation, tranquil recreation, and ecological protection. Its combination of natural, cultural, recreational, and historical attributes makes it a strong candidate for enhanced protection through mechanisms such as a National Urban Park designation or a broader heritage landscape framework.

Before any irreversible decisions are made, a comprehensive assessment should be undertaken to determine the full value of this section of the river to Indigenous peoples, residents, recreational users, heritage organizations, and Canadians generally. Without such an assessment, the bridge proposal risks

becoming an isolated transportation project pursued in the absence of an integrated vision for the river corridor and the wider National Capital Region.

The project is therefore not simply testing a bridge location. It is revealing the consequences of fragmented planning, where a major transportation initiative is advancing without an overarching transportation, waterfront, recreation, heritage, and land-use strategy to guide decision-making. As a result, the current evaluation framework appears to undervalue the very community qualities that make the Kettle Island corridor unique and worthy of protection.

21. Potential Impacts on the Health or Socio-economic Conditions of Indigenous Peoples (Page 135)

This section does not appear to adequately consider the current and future importance of the Kettle Island corridor for Urban Indigenous peoples and Indigenous organizations in the National Capital Region.

The assessment should examine how the loss or degradation of this tranquil recreation area could affect Indigenous physical, mental, cultural, and spiritual well-being. For many Indigenous people living in urban environments, access to natural areas and waterways provides important opportunities for recreation, reflection, cultural connection, and renewal. Activities such as paddling, swimming, fishing, gathering traditional plants, spending time on the land, and connecting with the river contribute positively to health and quality of life.

The proposed bridge would permanently alter one of the region's most significant waterfront recreation areas. Increased traffic, noise, visual intrusion, and reduced perceptions of safety and tranquility could diminish the value of the area for Indigenous users seeking opportunities to reconnect with the river and engage in land-based activities. Alternative locations farther downstream do not provide equivalent recreational, cultural, scenic, or spiritual benefits and therefore cannot be viewed as comparable substitutes.

The assessment should also consider the potential effects on future Indigenous-led recreation, education, and cultural programming. The Kettle Island corridor presents opportunities for initiatives such as paddling programs, youth education, cultural interpretation, and river-based learning activities that help reconnect Indigenous people with the waterway. These opportunities may be reduced if the character of the area is fundamentally changed by major transportation infrastructure.

More broadly, the assessment should recognize that waterways and river landscapes have long served as places of travel, gathering, ceremony, recreation, and cultural connection for Indigenous peoples. The cumulative effect of continued development pressure on these spaces may contribute to a gradual erosion of opportunities for Indigenous people to maintain and strengthen those connections within an urban setting.

The discussion of Indigenous economic benefits should also be approached carefully. While employment, business, and procurement opportunities can be important project outcomes, economic benefits should not be treated as substitutes for assessing impacts on cultural values, community well-being, recreational use, or access to traditional and contemporary land and water uses. These considerations

should be evaluated independently and transparently. Dangling enticements to win Indigenous communities to support the project and sell-out the interests of local Indigenous people who use the river will undermine the process. That is also reminiscent of the bad colonial treaty signing practices used in the past, getting sign-off on agreements with those who do not have as great an interest as those locally.

Finally, the assessment should acknowledge that Indigenous communities and Indigenous individuals may hold differing perspectives regarding the project. Consultation processes should recognize this diversity of views and ensure that concerns relating to cultural landscapes, recreation, community values, and quality of life receive the same consideration as potential economic benefits. A comprehensive impact assessment should respectfully examine all of these perspectives before determining whether the project is in the public interest.

Economic Participation Measures and Potential Conflicts with Project Assessment (Page 135)

The document states that PSPC has developed a number of measures intended to support Indigenous economic participation, including procurement targets for Indigenous businesses, capacity-building initiatives, and employment opportunities within PSPC and the NCC.

While economic participation and employment opportunities can be important policy objectives, they should not be presented in a manner that could be perceived as offsetting concerns about a project's impacts on Indigenous rights, community interests, cultural values, or quality of life. Economic benefits and project impacts are separate considerations and should be assessed independently.

