



Ontario Report

Transport Action Ontario

(Formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO IS THE NEW NAME FOR TRANSPORT 2000 ONTARIO

Following the adoption in December by our national organization Transport 2000 Canada of its new name Transport Action Canada, as its regional affiliate in Ontario, we have changed our name to Transport Action Ontario. For over 30 years Transport 2000 has been widely recognized for its advocacy of sustainable transportation. Transport Action Ontario continues as a volunteer-run, non-profit engaged in public education and consumer advocacy to promote an integrated network of public transportation for Ontario for the movement of both passengers and freight. The name Transport Action was chosen as it was the well-established name of our national newsletter since 1980. Find us at www.transport-action.ca.

METROLINX MOVES FORWARD: POSITIVES AND SOME CHALLENGES AHEAD

Feature story. First the good news, and then a look at some of the challenges facing Metrolinx in the GTHA. Metrolinx is the provincial agency responsible for transit planning and funding for all the transit agencies in its area, including GO Transit which is now part of Metrolinx. We begin this article with the positives for the TTC, and then for GO Transit. (More “backgrounder” information on Metrolinx/GO/TTC on Page. 5.)

Toronto's Transit City LRT plan took a big step forward when, in April 2009, the Province announced funding for three Transit City projects, the Finch West LRT (\$1.2B), Eglinton Cross- ...continued on PAGE 3

FROM THE PRESIDENT -

NATALIE LITWIN

LET'S FACE REALITY



This column will, in some circles and possibly among my own, place me in the same category as a skunk at a garden party, but I am going to have my say – one of

the perks of being President.

Here are some unpleasant facts that face supporters of sustainable transportation:

➤ We live in an era in which social conservatives holds sway – even the ones who call themselves “liberal” – and social conservatives are reluctant to spend money on rail and public transit. They think cars, trucks and airplanes are just nifty and more effi-

In this Issue

- ✿ Northern Ontario/Ottawa Valley: 586 km of rail lines may be torn up
- ✿ Sarnia-Lambton looking to improve passenger train services
- ✿ No track upgrades in sight for VIA's Guelph-Kitchener route
- ✿ Strong bid from Hamilton for Light Rail Transit
- ✿ Experiencing temporary disability

ANNUAL MEETING AND AFTERNOON PUBLIC PROGRAM

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2010, METRO HALL, 55 John St., Toronto

- Transport Action Ontario AGM 10:00 am-12 noon - Room 302.
- Complementary lunch for members and guests attending the AGM (beverages not included; reservations recommended - see details on Page 8).
- Afternoon public program: 1:30p.m. - 4:00 pm; Room 302. Everyone welcome.

DRIC: ROAD-BASED INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

Our panel discussion focuses on the important but underreported issue of the Detroit River International Crossing project (DRIC). A panel of speakers, two from Michigan, will uncover the weaknesses behind this expensive, unsustainable and outdated infrastructure plan. ...speakers and more details on Page 8.

cient than sustainable alternatives, unaware or in denial that gobs of taxpayers' money make them that way.

➤ There is a significant power imbalance between transit riders, bike riders, train ...continued on PAGE 2

FROM THE PRESIDENT

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riders and pedestrians and the guys who build airports, run trucking companies and build highways.

➤ Our Ontario Ministry of Transportation has been listening to groups like us and has increased the budget share for transit in recent years, but building highways is still a far too important part of MTO's culture and that shows no sign of changing. Ontario's 2008 budget reserved \$1,924.3 million for transit and \$1,345.7 million for highways. But the 2009 budget reversed this favourable balance: \$1,687.1 million for transit and \$1,718.3 million for highways with an additional \$247 million for the Windsor gateway (DRIC) project that we so strongly oppose.

➤ Every unnecessary highway represents that much less funding for Ontario's struggling municipal and regional transit. Transit plans are ready but the funding is not. Metrolinx waits for funding for its Regional Transportation Plan commitment, and for a favourable response to its request for a \$6 billion federal contribution.

➤ Building transit on the cheap doesn't work. Ottawa's city fathers built an "inexpensive" bus-based transit system that has turned out to be more expensive than light rail and has diesel buses jamming downtown streets at rush hour. Hamilton's hopes for an LRT system is not a given as Metrolinx considers a less expensive bus rapid transit system as a cheaper alternative in spite of the mess in Ottawa.

