




# Ontario Report

## Transport Action Ontario

March 4 - St. Marys, Ontario

**TAO launches discussion paper on the High Performance Rail option for the Ontario-Quebec rail corridor...see story on p. 4**

**THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE RAIL OPTION**



A Transport Action Ontario Discussion Paper  
By  
Greg Gormick, On Track Strategies

**Featured in This Issue:**

- > Greg Gormick takes a critical look at VIA's plan for the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto corridor; second part of a two-part series (pp. 1, 2-3)
- > St. Catharines supports expanding VIA Rail service (pp. 4-5)
- > Hamilton's LRT and transit underfunding (pp. 4-5)
- > TAO proposal for Scarborough Express Rail presented to the City and Metrolinx (pp. 7-8)

**Op-ed analysis (Part 2):**

**VIA's HFR scheme: separating the wheat from the chaff**  
by Greg Gormick

Is there anything right about VIA's high-frequency rail (HFR) proposal? It's difficult to say because of the way VIA has spun its scheme.

For more than a year, the HFR proposal has been promoted at business luncheons and in media interviews in vague generalities. Even the authors of one of three rail passenger backgrounders produced for the recent Canada Transport Act Review wrote that they could only present their interpretation of the proposal because all they received was a briefing from two VIA managers.

What is known about the HFR proposal  
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**FROM THE PRESIDENT**  
**- PETER MIASEK**



**Ontario 2016 budget – little new on transportation, but big news on cap and trade**

The 2016 Ontario Budget was tabled on

February 25, several months earlier than usual. As always, there is much of interest for sustainable transportation advocates.

**Transportation.** The budget devotes considerable pages to transportation, but there is little that is new. No new funds were announced over and above the \$31B “Moving Ontario Forward” program announced

in 2014 and 2015. These funds are to be split 16/15 for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) and outside the GTHA.

Within the GTHA, the funds are largely committed. There is a large defined rapid transit program that is familiar to TAO members, including Regional Express Rail, various LRT and BRT projects, PRESTO deployment, and ongoing studies of numerous other projects. Extensions of

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**TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

SAT., APRIL 16, 2016, Metro Hall, Room 303, 55 John St. at King, Toronto.

- > TAO AGM 10 am-noon.
- > Public Forum, 1:30-3:30 pm, Room 303, Metro Hall, Speaker: **David Ticoll** (Univ. of Toronto). “**How Autonomous Vehicles will Reshape Canada.**” *Details on Page 8.*

Nominations are open for the election of officers and directors. They may be sent to the Secretary, Bruce Budd, at [brucebudd@gmail.com](mailto:brucebudd@gmail.com), or by telephone at 416-690-3299.

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**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

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GO rail service to Niagara and Bowmanville are promised “subject to agreement with freight rail partners,” as well as GO bus service to Brantford and Cambridge. There is also the familiar array of highway projects, including QEW High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes, widening of Highways 400 and 410 and continuing extension of Highway 407 East.

Outside the GTHA, a plethora of highway projects are identified, as well as LRT projects in Waterloo and Ottawa. There was nothing identified for intercity rail/bus other than the High Speed Rail Environmental Assessment work. The province did consult extensively last fall and again at pre-budget time on transportation needs outside the GTHA. TAO, as part of the Southwest Ontario Transportation Alliance (SWOTA), made submissions related to developing an integrated passenger rail and bus service across the province, but there appears to be no provincial uptake at this time.

It is interesting to compare this provincial budget with that in 2000, a mere 16 years ago. Back then (Premier Harris era), annual provincial highway expenditures were \$1.05B and transit expenditures were \$62M, for a ratio of 17:1. In this budget, the comparable numbers are \$2.1B and \$5.4B, for a ratio of 1:2.6. A factor of 44 turnaround! The encouraging trend is that higher ratios of transit spending has been steady for 15 years.

**Cap and trade program on GHG emissions.** Certainly one of the biggest new initiatives in the budget is the cap and trade program. (See my column in “Ontario Report” for November/December 2015 for background.) The budget and the recently introduced draft Climate Change Mitigation and Low-Carbon Economy Act (Bill 172) and associated regulations provide many more details.

In summary, the cap and trade program would cover industries,

electricity generators and institutions that emit 25,000 tonnes of GHG per year or more, and transportation fuel distributors. The program would also cover entities that import electricity and fuels into Ontario. With this broad economy-wide approach, 82% of Ontario’s GHG emissions would be covered.

