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# AMBITIOUS DESIGN



**Rob Jowett**

Creating an open, inviting environment to attract riders was a design priority for the 12 Mississauga Transitway stations.

Using the Mississauga Transitway as a case study, **IBI Group** transit architecture associate director and project lead **Lisa D'Abbondanza** told Interior Design Show Toronto attendees that transit infrastructure has to be designed with a focus on user experience to encourage use. IBI Group designed eight of the 12 stations.

"Thoughtful design does matter in public transit projects," she says. "With a

focus on user experience and treating each station as a transit node and as a civic space that's worthy of light, beauty, visibility, and comfort... we can create great public spaces that benefit the public and transform the way we think about infrastructure."

The Mississauga Transitway is the second grade-separated bus rapid transit (BRT) system in Canada. Ottawa also operates a BRT system. The 18-km transitway begins at Winston Churchill Boulevard and progresses east along Highway 403, Eastgate Parkway and Eglinton Avenue to Renforth Drive. It began

operation in phases between November 17, 2014 and November 22, 2017.

In designing the stations, D'Abbondanza says it was a priority to create open environments, which would encourage people to use them, and to employ a consistent design with unique aspects in each station to differentiate them. Stations needed to be well connected to their surrounding neighbourhoods, and to feel "iconic" to users.

"It was very important from the onset—the client had a very strong objective to create a new, highly identifiable landmark identity for the transit system,"

she says. "This was a new transit system in a very car-centric condition, and their intention was to be able to draw people to the BRT. What's going to get you to get out of your car in Mississauga and take transit? So we developed a consistent design language of elements that would be applied at all stations so that they would be recognizable and would serve as a new brand for Miway."

She says that several methods were used to achieve this, such as a consistent use of coloured glass, concrete, and wood roofs, along with an abundance of greenery in the

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Clockwise from bottom left:

The 18-km, 12-stop Mississauga Transitway began full operation in November 2017.

SOURCE: CITY OF MISSISSAUGA

Openness and design consistency are key aspects in the design of the Mississauga Transitway stations.

PHOTOGRAPHER: SHAI GIL  
SOURCE: IBI GROUP

Coloured glass is used differently at every station to provide each with a unique character.

PHOTOGRAPHER: SHAI GIL / STUDIO SHAI GIL  
SOURCE: IBI GROUP

Toronto-based artist Panya Clark Espinal created a public art exhibit, which is installed at seven transitway stations. While the theme is consistent across the stations, each is a unique installation.

PHOTOGRAPHER: BEN RAHN / A-FRAME  
SOURCE: IBI GROUP

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stations. The roofs are also designed to direct rainwater to planters around the exterior of the stations.

“One of the things I’m really impressed with [about the design] is they didn’t really go high-end, they didn’t really go low-end, but they went with a design... that looks warm, looks inviting, [has] lots of glass [and] exposure,” BRT senior project manager **Scott Anderson** told *NRU*. “And by building it up above a minimum standard, the hope

was there wouldn’t be a lot of vandalism—that people would actually appreciate the station. And we’ve really noticed that. We’ve had very little vandalism.”

Additionally, Toronto-based artist **Panya Clark Espinal** was retained to develop public art installations for seven of the stations.

The transitway is also intended to be a catalyst for further growth in the city. Mississauga is expanding rapidly, and is expected to add

500,000 new residents by 2041 to its current population of 721,000. With no greenfield sites left, the city is expanding vertically.

Mississauga development and design director **Lesley Pavan** says that the areas of greatest intensification are going to be around transit hubs, including the transitway stations.

“We did the Downtown 21 master plan a few years ago where we’re looking at having 70,000 people and 70,000 jobs, and the transitway as it travels along the 403... comes into our downtown,” she says. “As it moves out of the downtown along Eastgate Parkway and Eglinton, we... [prepared] a land use study for the lands

east of Etobicoke Creek and focusing on the stations there and focussing on how to get more intensive development around those stations.”

The system is also future-proofed in that it can be easily upgraded to a light rail transit system when ridership demands it, which would be more than double the current ridership.

“As designers, we care a lot about design,” says D’Abbondanza. “Building a new transit system in this manner was bold and ambitious for Mississauga. They’ve changed the nature of public transit in a car-centric community, and it’s set a precedent for future transit projects in the area.” 