➤ Intercity bus service is unravelling as Greyhound discontinues service particularly in the province's northwest leaving some communities with no transportation except the car. Some positive news: On February 9, the federal government, all provinces and the Yukon joined in a working group to study intercity bus service and report

back in the fall. One possibility for the working group is to look at the trend towards city regions and city pairs and explore the possibility of public/private partnerships to provide regional and rural transit across the province.

➤ As for bike lanes and pedestrian malls and/or pedestrian days, they barely exist. City councils to their shame are too afraid of the I.I occupants of cars who don't like to share their roads so they don't build needed bicycle lanes or widen sidewalks, or designate some downtown streets as car-free.

➤ Parking. The availability of parking space encourages car drivers. Much has been written about the acres of pavement that invite drivers to enter the city centre and leave their cars sitting all day on valuable real estate. And the sheepish city fathers won't touch that problem with a ten-foot pole.

So much for the unpleasant realities. Here are some unpopular solutions:

➤ Congestion pricing. Major cities around the world charge drivers who enter their cities or city centers and add to traffic congestion. Toronto and Ottawa at the very least should follow suit. Exemptions can easily be made for business vehicles by means of special license plates. Revenues should go to transit infrastructure.

➤ Road tolls. What's all the fuss about? Why are drivers entitled to move free along taxpayer-funded roads while transit riders pay hefty fares for the privilege of riding in overcrowded buses, streetcars and subways? The argument that vehicle taxes cover road costs doesn't hold water since non-drivers' taxes also pay for the roads. In Quebec where I grew up, and in the U.S. in my youth, road tolls were a fact of life. Nobody complained. Our politicians should face the wrath of drivers and do the right thing – send toll revenue

where it is needed – to transit, rail and active transportation infrastructure.

➤ Public/private partnerships. Yes, the federal and provincial governments should come across with much larger funding packages for municipal and regional transit. The money saved from sprawl-inducing highways would go some way in modernizing our crumbling transit systems. But significant increases are difficult in times of budget deficits, and not enough after years of neglect. When the going gets tough, we have to get creative and ppp's for public transportation should be explored.

➤ Cost out parking. The cost of parking spaces should be based on their true cost, with some exceptions such as disabled parking. "Free" parking spaces for employees should be taxed as an employee benefit, and those employees should be offered a cash alternative as an incentive to use transit, walk or cycle. Land devoted to parking should be taxed at the same rate as land used for buildings. Hospitals already charge for parking, and so should shopping malls, restaurants, churches, etc. A few steps are being taken in the right direction: A proposed condo building in downtown Toronto would have no parking. This is a fairly common practice in London, England, and Londoners have survived. Montreal just recently slapped a parking tax on non-residential indoor and outdoor parking lots in its downtown. Getting tough on the squandering of precious city space could save an estimated million barrels of oil a day that is consumed by this wasteful habit.

Citizens should want our decision-makers to lead, not follow, and leading means making some decisions that ruffle the feathers of the too comfortable members of our society. Good leadership also means getting to the core of problems, not nibbling around the edges. ■

METROLINX MOVES FORWARD

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 town LRT (\$4.6B) with its 10km central tunneled section, and the conversion and extension of the Scarborough Rapid Transit (SRT) line to LRT (1.4B). In May, 2009, the Province and the Federal Government announced funding for the Sheppard East LRT (\$950M).

We applaud the Province and Metrolinx joining with Toronto to support LRT. LRT is North America's most widely adopted and advancing means of providing local mass urban transit. Support for Transit City recognizes that the only affordable way, and the quickest way, to get higher-order transit to the vast medium density parts of Toronto is with LRT. It is good sense to fold the SRT into the emerging Transit City network so that Scarborough receives an all-LRT system. The funding of the Sheppard LRT, and its opening by 2013, recognizes it as critical to providing high-order transit to the University of Toronto Scarborough campus where key sports facilities must be ready for the Pan Am Games in 2015.

While funding is in place for the initial Transit City routes, much detailed planning of their construction remains that will challenge Metrolinx and the TTC to make best practice choices even though these may raise costs. In the long term, building to high quality standards is what successful transit requires, as transit is still in competition with driving since car ownership remains the norm.

