



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

Advocating for Sustainable Public and Freight Transportation
Box 6418, Station "A" Toronto, ON M5W 1X3

2012 11 19

Mr. Brad Duguid,
Minister of Economic Development and Innovation,
Attn: Communications and Public Affairs Branch,
8th Floor, Hearst Block,
900 Bay St.,
Toronto,
ON
M7A 2E1

Dear Sir,

Better Public Transportation is a key to economic growth

The Globe and Mail, November 7th edition carried a thought-provoking article by Gordon Nixon and Kevin Lynch entitled "What's holding Ontario back?" Their narrative as Chair and Vice Chair of Ontario's Jobs and Prosperity Council posed the question of what actions are required to seize future opportunities for economic growth in the Province of Ontario.

As an advocacy group, Transport Action Ontario (TAO) is focused specifically on transportation strategies that will provide Ontarians and non-residents of the province with mobility options reflecting changes to Ontario's industrial mix while preserving or enhancing their quality of life. We are also concerned about competitiveness and the need to attract and retain "jobs of tomorrow" as a means of securing our long-term prosperity.

The authors of the Globe and Mail article made specific mention of gaps in our physical infrastructure and the escalating cost of congestion in the Toronto region. TAO believes that Ontario is facing a serious mobility crisis that seriously undermines complementary private and public initiatives aimed at sustaining and growing Ontario's industrial base. Our concerns are as follows:

- We believe that MTO and other ministries involved in infrastructure planning and development must further elevate the importance of public transportation to ensure that people can access their workplace in a timely and cost-efficient manner. The view should focus on changing demographics, Ontario's evolving industrial base, modal-integration, environmental concerns, declining car use and be based on a 25 year time horizon. There is evidence that new business investment in Ontario, particularly in knowledge industries, is being deterred by car dependency and lack of regional, all-day, two-way public transportation.

- We believe the recent service reduction or elimination by VIA Rail Canada and Ontario Northland to be highly detrimental to the prosperity of Ontario both immediately and in the longer term. This is harming technology clusters such as Guelph/Kitchener/Waterloo while making Northern Ontario less attractive to residency and business investment. The reduction or severance of VIA services to border cities including Niagara Falls, Sarnia and Windsor will inhibit participation in Amtrak developments towards more effective trans-border passenger services, discourage business investment, isolate communities and deter people with needed skills.
- Our understanding is that there is little, if any, dialogue between VIA Rail, Metrolinx and Amtrak on the co-ordination of rail-based mobility solutions in Ontario. Without this, commuters and business travellers will find employment, academic and business opportunities very difficult or impossible to access and will have a significant dampening effect on the Ontario economy as a whole. We ask that you and your fellow ministers work to bring these parties together in constructive dialogue towards an action plan on the coordination and expansion of local and long-distance passenger services.
- The Province must continue to encourage the City of Toronto leadership to work positively with transit planners and funders in ensuring the city remains competitive both economically and socially. The cost of regional traffic congestion, currently estimated at between \$5.5bn and \$6bn and escalating rapidly, is a major drag on the economy that cannot be solved simply by more roads. Atlanta GA in the U.S.A. is an excellent example that Ontario and, specifically the GTHA must, under no circumstances, be allowed to follow.

Compared to other G8 nations, Canada and specifically Ontario, is placing itself at a grave competitive disadvantage because of underinvestment and poor decision-making in public transportation. The current thinking is too localised, often political in nature, is not sufficiently forward-thinking, fails to fully accommodate people with disabilities, and is generally harmful to the environment. In other words it constricts rather than facilitate economic growth and wellbeing.

We therefore urge your Ministry and the Ontario Jobs and Prosperity Council to work with other provincial ministries, federal departments and local government to focus on our province's mobility crisis for what it really is. Investment and prosperity will simply not happen if congestion and limited access to regions outside the GTHA continue on their current upward trajectory. Money and people will simply go elsewhere.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Westcar,
Board Member,
Transport Action Ontario