The program takes effect January 1, 2017. Allowances, each representing 1 tonne of GHG emissions, would be made available for the covered sectors through auctioning and free-of-charge allocation. Total available allowances would drop aggressively at 4% per year so that Ontario can meet its 2020 GHG reduction targets. To help maintain competitiveness of vulnerable industries, Ontario would allocate free-of-charge allowances as a transitional measure to 2020 to industries like cement, steel, mining and petrochemicals. Covered sectors have the option of purchasing allowance in the carbon market, reducing emissions or purchasing offset credits in non-covered sectors such as agriculture.

Assuming a carbon price of \$18/tonne, anticipated annual proceeds from auction are expected to be \$1.9B/yr. The \$18/tonne translates into about 4.3 cents per litre of gasoline. By legislation, these proceeds must be invested in green initiatives such as public transportation, transportation infrastructure, home and business energy efficiency, clean technology and innovative funding. The legislation also mandates transparency and annual reporting.

There is cautious optimism that the Ontario system will prove effective. On the negative side, it is a very complex system. The draft cap and trade regulation is 70 pages long including a 35 page technical appendix. The amended GHG reporting

regulation incorporates a 245 page guideline for GHG reporting. Another regulation will be needed for offsets. And future amendments will be needed to link the program with Quebec and California. However, according to David Suzuki, there is evidence that cap and trade can work, in that it played a key role in reducing acid rain in the USA. It is good that the Ontario program covers most of the economy, has relatively few free allowances and has an aggressive drop in total provincial cap year-to-year. ■

**VIA’s HFR scheme: separating the wheat from the chaff**

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has led many observers to raise questions about VIA’s claim that it would be a pathway to success, especially since it only addresses the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto portion of the Quebec-Windsor Corridor. Comparing it with previous high-speed rail (HSR) studies, the authors of the CTA Review backgrounder noted that VIA informed them “the extended Corridor towards Quebec City and Windsor is no longer envisaged, as the market sizes do not justify the investment.”

As well, there is the question of the routing. As confirmed by the authors of the CTA Review backgrounder, “The dedicated route would be Montreal-Ottawa- Peterborough-Smiths Falls-Downtown Toronto (sic) and would use diesel trains operating at a 110 mph top speed. New tracks would be built on existing right-of-way, some tracks are already in place (AMT and GO going into Montreal and Toronto) and a small portion around Peterborough is an old CP line.”

In fact, insiders associated with the HFR proposal say it would require the construction of dedicated tracks on active and abandoned CP corridors all the way from Smiths Falls to the east side of Toronto. However, VIA will not confirm or deny this routing. Nor

will the corporation explain its rationale for expanding the proposal into a 125-mph electrified service, which would increase its cost by at least \$1 billion.

Despite all the red flags these issues raise, it's not impossible to find positive points in any proposal that seeks to separate passenger and freight traffic to the maximum extent possible. The underlying logic is sound, but the practicality of implementing it in full remains a major sticking point. In this, it is the routing west of Smiths Falls that is problematic, but not so much the route to the east of there.

Today, VIA owns the ex-CN trackage from De Beaujeu, Quebec, (7.5 miles north of the junction with CN's Toronto-Montreal main line at Coteau) to Smiths Falls via Ottawa. With this 109 miles of infrastructure already in VIA's hands, and a key component of the HFR proposal, it could be treated as a priority, stand-alone upgrading project. Whether the HFR project goes ahead or not, this investment would bring near-term benefits to VIA's Montreal-Ottawa and Ottawa-Toronto services. This could help make the case for further investment west of Smiths Falls to Toronto in the future, whether that should be on VIA's existing routing or the proposed HFR alignment.

Bringing the De Beaujeu-Smiths Falls line up to high-performance rail (HPR) standards would be expensive. If the objective were to improve it for eventual operation at 125 mph with diesel or electric traction, it would require the elimination of all the grade crossings. Even if the aim was only 110 mph diesel service, there are several speed-limiting curves near Glen Robertson, Alexandria and Maxville that would need to be eliminated through major route re-alignments. There's also the at-grade crossing of CP's Toronto-Montreal main line at De Beaujeu, which would ideally be grade separated to allow for more frequent VIA service without disrupting CP's freight traffic.

Large though they would be, these major investments could convert the Montreal-Ottawa service into an HPR operation with reduced running times and hourly departures from early morning until late evening. It could be just the kind of showcase VIA has long required. With the running time cut to 1:45 hours or less and frequent shuttle van service between Dorval and Trudeau International Airport, the route could provide much greater intercity utility and act as an integrated feeder for international airlines that don't serve Ottawa.