GO Transit was a pioneer in advancing commuter rail in North America in the post-WW II period, incrementally expanding both its rail and bus services in later decades, services which have proven highly popular. As the Greater Golden Horseshoe has filled in, forming an urbanized conglomeration centered on the GTA, there has been significant public pressure for extended and more frequent GO Transit. In moving beyond its original service area, GO often has started first by offering new bus routes, the new bus routes not connecting di-

rectly to downtown Toronto but rather as added links or extensions to its base rail/bus network. For example, Guelph began to be intensively served in September 2008 from the Guelph University to Square One and Cooksville GO station. Intensive bus service began in September 2009 between Burlington, Stoney Creek, Grimsby, St. Catherines, and Niagara Falls. Similarly, on October 31, 2009, GO introduced bus service between Waterloo-Kitchener and Square One in the Milton corridor. Extended commuter rail will follow in these corridors with Georgetown trains announced for Guelph and Kitchener in 2011, though this extension still remains unfunded. An Environmental Assessment (EA) is currently in progress regarding extending commuter rail from Burlington to St. Catherines and Niagara Falls. Peterborough is asking that its GO bus service be augmented with commuter rail.

Aware that Golden Horseshoe growth would require much more inter-regional public transit, coming out of the 1990s GO began to scope out expansion of its commuter rail system. By 2002 GO formally proposed a 10-year capital plan costing over \$3B. By 2004 the rail component had its own name, the 10-year GO Transit Rail Improvement Program (GO TRIP). The focus of the rail system, Union Station, was to receive much needed upgrades, especially track and signaling, but all along the radial system there would be much needed track improvements, rail-to-rail and rail-to-road grade separations, upgraded or new stations, additional commuter rail cars and new, more powerful locomotives, and more. This program was also incorporated into MoveOntario 2020 and then into the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan. But the RTP took it all one step further. It foresaw an integrated system of public transit with good local public transit linked to both more local and interregional rapid transit. GO Transit's commuter rail lines were to evolve into all-day, two-way frequent regional rail. The network would be secured by connections as simple as crossing the street to another bus line, shared stops,

more elaborate station facilities, with the larger inter-modal facilities being designed as hubs. Metrolinx's full plan to 2031 carries a price tag of \$50B. The only assured funding is the provincial funding of \$10B that came with MoveOntario 2020.

The Metrolinx plan will of course be phased in over several decades. Rail-based transit often requires substantial civil works that require long periods of planning and construction. The GO Transit rail commuter service on the Lakeshore Corridor is its only all-day two-way rail service and off-peak it is hourly. More frequent and reliable service on this and the other GO rail routes such as the Georgetown Corridor would be helped by electrification, talked about but still with no commitment from either Metrolinx or the Province. The focus of a regional rail system for the GTHA would be Toronto's Union Station, and fortunately Toronto, the Province and the feds have agreed on its revitalization with funds now in hand and a completion date of 2015.

Concerns: Funding. There are two substantial concerns regarding the way forward for Metrolinx. The first is adequate funding. Though Metrolinx has a first instalment in hand from the Province for its RTP, where is it going to get the balance needed, an amount that will surely top \$40B over the next 20 years? Where is the much needed investment strategy? Readers are invited to consider some of the ideas and ways in which funds for transit have been generated in other jurisdictions. Peter Miasek's article on Page 4 (first installment) presents some thoughts on the topic of possible investment strategies for transit in the GTHA.

Getting to connectivity. There is a second major issue confronting Metrolinx as it brings its RTP to fruition. A transit network with service that is frequent, safe, reliable and comfortable is obviously essential. But from the point of view of riders, the consumers of transit, one key element in using transit is connectivity, especially making connections between services without difficulties. Making *...continued on PAGE 4*

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connections between services usually means relatively brief moments transferring on foot. Riders would prefer to make these transfers in ways that are relatively quick, safe and comfortable, which translates into preferring stations with indoor areas, easy climbs up and down steps or by escalators, elevators, or ramps, good lighting and signage, not having to exit and cross busy and therefore dangerous streets, and so on. In its RTP, Metrolinx makes a promise to provide an outstanding customer experience for users of public transit, making the GTHA's developing transit system truly a model of connectivity. As we rapidly move forward with making the GTHA transit-friendly and less auto-dependent as a multitude of transit improvement projects now are, or soon will be underway, will Metrolinx fulfill its commitment by exercising its responsibility to achieve connectivity where transit routes come together insisting on and funding best practices?

