

Opening Remarks – PATH Conference

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Prof. Steven Farber, Director, Mobility Network

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge this land on which we are meeting today. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Indigenous communities across Ontario are leading a diverse range of transportation initiatives that strengthen mobility, economic opportunities, and community well-being. These initiatives include expanding on-demand transit services in remote regions, developing active transportation infrastructure to support walking and cycling, and enhancing winter road networks that connect northern communities. Investments are also fostering sustainable solutions such as zero-emission vehicle programs and transportation hubs that integrate local services. By advancing these projects, Indigenous communities are shaping transportation systems that reflect their priorities, support cultural continuity, and improve access to essential services.

INTRODUCE KAREN

First up today, I would like to invite Karen Chapple to say some introductory remarks. Karen is the Director of the School of Cities at the University of Toronto, where she also serves as Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning. She is Professor Emerita of City & Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley, where she served as department chair and held the Carmel P. Friesen Chair in Urban Studies

Section 1: Welcome

Welcome to the inaugural PATH Conference! It's truly wonderful to see so many of you here today—whether you've come from local, provincial, or federal government; the community and private sectors; or the University of Toronto as alumni, faculty, postdocs, graduate students, or collaborators. Your presence reflects the shared commitment we all have to advancing transportation and housing solutions for this region.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the incredible efforts of the Mobility Network team—Jasvinei, Khadija, and Jasmine—who have worked tirelessly to organize this conference. Your dedication is what makes today possible. I'm also grateful for the financial support from the Office of Institutional Strategic Initiatives, which has

been instrumental in sustaining the Mobility Network, and to the School of Cities for their contribution to helping us take the next steps in our journey.

A special thanks also goes to Prof. Eric Miller for his tremendous leadership as the past director of the Mobility Network. Eric's work has been pivotal in organizing the University's transportation research community, fostering impactful connections, and ensuring that our work resonates beyond the academic sphere. His efforts have left us with a strong foundation to build on—not to mention a small but perfectly timed budget with which to host this wonderful event today! Eric, your decades of service at the University continue to inspire us.

Reflecting on my own journey, I vividly recall the sense of excitement and reassurance I felt when I first arrived at the University of Toronto as an assistant professor. I knew I had found a place where collaboration would thrive—both within and outside the University—thanks to initiatives like Cities Centre, UTTRI, and the Mobility Network, all of which Eric dedicated his precious time to nurturing. That sense of community and shared vision for the future is something I deeply value, and I am committed to continuing to nurture and grow it during my leadership of the Mobility Network.

Section 2: Celebrating Research and Impact

One of the great strengths of the University of Toronto is the sheer depth and breadth of research that takes place here. Across faculties, institutes, and research groups, UofT has become a national and global leader in advancing knowledge in transportation, mobility, and land-use planning.

But what truly sets this work apart is its impact. Research conducted at UofT does not sit on a shelf—it actively shapes **policy, planning, and decision-making** across all levels of government, as well as within transit agencies, the private sector, and community organizations. Through long-standing collaborations with municipal governments, Metrolinx, the Ministry of Transportation, and federal ministries, our work is applied in ways that directly improve transportation systems across the region.

Much of this impact comes through **modeling and forecasting tools** that help governments plan for the future. For decades, UofT has led the way in **developing sophisticated travel demand models**, giving decision-makers the ability to anticipate the impacts of population growth, evolving travel patterns, and infrastructure needs. These tools have been instrumental in guiding transit investments and service planning, ensuring that transportation systems adapt to the changing needs of communities.

At the same time, the urgency of climate change has placed a renewed focus on **understanding and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation**. UofT researchers have pioneered advanced methods to **model emissions and evaluate different decarbonization strategies**, providing evidence-based insights that help governments meet their climate targets. This

work is shaping policies at every level, ensuring that sustainable mobility solutions are at the heart of transportation planning.

Of course, transportation is about more than just movement—it is about access, opportunity, and equity. Research at UofT has pushed the boundaries of how we think about **fair and inclusive transportation systems**, ensuring that mobility is not just efficient, but also just. From developing new ways to measure accessibility gaps to rethinking transit fare policies, this work has been instrumental in advancing equity-based approaches to transportation planning.