Furthermore, HPR-standard upgrading on the VIA-owned Ottawa-Smiths Falls and Smiths Falls-Brockville route segments would benefit the current Ottawa-Toronto service, shaving at least 10 minutes off the running times.

Also worthwhile is the HFR proposal's call for new equipment. While this is another aspect of the scheme that hasn't been detailed, it could be a major benefit to VIA's entire corridor operation. So far, VIA has only said its HFR proposal would require a public investment of \$1 billion for new, unspecified motive power and rolling stock, if it proceeded as a 110-mph diesel-powered project. Under the 125-mph electric scenario, that would increase to \$1.3 billion.

One of the biggest impediments to VIA ever reducing its costs and improving its passenger attractiveness and service levels remains its aged, inefficient fleet. The key here would be to ensure VIA acquires an efficient and flexible corridor fleet that would enable it to deliver HPR levels of service up to 125 mph. Evidence from the successful Amtrak California corridors suggests this should be push-pull bi-level equipment.

Implemented competently, the fleet component of the HFR plan has merit. The caveat must be that it is well studied by VIA and objectively analyzed by outsiders who are competent to render an informed decision. The last thing VIA needs is a repeat of the botched LRC acquisition

program of the early 1980s or the Renaissance misfire of recent years.

Therefore, at the very least, there are two worthy sub-projects wrapped up within the HFR proposal that could be extracted and acted on, provided they passed inspection by the new government and independent advisers. Taking an optimistic view, one could also say the HFR proposal is worthwhile in a very broad sense because it has triggered a high-profile discussion of the need to invest in VIA to make it a more effective, efficient and relevant public service.

In the end, the decision about whether the full HFR proposal or even pieces of it fly will be up to Transport Minister Marc Garneau and the members of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's cabinet. As much as VIA wants to aggressively push its dream forward, there are so many question marks hovering over it that it simply shouldn't be rushed.

As I said in TAO's recent HPR discussion paper, any decision on VIA investment will reverberate for generations, affecting the future economic, social and environmental prosperity of the Quebec-Windsor Corridor and the nation. Such a decision would also come with a considerable public cost. Therefore, it behooves Ottawa to consider all its options. VIA's HFR proposal -- in whole or in part -- should be part of that analysis. What also must be considered are other, service-proven options, including the full-corridor HPR approach advocated by TAO. ■

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## Province lowers UPX fares

As of March 9, fares on the Union Pearson Express between Toronto's Union Station and the airport will drop from \$27.50 to \$12 for a one-way ticket, \$9 for Presto card users (one-stop ride \$4.71, two-stops \$5.02). This is an initiative to increase ridership. There are roughly 10,000 seat-rides per direction per day; recently ridership has dipped to as low as 1,500 riders per day.

## High performance rail option for Ontario: report

On March 4, 2016, Transport Action Ontario launched its discussion paper on *The High-Performance Rail Option* prepared by Greg Gormick. The event was held at St. Marys' Town Hall. The paper complements Gormick's *The VIA 1-4-10 Plan: A Recovery Strategy for Canada's Rail Passenger Service*, released November 6, 2015 which had a Canada-wide focus. TAO asked Gormick to focus specifically on Ontario, and to consider how passenger rail could be upgraded and expanded between Windsor, Toronto and Montreal. TAO is seeking a strategy that gets results -- affordable, frequent, and reliable intercity passenger rail transportation that will attract people out of their cars.

Gormick's 19-page paper gives an answer. High performance rail (HPR) is a phrase that sums up a way to deliver intercity passenger rail that fulfills the goals indicated above. The report describes HPR and gives examples of where it can be found in the U.S. HPR is a recent moniker for quality passenger rail services that have operated in the U.S. for a number of decades, with more being planned as this is written.

VIA Rail is a federal responsibility. The new federal government has not announced its investment strategy for VIA. But there are two proposals in process involving Ontario. The Ontario government is studying high speed rail (HSR) between Toronto, Kitchener and London, with a possible extension to Windsor. VIA Rail's president has been talking about high frequency rail (HFR) passenger trains on a dedicated route between Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

The discussion paper considers the merits and drawbacks of the Ontario HSR plan as announced. VIA's proposal is more difficult to analyze because of a lack of information. One important difficulty is that the latter's route does not serve the populated areas of Ontario east of Toronto along

Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River.