Readers who live in the GTHA will know of many examples of transfer points that are less than ideal from the point of view of transit riders. Much of the problem can be traced to transit being an add-on or afterthought over much of the GTHA. Who would have expected people would need or use transit in the suburbs causing customers to cross six- and eight-lane roads and wait at tiny shelters for the hourly or half-hourly bus? There are also classic big mistakes such as not connecting Bloor GO rail platforms to Dundas West Station on the Bloor-Danforth subway.

Metrolinx has a dilemma here and, as so often, it comes down to adequate funding. In any given situation, will the detailed planning reflect best practice, or will it be done on the cheap? A good example where Metrolinx could play a role is on the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line. The Eglinton Crosstown LRT line will cross GO Transit's Georgetown line (and possibly the Bolton line as well) just east

of Weston Road, a GO rail route that will carry all-day two-way service perhaps in the next five years. As a best practice, the TTC might tunnel at this point, placing its station in a short subway between Weston Rd. and GO rail. Yes, that would be expensive. Still somewhat convenient would be an LRT platform east of Weston Rd. with one end at the rail corridor with an elevated walkway that would connect to the GO rail station at Eglinton that should be in service before the Eglinton Crosstown LRT opens. But in the actual current plan there is no consideration of being close to the GO rail line as the planned LRT stop is to be to the west of Weston Rd. This would be even worse than the Dundas West TTC-Bloor GO station mistake of decades ago, as at least at Dundas West the TTC could add a second exit directly at the GO platform. Who is speaking for and protecting the interests of the transit riders of the future that are supposed to have an integrated system? ■

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING GAP IN THE GTHA. PART 1: THE CHALLENGE

Public transit provides many economic, social and environmental benefits. Similarly, roads are vital for goods movement, transit movement and for trips that cannot be efficiently achieved by transit. However, there is a huge funding gap for both transit and roads that needs to be filled!

Transit costs. Present day operating costs of the various transit systems in the GTHA are about \$2B/year, of which only 65% on average is recovered from passenger fares. Current capital costs to incrementally expand and rehabilitate these systems are also over \$2B/year.

In addition, *The Big Move*, Metrolinx's plan for increased regional rapid transit, is estimated to cost \$50B to build over 25 years, and \$3B/year after that to operate and rehabilitate. The costs of building, operating and maintaining increased or adjusted local transit services to provide connections to the regional rapid transit network is likely at

least 50% greater than today. Thus, we can anticipate future annual GTHA transit operating and capital costs of at least \$8B/year, truly a staggering figure!

Transit revenues. Passenger revenues for GTHA transit systems totaled about \$1.3B in 2008. A significant amount of transit funding for GTHA operators comes from provincial and federal grants. However, this funding is almost exclusively directed to specific expansion programs, usually for large high profile projects. Examples of these are the announcements by the Province and Feds in April and May 2009, totaling \$9.6B for capital funding for various high profile lines identified in *The Big Move*. Although the funding is welcomed, there is legitimate concern among transit operators that this mode of "big announcement funding" is unpredictable, unsustainable and insufficient.

Other than passenger revenue, transit operators in the GTHA receive only minor amounts of dedicated stable and predictable funding. Portions of both the federal and provincial gas taxes are directed towards transit, totaling \$0.3 - 0.4B in 2008 to GTHA transit operators. Any funding shortfall is made up by a grant (subsidy) from the local municipalities. For example, the operating cost grants to the TTC and YRT/VIVA in 2008 totaled over \$0.4B. Essentially this is paid for by municipal property taxes.

Road costs and revenues. Roads are also facing a funding gap. It is a common misconception that user fees are sufficient to cover the costs of roads. While this may have been true historically, this is no longer the case. A 2008 Transport Canada report pegged the capital, land, operating and maintenance costs of roads in Canada to be \$38B/year, while revenue raised from fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees totaled only \$13B/year. Prorating this to the GTHA suggests a road funding gap of \$5B/year.

Potential other revenue sources. One of the missions for Metrolinx is to develop proposals for revenue generation tools that may be used by the province or the municipalities to support the implementation of its transportation plan.

In addition to raising transit fares, operating grants and capital grants, Metrolinx has identified several large new potential tools that could raise \$1B+/year in revenues or financing:

- Road pricing
- Parking pricing
- Carbon-based pricing (gas tax increase)
- Sales tax
- Debt financing (analogous to a home mortgage amortized over the life of the asset)
- Land value uplift capture.