The assessment should also acknowledge that employment opportunities associated with public-sector projects are often temporary and may not necessarily provide long-term economic security or sustained community benefits. Recruitment initiatives are valuable, but meaningful reconciliation requires not only hiring Indigenous employees and contractors, but also creating conditions that support long-term retention, advancement, cultural safety, and genuine participation in decision-making processes.

There is a strong risk that emphasizing procurement, contracts, employment opportunities, and other economic incentives within the context of project evaluation may create the perception that support for a project can be obtained through financial benefits rather than through a thorough examination of its potential impacts. I have seen this in the way the government has interacted in local Indigenous issues, which has caused much distrust of how it operates on inter-Indigenous matters. To maintain public confidence and the integrity of the consultation process, discussions of economic benefits should be clearly separated from assessments of cultural, recreational, environmental, heritage, and community impacts.

The assessment should also recognize that Indigenous peoples are not a single interest group and may hold differing views regarding the project. Some individuals, organizations, and communities may prioritize economic opportunities, while others may place greater importance on protecting cultural landscapes, waterways, recreation areas, and places of historical significance. All perspectives deserve equal consideration.

In the case of Kettle Island and the surrounding waterfront, concerns have been raised regarding potential impacts on Indigenous cultural connections to the river, opportunities for paddling and land-based education programs, access to traditional gathering places, and the continued use of the area for recreation, reflection, and cultural activities. These concerns should be evaluated on their own merits and should not be weighed against procurement commitments or employment initiatives.

If governments wish to create meaningful and lasting Indigenous employment opportunities, consideration should also be given to long-term stewardship and conservation initiatives. For example, investments in protected areas, cultural landscapes, interpretation programs, ecological restoration, and waterfront management could provide enduring employment and leadership opportunities while preserving the cultural, environmental, and recreational values that Indigenous peoples and the broader community seek to protect.

Ultimately, project approval should be based on a transparent assessment of the public interest, Indigenous rights and interests, environmental effects, community values, and long-term sustainability. Economic participation programs may provide important benefits, but they should not be presented as substitutes for addressing concerns about the permanent alteration of places that hold cultural, historical, recreational, and social significance. They should not compel one group to sell-out another, just to get their reward. That was a colonial practice that should not be resurrected.

ADDENDA:

Request to postpone this phase of consultation:

By John Savage

Request to Extend the October 9, 2026 Consultation Deadline for the Eastern Bridge Project

On September 1, 2026, the National Capital Commission (NCC) announced a public consultation for the Eastern Bridge Project, with submissions due by October 9, 2026. While this timeline may suit the internal pace of the project team advancing a Kettle Island bridge option, it is unreasonably short for a project of this magnitude - one that will permanently shape our community forever, undermining community values and the future of our protected Kettle Island nature reserve, also destroying what the National Capital Commission has recently recognized as the last tranquil recreation waterway used for generations. A six-week window is insufficient for residents, neighbourhood associations, Indigenous organizations, and other stakeholders to review the project materials, examine the historical context, consult their communities, and prepare meaningful responses. Many non-profit organizations rely on volunteer boards that meet monthly; they cannot simply accelerate their governance processes because a federal project team is in a hurry. The timing is also inappropriate due to elections on both sides of the river. Stakeholder capacity is already constrained, and it is well-established that Indigenous communities, in particular, require longer timelines to conduct proper consultation within their own governance traditions. Accelerating this process disproportionately burdens Indigenous participants and undermines the integrity of the consultation. Reference: Ottawa council wants to extend public consultations on new