Gormick explores the HPR solution for VIA Rail in considerable detail, considering necessary requirements in two phases. The case is made for upgrading existing freight railway track to provide capacity enhancements to keep freight operations sufficiently apart from passenger trains so as to provide overall fast and reliable passenger train service. The discussion paper supports an incremental investment strategy that has the merit of delivering a modernized passenger rail network sooner rather than later. The network sticks with the existing population concentrations in Ontario, offering somewhat faster speeds on improved track, but especially much improved frequency and reliability.

This detailed yet concise discussion paper presents a modest vision in clear and understandable terms. It educates readers so that they can understand what is at stake, the choices that are on offer, and a way forward based on the model of HPR, which is fast becoming the strategy of choice for passenger rail. The discussion paper is a quick read, with maps, a few tables, and some illustrative photos. It is available on the TAO website. ■

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## Support in St. Catharines for expanding VIA Rail service

At its meeting on February 8, St. Catharines city council voted unanimously to request that VIA Rail restore effective train service between Toronto, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls. Transport Action Ontario submitted a letter and presented a deputation to council supporting this request. Cities in the Niagara peninsula have been lobbying Queen's Park for all-day two-way GO train service. They have been reluctant to ask for VIA back because that might work against getting GO trains.

The Toronto-Niagara Falls route still hosts the jointly operated daily

Toronto-New York City *Maple Leaf* that uses Amtrak equipment. The popular VIA commuter train that arrived in Toronto in the morning and returned late in the day was taken off in the fall of 2012 in a budget cutting move by VIA.

Councillor Bruce Williamson took up the cause of returning VIA trains by asking council to adopt a resolution asking VIA to restore service. It is hoped that the other cities in the region will join with St. Catharines by supporting similar resolutions. It has become clear that promised GO service to Niagara Falls is years into the future. Scott Rosts of *Niagara This Week* (Feb. 9) reported Williamson as saying, "The existing rail infrastructure, including a climate-controlled station building and parking area, is already in place," adding "Niagara is positioned favourably for growth and transportation links are vital ingredients for future prosperity and sustainability."

Greg Gormick, policy advisor to TAO, spoke to council, arguing that VIA and GO complement each other. VIA would offer an express service into Toronto. A GO train would need two hours for the full trip with all of its stops, not attractive to long-distance commuters. VIA's express service could also tie into New York State's Empire rail corridor which will terminate at a soon to be operational new station in Niagara Falls, NY. The Empire corridor is being upgraded for more frequent and higher speed trains serving Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Rochester, Albany and New York City. This new service could be linked to VIA Rail express service at Niagara Falls, with Toronto and the Niagara region benefiting from modern high performance intercity passenger rail in the nearby U.S.

Williamson's resolution had the backing of the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce. Mishka Balsom, its CEO, told the council that it makes sense to push for VIA service while advocating for GO trains as well. "We need to take full advantage," said

Balsom, noting long-haul rail service should be an important part of any future Niagara-wide transportation master plan," Rosts reported. Long-haul VIA train service would connect the Niagara region in both directions, to New York's Empire corridor, but also to the whole of the VIA Rail network in central Canada.

With VIA Rail being a federal responsibility, funding for an expanded VIA could be part of infrastructure investments that the new federal Liberal government has promised with the aim of strengthening the economy in general.

(More material on the St. Catharines support for expanded VIA Rail can be found on the TAO website.) ■

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## Hamilton transit expansion threatened by continuing underfunding

The Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) is Hamilton's transit agency operating its many bus routes. Since the late 1980s, ridership growth on the HSR has stagnated due to decades of transit underfunding by the city. In 2013 ridership was 75% of what it was in the late 80s when HSR had 50% more buses on the road. The few routes with high levels of service have had, and continue to have, high ridership, confirming a relationship long known in the transit industry.

In 2006 the province created a regional transit planning agency for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) that adopted the name Metrolinx in 2007. GO Transit was merged into Metrolinx in 2009. Municipalities in the GTHA were asked to put forward major transit initiatives for funding by the province. Hamilton's Transportation Master Plan of 2007 led to a proposed five-line LRT network with Hamilton putting forward its downtown east-west LRT (B-Line) as its highest priority, to be followed by a north-south LRT line that would connect downtown Hamilton to the part of the city on the Mountain (A-Line). The province's

MoveOntario 2020 transit plan of 2007 included Hamilton's B-Line LRT as one of its top 15 projects, these projects becoming part of Metrolinx's 2008 regional transportation plan "The Big Move."