Almost all of these tools are used elsewhere in either Canada or across the world. Future articles in Transport Action will discuss the status and pros/cons of these various tools. Stay tuned! ■

- Peter Miasek

Transport Action Ontario is engaged in discussions with other stakeholders on this Transportation Funding Gap in an effort to advance public dialogue on this vital issue. For further information, see our position paper on the Transport Action website.

Background: Formed in 2006, Metrolinx is the transit planning and coordinating agency for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Building on the Province's June 2007 MoveOntario 2020 Transit Plan for the GTHA, Metrolinx approved its mandated Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), entitled *The Big Move*, in Nov. 2008. The City of Toronto's Transit City Plan of 7 light rail transit (LRT) lines to extend higher-order transit to the parts of Toronto not served by subways was included in MoveOntario 2020 and thus also became part of Metrolinx's RTP. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) endorsed Transit City in March 2007. The TTC's older streetcar lines will be receiving new 100% low-floor streetcars in 2012 from Bombardier, with a longer version LRT vehicle to be used for Transit City routes still to be purchased.

GO Transit began in 1967 and merged into Metrolinx in May 2009. Its first commuter rail service operated between Oakville and Pickering on the Lakeshore Corridor. Its original service area included the 7 cities within Metropolitan Toronto and the surrounding regional municipalities of Halton, Peel, York, and Durham. Today GO operates a number of services beyond this area. ■

NORTHERN ONTARIO/OTTAWA VALLEY NEWS

ALGOMA DISTRICT NEWS

The Coalition of Algoma Passenger Trains is stepping up its outreach activities. CAPT has launched a new blog-style website at www.capttrains.ca. It has coordinated feedback to the provinces's proposed 25-year Northern Growth Plan. CAPT has been advocating better rail-based transportation options for the region. Based on news reports, the website indicates that Timmins, Ontario resident Debby Pell has collected 7,500 signatures on a petition requesting reinstatement of passenger rail service to Timmins which was cancelled the 1980s. The petition is directed to the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission which provides train service on its mainline to the east of Timmins. ■

HURON CENTRAL RAILWAY WITHIN DAYS OF CLOSING

After a promise from the McGuinty government to help the Huron Central Railway (HCR) stay in business, the HCR has announced that it will close at the end of March if funds for track improvements are not provided. The railway leases former CPR track between Sudbury and the Sault with a branch to Espanola. A fund of \$3M was raised earlier to keep the HCR operating during the winter. A working group with representatives from the City of Sault Ste. Marie and two main shippers has successfully worked out a funding framework with the HCR. A partnership of communities, First Nations, and industries from Sudbury to the Sault has urged government to provide the \$30M still needed to get the track improvements that the HCR needs. Local politicians are also on-side. Funding was supposed to have been in place by the end of January. CAPT has written to both Transport Minister John Baird and Brad Duguid, Ontario Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, wondering why funding is stalled? Recently, Minister Baird wrote a

letter stating that Ontario has yet to sign on to the Canada-Ontario Base Fund Agreement necessary for federal funding to flow. By contrast, the feds have had such an agreement in place for some time with Quebec. As of the end of February, Ontario has stated that the agreement is still under review. ■

OTTAWA VALLEY RAILWAY CLOSE TO ABANDONMENT

At one time there were two transcontinental rail routes that used the Ottawa Valley to connect the western rail network to Canada's east through North Bay to Ottawa and Montreal. The CN route through Algonquin Park was pulled up in 1995 west of Pembroke. CPR leased its route to a U.S. company that operated between Sudbury, North Bay, Matawa, and Smith Falls as the Ottawa Valley Railway (OVR). CP helped provide business to the OVR by running some of its western-origin freights to Montreal on the OVR. But with the recent recession, CP started running all of its trains through Toronto to avoid paying the OVR any running-rights fees. As a consequence, the U.S. short line has given up its lease. CPR is looking for another short line operator for the portion between Sudbury, North Bay, and Matawa with a branch from Matawa to Termiscaming, Quebec, this portion having some originating freight. As the underlying owner of the Ottawa Valley track, CP has now applied for abandonment of the 300 km portion from Matawa to Smith Falls, a route which also serves Chalk River, Pembroke, and Renfrew.