bridge Expedited Consultation Undermines the Legitimacy of the Process Throughout this process, the project appears to be “frog-walked” toward a predetermined conclusion. A six-week consultation period for a major interprovincial infrastructure project makes the exercise appear performative rather than substantive. To restore public confidence, the NCC must extend the deadline and allow time for genuine engagement, analysis, and response. Anything less resembles outdated political tactics that restrict democratic participation to promote a bureaucratic agenda. Indigenous Rights and the Honour of the Crown As a Métis resident of this watershed - whose Chippewa and Métis ancestors lived and travelled along the Kichi Sibi - I assert my right to participate meaningfully in this consultation. I also raise these concerns on behalf of the broader Indigenous community, many of whom will wish to participate but cannot do so under such compressed timelines. Legally, the Crown’s Duty to Consult requires meaningful, good-faith engagement. A six-week window does not meet this standard and risks violating the Honour of the Crown, a constitutional principle tied to section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The Supreme Court of Canada has been clear: Taku River Tlingit First Nation v. British Columbia (2004) The duty to consult is grounded in the Honour of the Crown and must be given full effect to promote reconciliation. The Crown’s duty to consult and accommodate Aboriginal peoples, even prior to proof of asserted Aboriginal rights and title, is grounded in the principle of the honour of the Crown, which derives from the Crown’s assertion of sovereignty in the face of prior Aboriginal occupation. The Crown’s honour cannot be interpreted narrowly or technically, but must be given full effect in order to promote the process of reconciliation mandated by s. 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982. Haida Nation v. British Columbia (2004) The duty arises when the Crown has knowledge of potential Aboriginal rights and contemplates actions that may adversely affect them. The foundation of the duty in the Crown’s honour and the goal of reconciliation suggest that the duty arises when the Crown has knowledge, real or constructive, of the potential existence of the Aboriginal right or title and contemplates conduct that might adversely affect it. Indigenous organizations cannot simply abandon their paid work or community responsibilities to meet an arbitrary deadline set by federal bureaucrats or pro-bridge political actors. The NCC must reconsider the timeline in light of its constitutional obligations. Conflicts with Elections in Ontario and Quebec The October 9 deadline directly conflicts with major elections: City of Ottawa municipal election: October 26, 2026 Ottawa City Council has already publicly stated that the NCC’s deadline does not allow elected representatives to participate meaningfully. Quebec provincial election: October 5, 2026 Many potential participants are heavily involved in this election period and cannot simultaneously engage in a complex infrastructure consultation. These overlapping elections significantly reduce stakeholder capacity. Many of us are also working full-time jobs while supporting our neighbourhoods during the election period. The NCC’s chosen timeline is simply unrealistic. Requests I formally request the following:

1. Extend the consultation deadline until after the City of Ottawa’s October 26, 2026 election, so residents can engage with newly elected representatives and so Indigenous communities can participate in accordance with the Duty of the Crown to properly engage us.

2. Extend the deadline until all applications to the Participant Funding Program have been reviewed and decided. Participants cannot plan their involvement without knowing whether their time will be

compensated. Proceeding without this information creates an unnecessary barrier to public participation.

3. Commit to avoiding short-notice consultation deadlines for future phases of this project. Major federal infrastructure projects typically follow longer, more respectful timelines. Agencies such as the Canadian Transportation Agency and the CRTC provide examples of fair and transparent consultation practices. I propose you review those standards and report back to us what new more fair standard the NCC proposes to follow in the future for this project.

4. Increase funding allocations for Indigenous participants to reflect the additional time required to consult broader community stakeholders according to Indigenous governance protocols.

5. Avoid repeating past adversarial practices, including those documented by Kitigan Zibi in 2008, and ensure that consultation is conducted in a respectful, good-faith manner. (The press release from Kitigan Zibi concerning the failings of the expedited 2008 Kettle Island Bridge consultation process attached touches on the historical failures of this process that should be avoided then and now.) If the Federal government intends to fairly engage the public and the Indigenous community on important infrastructure projects, it must do better than using old style political tactics that muzzles our community's voices. This Government should aspire to a higher standard, based on best practices for our nation's capital. Should you require clarification regarding any of these requests, please contact me. Miigwetch,

John Gaudaur Savage 1191 rue Jacques-Cartier Gatineau, Quebec 819-700-1742

Another example how the NCC has ignored Urban Indigenous interests in this section of the river, when they failed to respond to this and other emails asking about using the NCC River House for an Indigenous paddling program. This sort of false support of Indigenous interests needs to be addressed at some point.