Detailed planning for light rail in Hamilton began with substantial public consultations. A great deal of public support developed during this process. LRT was pictured as more than just higher order rapid transit; it would stimulate revitalization of Hamilton's downtown and other neighbourhoods along the route. A Metrolinx Benefits Case Analysis of the B-Line LRT was positive. Environmental assessment was concluded in 2011 and the LRT was ready for provincial funding.

In 2011 Hamilton's LRT project was put into suspended animation by mayor Bob Bratina, elected in the fall of 2010. Bratina represented to the province that the city's priority was all-day two-way GO train service, not LRT, with the province responding by moving Hamilton's LRT down in the Metrolinx priority list. Hamilton's city manager suspended the Rapid Transit Office and established a new team to focus on getting all-day GO rail service. Delayed construction of LRT had the consequence of giving opponents opportunities to undermine the project, to the distress of the many citizens who had energetically supported it. Though the new West Harbour GO station opened in July, 2015, just west of the old James Street North GO station it replaced, there still is no all-day two-way GO train service to the city.

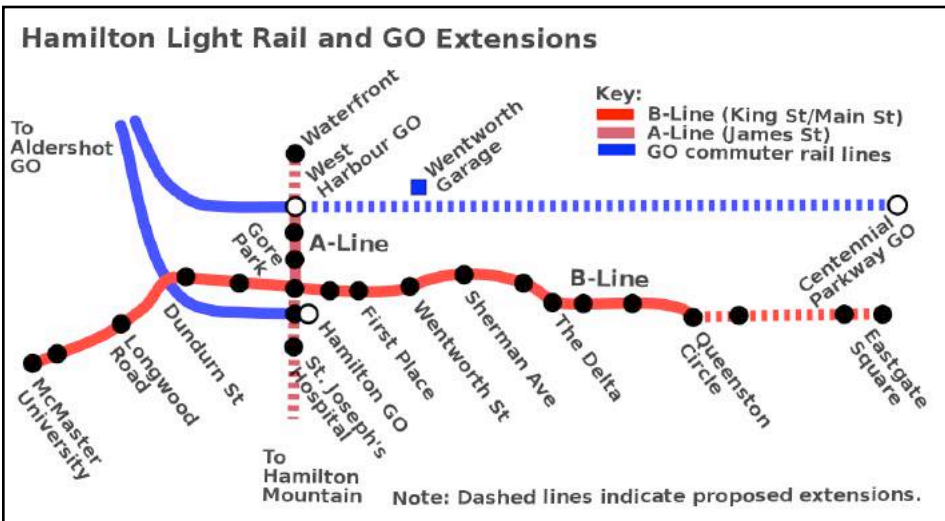
In January 2013, Kathleen Wynne became leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, becoming premier and continuing as premier with the Liberal election victory in June 2014. In the municipal elections of October 2014, Fred Eisenberger was elected mayor of Hamilton, having perviously been mayor between 2006 and 2010. Eisenberger went to bat for LRT and, in May 2015, the province announced \$1 billion in funding for the Hamilton's B-Line LRT.

Because it is entirely funded by the province, the B-Line project is in the hands of Metrolinx. The project has been modified, with the east end of the route cut back from Eastgate Square to Queenston Circle. Instead, there will be a branch off King Street on James Street North to the West Harbour GO station, a segment of the proposed A-Line LRT. Part of the funds allocated to Hamilton will also be used for a brand new Centennial Parkway GO station in Stoney Creek 9 km east of James Street on the CN railway line to Niagara Falls. HSR will need a garage facility for its 14 light rail vehicles. A likely candidate is a former relatively modern bus garage on Wentworth Street North at the CN rail line, now a city works department facility. With modifications, this facility has indoor space to accommodate HSR's LRT fleet. Using this location would require about 2 km of connecting track.

With Brampton rejecting an LRT line through its downtown in October 2015, some Hamiltonians are hoping these unspent funds might move to Hamilton. They could be applied to extend the B-Line to Eastgate Square as originally planned, or to extend the A-Line to Waterfront and/or St. Joseph's hospital on James Street South.

In December 2015, Paul Johnson became director of LRT coordination for the City of Hamilton. He is working to expedite LRT construction starting with utility removal and/or replacement. As in Kitchener-Waterloo, the construction of the project will be a P3. Contract tendering will occur in 2017, with construction to start in 2019, completion being in 2024. Johnson has indicated that the A-Line segment to the West Harbour GO station is now being more fully studied. Other parallel streets just either side of James Street may get the track. There may be room in the budget to take this branch to Waterfront.