The President of Transport Action Canada, David Jeanes, has written to Transport Minister John Baird explaining the critical importance of retaining the Ottawa Valley rail line, stating that "The implication of this decision is that direct east-west freight trains must be rerouted through

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OTTAWA VALLEY

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Toronto, already congested in normal times outside downturns as at the present time. When the economy rebounds the resulting rail congestion will return." Moreover, routing freight bound for eastern Canada through Toronto adds some 300km to the trip wasting energy and creating extra greenhouse gas emissions. The longer trip also disadvantages the Port of Montreal. Finally, in the Greater Toronto Area, Metrolinx is concerned that freight congestion on the railways feeding in and out of Toronto will impose constraints to expanding commuter rail in the region.

Municipalities along the OVR have indicated an interest in working to keep the Ottawa Valley rail line running and efforts are underway to show the freight possibilities that were neglected by the previous operator. A major question is whether or not the Province of Ontario will provide timely support for such a project. Towns along the route are getting support from a novel direction, efforts from the Quebec side of the river to keep a remnant CN rail line going (see following story). ■

THE PONTIAC FIGHTS TO KEEP OPEN THE CN RAIL LINE BETWEEN OTTAWA AND PEMBROKE

CN has put up for abandonment its Beachburg subdivision which runs 141 km east of Ottawa to Pembroke, with significant sections of its route on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River. On the Quebec side, a non-profit organization--Transport Pontiac Renfrew--has formed to acquire the line, one purpose being to start up commuter train service into Ottawa. The group is working with towns on the Ontario side including towns further west of Pembroke that are on the OVR. A regional economic development organization has obtained a grant from the federal government to prepare a study of the potential future benefits or retaining rail service, the grant supported by the MP

for Pontiac, Lawrence Cannon, a former transport minister and now Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs. ■

SARNIA WANTS BETTER VIA RAIL SERVICE

The Sarnia-Lambton region of Ontario wants better VIA rail services. In October of 2007, VIA received a substantial capital grant and some additional operating funds to improve track, locomotives and cars, with the promise of significant increases in service in the Windsor-Quebec City corridor. In late 2008, joint studies were undertaken by the City of Sarnia, the Sarnia-Lambton Chamber of Commerce, and the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership to assess customer needs and how economic revitalization of the region would be helped by better rail service, studies completed at the end of 2009.

As yet, no train improvements are in sight. Sarnia's two daily trains travel to and from Toronto through London, Kitchener, and Guelph, with the portion of the ride from London to Georgetown being on slow track badly in need of upgrading. In addition, Sarnia-Lambton residents are not happy with the connections at London. Now Sarnia is moving towards advocating for a frequent shuttle train service to London in anticipation of better future train connections there. These ought to include connections not just to Toronto via Brantford, Aldershot and Oakville, but also allowing frequent connections to Kitchener and Guelph. Sarnia-Lambton MP Pat Davidson is backing better train service, and has also successfully gotten the region included in the high speed rail study now underway for the Windsor-Quebec City corridor. ■

GUELPH-KITCHENER-STRATFORD VIA CORRIDOR UPGRADE STILL IN LIMBO

Funds allocated to VIA in 2007 for major track and service improvements to the North Main Line between Toronto

and London through Kitchener-Waterloo and Stratford still remain unused. An upgrading agreement is still being held up by the Goderich-Exeter Railway that leases this track from CN. Transport Action has long advocated a federal VIA Rail Act that, among other things, might have provided mechanisms to quickly resolve situations such as this one. The North Main Line is one of Ontario's most dense urban corridors, 160km from Brampton to London, with a population of over a million in close proximity to the rail line itself. With major population and economic growth expected in this corridor that also includes three major universities, not having frequent and fast rail service should be a serious embarrassment to senior levels of government. GO Transit has just completed an EA to extend commuter rail to Guelph and Kitchener from Georgetown, with service to start in 2011. The EA stipulates track speeds of 128k/h. City and Regional government officials on the route are very concerned about lack of progress on getting the kind of rail service this corridor deserves. Is there to be another lost year for the North Main Line? Neither VIA nor GO appear likely to meet announced goals. ■