Advancements in technology are also transforming how cities manage mobility in real time. AI and data-driven innovation are enabling **smarter traffic and transit control systems**, improving congestion management and optimizing public transit operations. UofT research has been at the forefront of these developments, helping agencies deploy real-time solutions that enhance the reliability, safety and efficiency of urban transportation networks.

And, beyond planning and operations, UofT has played a leading role in rethinking how we **finance and deliver major transportation infrastructure projects**. As cities and regions face increasing financial constraints, our researchers are exploring new strategies for funding transit expansion, improving public-private partnerships, and ensuring that investments in transportation align with long-term urban growth and sustainability goals.

These are just a few examples of how research at UofT is driving real-world change. More than just academic exercises, these projects demonstrate the power of **partnerships between researchers, government agencies, and practitioners**—collaborations that are shaping the future of transportation in this region.

Section 3: Honoring the Practitioner Community

I've spent quite a bit of time talking about the research happening at the University of Toronto, but enough about us—what about you?

Researchers at the University are not only driven by curiosity; we often take our inspiration from the incredibly **wicked problems** that arise in our region—the very challenges that **you**, as practitioners, work to manage and solve on a daily basis. Whether it's addressing affordability, accessibility, congestion, or climate impacts, these are complex, evolving issues that demand expertise, creativity, and action. And so often, we find that **we share priorities**—that the problems that drive your work also fuel our research.

I also want to acknowledge that **the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) and Metrolinx had planned to be here today, with more than 30 delegates registered to attend**. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing provincial election, they were unable to participate. Their absence today is not a reflection of their engagement, but rather a procedural necessity during an election period. We know

that MTO and Metrolinx remain deeply committed to the conversations happening here, and we look forward to continuing our work with them as this initiative moves forward.

This only reinforces the importance of **having structured, institutionalized spaces for knowledge exchange**—so that collaboration isn't dependent on who is able to be in the room on a given day, but is sustained over the long term. **That is exactly what the Mobility Network Research Consortium (MNRC) is designed to accomplish.** By creating a platform for ongoing cooperation, we can ensure that expertise—whether from academia or government—does not exist in isolation, but instead feeds into shared progress.

Section 4: Introducing the Mobility Network Research Consortium (MNRC)

Collaboration has always been at the heart of meaningful progress in transportation and land-use planning. The challenges we face—whether it's congestion, affordability, or the climate crisis—demand solutions that **bridge research, policy, and practice.** To truly move the needle, we need **sustained, structured, and strategic partnerships** that ensure research is not only relevant but also directly useful in shaping decisions.

That is why we are launching the **Mobility Network Research Consortium (MNRC)**—a new initiative designed to **institutionalize collaboration between researchers and practitioners**, ensuring that **policy and practice are informed by cutting-edge research, and that research is grounded in the realities of implementation.**

The Greater Golden Horseshoe is growing at an incredible pace. That growth brings opportunities—but also **significant challenges.** Infrastructure and housing development have struggled to keep up. Congestion, affordability concerns, and climate pressures are mounting. Governments at all levels have well-articulated goals for **equity, sustainability, and coordinated land-use and transportation planning.** But there are still critical knowledge gaps in **how best to implement policies, investments, and infrastructure projects to meet those goals.**

That's where the MNRC comes in.

We are working to **raise funds to establish a sustained program of research that reflects the key priorities of our regional stakeholders—aiming for \$1 million per year in dedicated research funding.** This will provide a stable foundation for collaborative, policy-relevant research that directly supports decision-makers and practitioners.

Beyond research, **MNRC will play a crucial role in workforce development**—helping train the next generation of transportation professionals. Our students and researchers will gain exposure to **real-world problem-solving and interdisciplinary collaboration**, ensuring that the people shaping transportation in the decades to come are ready to bridge the gap between research and practice.