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While the LRT drama has had a happy ending, drama still surrounds Hamilton's bus-based transit system, in decline for 30 years. Comparable transit systems across Canada have grown ridership by expanding service frequencies and routes. By contrast, city council in Hamilton has a closed wallet for transit expansion. It appears to have adopted an unofficial policy of refusing to put more city tax dollars into transit, instead relying on fare increases (which can be counter-productive) and extra money from the province.

In November 2014, David Dixon, formerly an operations manager with the TTC, became the new director of the HSR. As someone finally willing to push a transit agenda in Steeltown, his arrival in that post was viewed by many Hamilton transit advocates as a breath of fresh air. Dixon delivered a ten-year transit strategy adopted by city council in March 2015. The plan was growth oriented, but Dixon did not ask council to dip into its municipal pockets.

The plan included fare increases sufficient to provide some new buses and additional drivers. More ambitiously, it called for increased service, especially on routes that have been identified for future LRT. Out of sync with the mayor who was in negotiations with the province to get Hamilton's LRT funded, Dixon called on the province for a \$302 million

grant, the first \$100 million being for fleet expansion and the rest for a new bus garage. (At present the HSR bus garage and maintenance centre is on the Mountain close to the airport.)

LRT supporters were stunned by this new grant request which was perceived as putting LRT funding by the province at risk. But Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca quickly threw cold water on another handout to Hamilton stating that, instead, Hamilton should make use of the gas tax refund monies that are returned to municipalities across the province on an annual basis.

The way forward for the ten-year transit strategy should be clear. The gas tax refund by the province is a case in point. Close to 90% of the gas tax money is used for roads, whereas the program was originally intended to be a main source of paying for transit. Waterloo, for instance, uses half of its gas tax refund for transit.

There is another tax anomaly working against transit expansion, a peculiar property tax policy that Hamilton has followed since amalgamation. Amalgamated Hamilton includes the old high density city, less dense suburban areas, and rural districts. The property tax includes a transit levy that varies according to location. The transit levy originally reflected the level of transit service in the city's 17 designated areas. Today, ironically, one consequence is

that low tax areas (suburbs) oppose transit expansion because their transit levy would go up with better transit. Critics point out that property taxes for a city's services and programs ought not be a fee for service, but should rather reflect the cost of services and programs to everyone equally. Two citizen panels have recommended an end to area weighting for the transit levy. One option is a uniform tax rate with only rural areas being exempted. Transit is the only city service remaining with levies determined by area weighting.

The area rating system for transit funding and the lopsided use of the gas tax refund for roads are depriving the HSR of significant revenues it needs to augment service to reduce car-dependency by stimulating a modal shift to transit. The challenge for Hamilton is to finally fund transit at a level typical of most cities of its size, joining the trend to become more transit oriented. ■ -- Tony Turriffin

**Addendum:** In January 2015, Hamilton city council voted to end transit-only bus lanes through downtown Hamilton, a pilot project funded by Metrolinx in October 2013. The vote was 9 in favour of closing the bus lanes to 7 against. Councillors from wards in which the bus-lanes operated supported keeping them. The HSR ten-year transit strategy includes extensive use of transit-only lanes. Former mayor of Hamilton, Bob Bratina, was elected as MP (Liberal) for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek in October 2015. He remains a strong supporter of passenger rail. Information on Hamilton transit issues can be found at Raise the Hammer, a community discussion group website, and at the website of Citizens at City Hall (CATCH).

Hamilton has taken advantage of its location along the Niagara Escarpment by having enviable parklands with over 100 waterfalls within its city limits. It is also home to the Royal Botanical Gardens. Half-hourly GO transit express buses connect Hamilton with Toronto.

**Ottawa report**

Progress continues towards the opening of the LRT Confederation Line in the Spring of 2018. Sections of the bus transitway continue to be closed to allow rebuilding and conversion to LRT. Much of the three, deep downtown stations have been tunneled out and work is underway on connections to the street and underground shopping concourses. The Bayview O-Train Trillium Line Station has been shifted a few hundred feet north to allow demolition of the old transitway bridge and construction of the new interchange station. There is no rail connection being built now, but there may be a future provision for Bayview rail connections if the north-south Trillium Line is ever converted from diesel to electric traction. Assembly of the first Citadis train has commenced at the new Belfast car-building facility.