HAMILTON CHOSSES LRT FOR ITS TRANSIT FUTURE

Ontario's third largest city, Hamilton (505,000 pop.), has opted for light rail as its preferred form of rapid transit. Hamilton had streetcars until 1951 and used trolleybuses until 1992. Hamilton underwent amalgamation with surrounding districts in 2001. As it anticipated growth and economic development, the City embarked on planning studies one of which was a Master Transportation Plan published in 2007. This plan identified corridors for higher-order transit and proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) for these corridors. As early as 1986, the Hamilton Street Railway started express bus service, Line B, also known as Rt. 10, between McMaster University to Eastgate Square, an east-west alignment along King Street. MoveOntario 2020

included the B-line as a major transit project, and Metrolinx included it in its RTP among the top 15 transit projects for early implementation. As a result, Hamilton began public consultations in 2008 and 2009 presenting both BRT and LRT for the 14km B-line corridor. Over the course of this two-year process, public opinion clearly favoured the LRT option. LRT endorsements have come from the mayor and a number of councillors, the Chamber of Commerce, the downtown BIA, the Hamilton *Spectator* editorial board, and community groups. Local citizens organized to support LRT with a website: hamiltonlightrail.ca. LRT has become the City's preferred option.

At its February 19, 2010 meeting, the Metrolinx Board received the results of its Benefits Case Analysis (BCA) of the B-line. The BCA noted that BRT is considerably cheaper (\$218M) than LRT (\$829M), but the long-term economic development benefits clearly favoured the LRT option. (The BCA also considered a third option that mixed LRT and BRT.) While some Metrolinx Board members were ready to decide in favour of LRT at this Board meeting, the decision was put off pending getting funding cues from the Province. Hamilton, though, is moving forward with the more detailed planning that the B-line LRT route requires.

It appears that the Metrolinx BCA low-balled the cost of BRT (half the cost on a per kilometer basis of VIVA's conversion of its 37km express bus routes to dedicated "rapidway"!). In any case, with overwhelming public support for LRT in Hamilton, it will be difficult to downgrade the higher-order transit that Hamilton has selected to the low-balled BRT alternative. In its 25-year plan, Hamilton has four other high-order corridors identified, including the A-line running north-south from the waterfront on James Street up the mountain to Hamilton's airport. Hamilton joins Kitchener-Waterloo, and Toronto in recognizing the quality advantages of light rail in attracting and serving transit riders and also in terms of greater overall community benefits. ■

OBSERVATIONS ON SUFFERING A TEMPORARY DISABILITY

Five weeks ago I had a long-overdue operation to have a total knee replacement. I was assured that I would be walking in two days (I was) and that a diligent and determined program of therapy would have me as good as new. The therapy continues. I use two mobility devices, a cane and a walker. But the process to date has been a real eye-opener!

I own a car and have a permit for accessible parking. I do not abuse the permit. But most parking lots have far too few such designated spaces! Whenever possible, I try to use a regular "parking space" in order to free one up for someone less able than me. But I do resent trekking halfway across a parking lot, when no accessible spaces are available, to do essential errands such as banking and shopping. And, I combine trips to conserve gas, my own energy, and to not "clog up" parking lots.

When I cannot drive because of pain/discomfort or other circumstances, I have to rely on my spouse because other services for those unable to drive are poorly organized and planning for pick up in a timely fashion is next to impossible. (WheelTrans in the Toronto area requires a two-hour window for pickup and a similar window for a return trip plus substantial advance notice.)

All hospitals perform operations and many of them require some follow-up at the same site. Have you ever taken a good look at most hospital parking lots? Not only are they a substantial distance from entrances to hospitals, but their cost is prohibitive. Walking 15 to 20 minutes on a cane or walker to an entrance is tiring and frustrating. Those who are unfortunate enough not to have friends and family who can help are obliged to pay for taxis to and from appointments.

Over the years, I have nodded sagely in understanding when someone I know is temporarily disabled or unable to get around properly, or tells me of their frustrations when attempting to complete everyday activities. I am now "walking in another's shoes" and have made several observations and learned many lessons. I have

some suggestions for those who encounter people in wheelchairs, walkers or on canes.

Here are some of my thoughts:

- (1) Always offer to help. Perhaps it is not needed but the gesture is so important!
- (2) Open doors and try to be aware of folks who may have difficulty managing heavy doors.
- (3) Greet these people with a smile; they may be hurting or tired. In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, those less able tend to become less visible.

