



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

Advocating for Rail-Based Public Transportation

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BRAMPTON CITY COUNCIL DEPUTATION

ROBERT WIGHTMAN

PRESIDENT

TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017

Mayor Jeffrey, councillors, staff and members of the public:

Thank you for providing this opportunity for me to speak to you about the high-speed rail proposal that Premier Wynne announced last Friday. This is an issue that is of concern to me as both a resident of Brampton and as the president of the citizens' advocacy group, Transport Action Ontario.

Let me first say that I am not opposed to high-speed rail service. I have ridden it on several corridors in Europe and it is impressive. But those services are fundamentally different from the one being proposed for Southwestern Ontario because they have benefited from decades of continuous investment. They didn't suddenly sprout out of nowhere. They resulted from step-by-step incremental improvements that built passenger demand to a point that justified the leap to high-speed.

Even in the United States, the penny has dropped. Plans for immediate construction of high-speed service have been replaced by projects similar to those in Europe. The Americans have realized they have to build their corridor rail passenger services incrementally to deliver better service today, not years or even decades from now.

But this is not what's being proposed here in Ontario – and it flies in the face of this worldwide experience. It is folly to believe we can go from the meagre rail service we've now got to what Queen's Park is proposing in one leap. A rail service that won't be up and running until 2025, at the earliest, and at a cost of at least \$20 billion is simply unacceptable. Technical experts are already saying those costs and timelines are highly optimistic.

What should also be of concern is the fact that this proposal excludes us completely. If it's done the way Queen's Park has suggested, Brampton won't be served directly by the high-speed trains. We'd even lose the meagre and inadequate VIA Rail service we now have, which at least offers a one-seat ride on this route. It would make us a "have-not" community, especially compared to those cities that would eventually get the direct high-speed service.

To be blunt, Brampton would be shafted under this proposal.

It is clear that what we need is something very different from what Queen's Park is proposing. We need a plan that grows our rail service the same way it has been grown on corridors around the world. It must deliver real improvements as quickly as possible to all the communities on the existing route, including Brampton.

It is this type of rail service – delivered in progressive stages on an accelerated basis – that will provide us with the car-free mobility that is critical to the economic, social and environmental success of our city. We need it as an integrated component of the larger transportation master plan on which we are staking our future.

Therefore, I urge council to bring this issue to the attention of our elected representatives at Queen's Park. Our voice needs to be heard now, before this proposal gets any further down the track.

If the current proposal ever gets rolling, it will take us in the wrong direction. That will be difficult to halt. It would be a multi-billion-dollar blunder that would have negative repercussions for generations. We can't afford to let that happen.

High-speed rail service for the future is a wonderful objective. Faster, more frequent and more affordable rail service that includes cities such as Brampton is what will get us there. That's the route we need to take if we are going to compete with those regions around the world that have already done it. Time is growing short.

Thank you for your time and attention.