The Environmental Assessment of the Trillium Line extension and enhancement has been completed. This includes added stations at Gladstone and Confederation, plus single track extensions several miles south to Bowesville and a spur to the Ottawa Airport. While construction may be several years off, if infrastructure funding suddenly becomes available, contracting for construction can commence quickly. Allowance has been made for future double-tracking and electrification, but this would be many more years off.

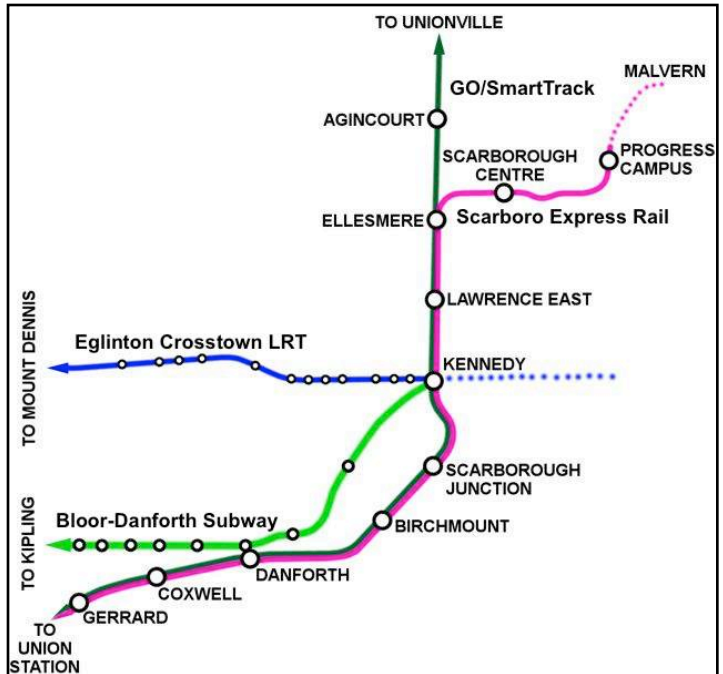
Signaling problems continue to plague the Trillium Line and staff have admitted they will never achieve the 8 minute frequency originally promised to Council. Some days they have trouble meeting 12 minute frequency with 4 Coradia trains. They used to have 15 minute frequency with 2 Talent trains.

In response to the Fallowfield bus/train crash two years ago, and the Transportation Safety Board report last fall, the city has announced it will study several grade separations along this busy VIA line that is also experiencing increasing vehicular crossings.

Once again steam operations along any part of the Hull/Chelsea/Wakefield ex-CP line are unlikely this summer. There are proposals to convert the Hull/Gatineau section to a walking and bike path, but no notification to abandon has yet been given. One Lebreton development plan foresees a train running between Bayview Station, across the Ottawa River to the Lac Leamy Casino in the Hull sector using this existing track, but with little chance of coming to fruition for now. ■ -- Bernie Geiger

**Scarborough Express Rail**

Scarborough Express Rail (SER), subsequently branded by the media as "Smart Spur," is part of a major 2013 report prepared by TAO advocating the electrification of GO Transit's commuter rail lines for all-day two-way service. The report was prepared by TAO senior researcher Karl Junkin. Reflecting a concern about how to provide



Scarborough with more rapid transit, the report included a branch off the Stouffville GO rail line at Ellesmere Avenue into the Scarborough Town Centre (STC). At the time the Scarborough RT line from Kennedy subway station to the STC was to be replaced by LRT. At the end of the Rob Ford administration, enough support was generated at city council so that this LRT conversion, already funded by the province and underway, was replaced by a three-stop subway extension (SSE) from Kennedy to the STC and beyond to Sheppard Avenue on McCowan Road. The additional (incremental) costs for the SSE would be covered with city and federal funding.

This controversial development got more so with the election of John Tory as mayor in 2014. During the election, Tory promised the city a frequent-service rapid transit line, dubbed SmartTrack, that would utilize GO tracks from Stouffville on the east to Union Station, and out on the west side of the city on GO's Georgetown route. It became clear that SmartTrack and the SSE overlapped so much that the subway extension no longer made sense. In the last 15 months, much study has been done by city planners and others regarding the best mix of transit options for the area between Kennedy subway station and the STC, studies weighing the collective and separate roles of GO transit, SmartTrack, more LRT, and a subway extension using several different routes.