I am "on the mend" but I will still be making my way about with a cane or on a walker for some time. I'm not quite ready for a pogo stick! I will graciously acknowledge smiles, offers of help and assistance and I will be a better person for it. And when I am completely recovered, I will make these new life lessons part of my everyday life. I have come to appreciate the requirements for accessible facilities such as curb cuts, automatic doors, ramps and elevators, and accessible public transit is a real help. ■ - Elizabeth Hill, member, Transport Action Canada

Accessibility note: While Ontario has passed two acts to promote accessibility for the disabled, in 2001 and 2005, few accessibility standards exist. A standard for customer service came into affect Jan. 1, 2010. A draft transportation standard was drawn up and public responses solicited in 2007, but the final standard has gone into bureaucratic limbo. Transportation agencies must file annual accessibility reports. Recently the Ontario Human Rights Commission supported a complaint that resulted in the TTC adopting an automated station calling system, a top notch system! (Ref.: Lepofsky v. TTC July 2007.) The Province hopes to achieve a high standard of accessibility by 2025. In the last decade transportation agencies have adopted many improvements that have aided the disabled and all users for that matter. Still, much progress awaits the arrival of major system changes, as when a transit bus fleet is renewed with low-floor vehicles. On Toronto's subway system, after years, 30 of 69 stations are now equipped with elevators. Where there is para-transit, it is often seen as inadequate and underfunded by the disabled. ■

TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO AGM AND AFTER-NOON PROGRAM MAR. 27

Transport Action Ontario's Annual General Meeting will be held on March 27, 2010 as indicated below. The AGM will include the President's and Treasurer's reports, and the election of officers and directors for 2010-2011.

Saturday 27 March 2010

Location: Metro Hall, 55 John Street, Toronto, Ontario, Room 302 (for the day).

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon: AGM.

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. Lunch break. Complementary lunch (beverages not included) will be provided to members and guests who attend the AGM. Reservations recommended by telephone or email. Please contact Dan Hammond at 1-888-410-4779 or danielshammond@gmail.com, or Tony Turritti at 416-653-4002 or turritti@yorku.ca.

Afternoon Public Program 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm. DRIC: Road-Based Infrastructure in the Era of Climate

Change. The panel of speakers, two from Michigan, will uncover the weaknesses behind this expensive, unsustainable and outdated infrastructure plan. Speakers: Dr. Dietrich Bergmann, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Albert Koehl, Ecojustice, Toronto Office; Paula Lombardi, Ambassador Bridge Company, Warren, Michigan; Emma Cane, Sierra Club, Ontario; Dan Hammond and Natalie Litwin, Transport Action Ontario. Issues: Do we need it? Does the EA process work? Have rail alternatives been properly explored? Everyone welcome.

Getting to Metro Hall: The St. Andrew subway station is one stop north of Union Station on the University-Spadina subway line. At St. Andrew stay underground and follow the signs to Metro Hall. An alternative is to exit at King/Yonge station and take the King street-car west to John Street. ■

NOMINATIONS CALL FOR THE TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO BOARD

Members present at the AGM on Mar. 27 will elect officers and directors for 2010/11. Nominations are invited for the following positions: President, Vice-President, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and Membership Secretary, and seven directors-at-large. To hold office, a person must be a member in good standing. It is recommended that board members have access to e-mail. Members willing to stand may do so in person at the AGM or by contacting the Nominations Chair, Bruce Budd, at bfb@primus.ca, or by mail to the mailing address given elsewhere on this page. A member may put forward his/her own name or may nominate another member. The Nominations Chair will ascertain the willingness of a nominated person to stand for office. ■

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BOARD MEETINGS

Our Board usually meets evenings on the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Our next meetings are April 21, May 19, and June 16, 2010. We meet at 215 Spadina Ave., Toronto, starting at 5:30 pm. If you wish to attend or participate, please contact Natalie Litwin at 416-498-0612 or by email at n.litwin@sympatico.ca to confirm as date, time and place are subject to change. Our Mar. 27 AGM replaces the March Board meeting. ■

CONTACT AND MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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Join Transport Action to help us advocate for sustainable transportation. By joining Transport Action Ontario, you also become a member of Transport Action Canada. Members receive *Ontario Report* as well as our national newsletter *TransportAction*.

To join, send your name, address, telephone number, email address (if any), and membership fee to our box address above. Our annual membership fees are: introductory (1st year only) \$20; regular \$35; senior \$30; student \$25; low income \$20; family \$50; non-profit affiliate \$75; business \$170. Transport Action Canada is a registered charity and donations to it receive a tax-credit receipt.

Our website is www.transport-action.ca/ontario. A membership form is available at this website. Membership may be paid by credit card using PayPal.