Subject: Questions for Annual Public Meeting
Fri, Sep 24, 2021 at 5:03 PM
To: NCCInfoCCN
From: John Savage

I would appreciate it if you could submit these questions to the National Capital Commission Board of Directors at the 2021 Annual Public Meeting coming up. Please let me know if you have any questions and what their response may be. Thanks. Questions for the Board of Directors:

1) It seems that the NCC is nearing the end of it renovation of the old Ottawa New Edinburgh Club boathouse, a place that will be a new access point for the public. As a Metis person who has a concern about protecting Indigenous access to the river for our own programs and the promotion of our history on this ancient waterway, I am concerned we have been left out of the planning around this. My requests to discuss Indigenous concerns have been ignored by your staff, so my my questions to you are:

Why wasn't the public properly consulted regarding the reconstruction of the Ottawa River Facility (former Ottawa New Edinburgh Club boathouse that has been recently renovated), including Indigenous groups that have a pre-existing right to access the river for their traditional activities, such as canoeing, kayaking, and rowing? I have tried to connect with your NCC team on this and have yet to get a response from them on how this facility could be used by Urban Indigenous people who live here and pay taxes. For example, it would make a great location for hosting Indigenous paddling and rowing programs, along with an exhibit space for showcasing our history on this Great River of special importance to Indigenous people across Canada. As I established the Ottawa Rowing Club Historical Interpretive Archive and various paddling and rowing programs out of this boathouse, I feel I at least deserve a conversation after my repeated requests for one. Would the Board task a staff member to enter into a meaningful dialogue with me on this matter, as I assert my Indigenous right to be consulted on this matter and on behalf of my community?

2) The National Capital Region has a large Indigenous population who are not always consulted as a community on many important projects, on various levels. As this urban region grows, urban development is becoming less and less representative of the Indigenous values of the land. In time, as people intermarry and the Indigenous population grows, it is conceivable that the majority of residents will be of Indigenous descent and won't be living in a urban region that is representative of their ancestral family values, but instead according to today's dominant colonial values. For this reason, for the sake of reducing institutionalized anti-Indigenism why doesn't the NCC organize an advisory group of concerned citizens and representatives to work with its staff on various planning issues, rather than having one or two people represent the entire nation here? Would you please task someone in your organization to discuss this with me, so that best practices to overcome institutionalized racism can be developed on such an important matter of lasting consequence? (Former MInister McKenna was supposed to put this request forward for me this past summer, but the election came and so perhaps this request wasn't made afterall.)

3) Since 2015, I have spent over $18,000 in lawyer fees to try to convince the NCC and City of Gatineau to respect the right of Indigenous paddlers and rowers to safely access the Ottawa & Gatineau Rivers as a result of the rue Jacques Cartier redevelopment in Gatineau. Up until 2015, Indigenous people on rue Jacques Cartier shoreline could safely launch a canoe, as they had for 7300 years, based on archeological evidence. The project team rejected my request for a meeting and their duty to consult with Indigenous people, as set out by various courts. As a result, I am out of pocket for these funds and our rights are undermined by an unsafe shoreline to launch from. In fact, the City of Gatineau Ombudsman found in 2019 that there is no longer any safe access for paddlers and rowers along rue Jacques Cartier, where I live, just motor boat docks and a shoreline of rebar and rubble. I asked your own NCC Ombudsman, Mr. Saville to investigate the NCC role, however, he found he didn't have the authority to do so. Even so, he did write to me in an email in 2019, that my complaint was a reminder of NCC's ongoing symbolic and actual responsibility to continue to actively promote and protect the rights of Canada's Indigenous people in the conduct of its business affairs and that he'd inform the Board of my concerns. To follow this up, as the NCC is the Federal agency legally and morally responsible for advocating on behalf of Indigenous citizens in this region, will it set a new policy to make it a funding condition for joint projects with the cites of Gatineau and Ottawa, that they both promote and protect the rights of their Indigenous people on all their projects, whether or not jointly funded with the NCC? And, will the NCC help compensate me for my legal fees, as an act of reconciliation and recognition of its own Duty of the Crown failure to consult me in a meaningful way at its various joint consultations with the City of Gatineau on the rue Jacques Cartier project?

Sincerely,

John P. Gaudaur Savage