TAO has participated in this decision-making process by offering Smart Spur as an alternative to the SSE. Either GO or SmartTrack trains would branch off the electrified Stouffville line at Ellesmere to the STC with an underground terminal station at that location. The line could be extended later to Centennial College and Malvern. Compared to the \$2.6 billion ...continued on PAGE 8

## Scarboro Express Rail

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cost of SSE, the Smart Spur cost is estimated at \$1.15 billion for a substantial saving that could be put into other transit projects. Smart Spur would operate at a five-minute interval and offer a one-seat ride to Union Station, taking pressure off the Bloor-Danforth subway. It fits with the network principle in that Smart Spur riders can transfer to subways at Kennedy station, or at the Main and Danforth GO station. The proposal was presented to city staff and councillors, Metrolinx staff, and most recently to Toronto's Executive Committee.

Smart Spur has received coverage by GTA columnist Royson James in the *Toronto Star* in the lead up to council's executive committee decision-making on a city staff compromise plan which proposes building a one-stop subway extension from Kennedy station to the STC, and extending LRT along Eglinton Avenue to Scarborough's University of Toronto campus. James has been dismayed by the lack of

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### >TAO Annual General Meeting:

Sat., April 16, 2016, Metro Hall, 55 John Street (at King), Toronto, Rm 303.

> **Lunch** noon to 1:30 pm. Members and guests are welcome to join us at the Aroma Restaurant, 121 King St. W. (2nd floor), across from Metro Hall, serving an East Indian cuisine buffet.

### > Afternoon Public Forum:

Speaker: **David Ticoll**, Distinguished Research Fellow, Innovation Policy Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto; Topic:

### “How Autonomous Vehicles will Reshape Canada”

Talk to be followed by a panel discussion and Q&A from the audience.

David Ticoll's Oct. 2015 discussion paper on AVs written for the City of Toronto may be viewed by browsing for "Driving Changes - City of Toronto."

## Take Action/Save VIA

Save VIA of St.Marys, Ont., has asked the public to write to the federal Ministry of Finance in support of VIA Rail. Their ad appeared in the *St.Marys Independent* of March 11. Here is the ad modified to direct correspondence to the finance minister; Even though the consultation period is complete, now is still a good time to show public support for a better VIA Rail -- TAO.

Since it was created in 1977, VIA Rail has been starved of the funding it requires to provide the modern, frequent, fast and affordable rail passenger service you need. Instead, there have been cut backs and constant threats to eliminate our passenger trains altogether.

Now, Canada's new federal government is asking Canadians how they want to see their tax dollars invested to improve our economy, connect our communities and protect our environment. You can tell them by sending a letter or email to:

Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance  
House of Commons Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6  
[bill.morneau@canada.ca](mailto:bill.morneau@canada.ca)

Tell our government that you want to see more of your tax dollars wisely invested in VIA Rail. Tell them that every other G7 nation is improving its passenger trains – and Canada should, too!

Your email or letter can help give us the VIA Rail service we want and we'll use.

A message from 

thorough examination of the full range of transit alternatives to serve the STC. He has frequently mentioned Smart Spur as an important alternative to consider. His column in the *Toronto Star* March 7, 2016 ("Time for councillors to ask tough transit questions") will interest readers because it comprehensively describes the many alternatives James believes need full examination by the city before making a final decision. City council will be making its final decision on the compromise package in several months. ■

*Ontario Report* is published by Transport Action Ontario bi-monthly in Feb., Apr., June, Aug., Oct. and Dec. Contributions of news and items are welcome. Submissions, including articles and letters, are subject to acceptance and editing. Statements in this publication are those of the respective authors and are not official policy which is approved by the Board of Transport Action Ontario. Photos by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Thanks to all who helped out with this issue. Particular thanks to John D. Thompson, Ryan McGreal, and Nick Kevlahan. News to March 10, 2016.

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ISSN 1923-1040 (Print)  
ISSN 1923-1059 (Online)

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to help us advocate for sustainable transportation. By joining

Transport Action Ontario, you also

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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.

TAO is requesting a \$10 supplement on a

member-ship for mailing a paper copy of

its newsletter, *Ontario Report*. Transport

Action Canada is a registered charity.

Donations to it receive a tax receipt. On

the web: [//www.transport-action.ca](http://www.transport-action.ca).

**Board meetings:** May 5, June 2, July 30,

Sept 8 at 5:30pm at Centre for Social Inno-

vation, 215 Spadina Ave., Toronto. If you

wish to participate, contact Peter Miasek to

confirm as date, time and location may change.