We are building **not just a research initiative, but a knowledge community**—one that will bring together leading scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to **continuously share insights, debate new ideas, and push forward the conversations on mobility and land-use planning.**

And the timing for this couldn't be better. We are at a **critical moment** for transportation and housing in this region. With billions of dollars of transit investment in progress, a shifting policy landscape, and an urgent need to address affordability and climate concerns, we **must seize this opportunity to create something transformative for the future.**

This is just the beginning. In the coming months, we will be working with partners to formalize the MNRC structure, define our research priorities, and advance our fundraising efforts. **Today marks the start of that journey, and we invite you to be part of it.**

Section 5: Program Highlights & What's Next

As we move forward, today's program has been designed to give you the **freedom to explore the topics that resonate most with you.** Throughout the day, we will have **concurrent sessions running in four different rooms**, covering a range of critical issues at the intersection of **transportation, land use, housing, climate, equity, and technology.** You can pick and choose your own adventure through the program—I hope that there's something for everyone.

While much of the day will allow for these **breakout discussions**, we will also be **coming together as a full group three more times.**

First, after **lunch**, we will have the privilege of hearing from our **distinguished keynote speaker, Prof. Daniel Rodriguez**, Director of the **Institute for Transportation Studies at UC Berkeley.** As the director of **one of the world's premier transportation research institutes**, he brings deep expertise in fostering impactful research collaborations between academia, government, and practice—something we are striving to build with the MNRC.

Later in the afternoon, at **4:40 PM**, we will **reconvene for an exciting debate with the motion:** *"Cars are still the future of mobility in the GGH."* This debate is not just about the arguments on either side—it's about **embracing discussion, critical thinking, and the healthy exchange of ideas.** As we develop and nurture our shared knowledge community, forums like this will be essential in shaping how we navigate the pressing challenges of transportation and housing.

And finally, after a full day of discussions, we will **close with a cocktail reception**—a chance to reflect, connect, and continue these conversations in a more relaxed setting.

So, I encourage you to engage fully today—participate in the sessions, ask questions, challenge ideas, and make new connections. This is what this conference is all about.

Section 6: Call to Action & Closing

As we come to the close of this opening session, I want to take a moment to reflect on the **opportunity that stands before us**.

We know that transportation and housing are **fundamental to how we live, work, and connect with one another**. We also know that the challenges we face—congestion, affordability, climate change—are not just technical problems. **They are human problems. They impact families, communities, livelihoods.**

And yet, despite their complexity, we are not powerless.

This room is filled with people who have dedicated their careers to **understanding, shaping, and improving the systems that define our cities and regions**. We are planners, engineers, policymakers, researchers—people who **care deeply about creating a more just, sustainable, and thriving future**.

But **progress doesn't happen in silos**. No single institution, no single research paper, no single policy decision will get us where we need to go. **It is only through collaboration—through sustained, institutionalized cooperation—that we will get the transformative change we need.**

That is why we are here today.

This conference is not just a series of presentations. It is **the beginning of a larger movement**—a movement to ensure that the work we do **does not stay within the walls of academia, or within the halls of government, but is shared, tested, improved, and that the best ideas are put into action**.

So, my call to you today is this: **stay engaged. Advocate for collaboration.**

Take what you hear today—what inspires you, what challenges you—and **bring it back to your teams, your directors, your organizations, and your elected officials. Tell them why our work matters. Tell them why our research and practice must be aligned**. Tell them that we cannot afford to operate in silos any longer.

The Mobility Network Research Consortium is just getting started. Over the next months, we will be building the foundation for this **long-term, institutionalized collaboration**. If you believe, as I do, that this kind of partnership is essential for our region's future, **I invite you to be a part of it**.

Tomorrow, at our **Leadership Workshop**, leaders from governments across the Greater Golden Horseshoe have already been invited to take the next steps in shaping the MNRC. But not everyone is at the table yet. If you're not sure whether your organization is represented, find us today and we will do our best to bring you in. For now, our conversations are focused on municipal, provincial, and federal government partners, but we **hope to expand opportunities for other universities, private sector firms, and community organizations** to engage in meaningful ways.

And this is just the beginning. The MNRC is more than a regional initiative—it is a **testbed for something bigger**. We see this as a model that could **expand to a national consortium**, or inspire the development of **regional research consortia across the country**. If we get this right, it will **have a lasting impact on the state of transportation and land-use research and planning for the next generation**.

Let's not let today be just another conference. Let's make it the start of something bigger. **Together, we have the knowledge, the passion, and the expertise to shape a better future for our cities and our communities.**

Thank you