

For a consultation process that meets the stakes

To build support for large-scale projects that will permanently transform our daily lives, it is essential to involve the public throughout the process from beginning to end. A well-conducted consultation process allows development of the best solutions, minimizing their negative impacts and ensuring the project's legitimacy.

The National Capital Commission (NCC) is right to want to consult the citizens on the proposed construction of a new bridge in the eastern parts of Gatineau and Ottawa. However, for this process to be perceived as credible and constructive, it must be grounded in best practices in public participation. Unfortunately, that is not currently the case.

The first phase - a survey launched in the middle of summer, a time ill-suited for public engagement – is one such example. Furthermore, the creation of three separate advisory committees (Gatineau residents, Ottawa residents and environmental and transportation organizations) fragments the discussion and limits the development of a shared understanding of the issues, even though the NCC claims it wants to bring both sides of the river closer together.

The decision to limit participation to community associations located within 500 meters of the proposed corridor is also problematic. The impacts of such a project will extend well beyond that perimeter, especially with regard to access routes - which have yet to be determined – and the potential rerouting of truck traffic through residential neighborhoods.

For this consultation to fully meet its objectives, the public must have access to all relevant information: a bridge's potential to reduce congestion, comparisons with other mobility solutions, and the possible impacts on affected neighborhoods. Organizations invited to participate must also have adequate resources to fulfill their representative roles. In this regard, the NCC would benefit from drawing inspiration from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's Participant Funding Program, which provides financial support to groups wishing to review documents, submit briefs, and actively engage in decision-making processes.

Consulting for the sake of consulting will serve neither the NCC's interests nor those of the public. We therefore call for a process that:

- is scheduled at times conducive to meaningful public engagement ;
- engages all concerned citizens, not just those within a limited geographic area ;
- provides resources to enable informed participation ;

- and ensures access to documents justifying the project's relevance and its potential impacts on traffic in neighborhoods near the proposed bridge.

Without a meaningful consultation process that meets these fundamental conditions, a project of this scale cannot respond to collective needs or earn the support required to proceed.

This open letter is endorsed by :

Rockliffe Park Residents Association
Lindenlea Community Association
New Edinburgh Community Alliance
Manor Park Community Association
Carson Grove Community Association
Fairhaven Community Association
Wateridge Community Association
Association citoyenne de Pointe-Gatineau
Association des résidents du quartier Carrefour-de-l'Hôpital
Association des résidents du district de Limbour
Association du patrimoine du ruisseau de la Brasserie
Association des résidents du Parc-de-la-Montagne
L'Association des Amis de Wychwood
L'Association des résidents de Deschênes (ARD)
Association des résidents du Village d'Aylmer