



# TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

*Advocating for Sustainable Public and Freight Transportation*

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Ms. Karen Clark,  
Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change.  
VIA e-mail.

June 23rd 2016

Dear Ms. Clark,

## **Impact of limited public transportation outside the GTHA on carbon emissions.**

A further observation from the June 20<sup>th</sup> Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) webinar is that its primary transportation focus is on areas of high population density while not giving due consideration to smaller communities and rural areas. While we understand the need to focus plans for the best available outcomes we believe that provincial climate policies should be for the benefit of all Ontarians.

## **Non GTHA community concerns.**

Under the current proposed CCAP, those living in the extreme south-west, the east and the north of the Province will remain dependent on high-carbon emitting sources of transportation for the foreseeable future. Low carbon, intercity public transportation options are currently minimal or non-existent and electrically powered autonomous vehicles are unlikely to be suitable for long-distance travel. And yet those living outside the GTHA will be expected to contribute financially to the cost of the climate plan while seeing little or no benefit in the short to medium term.

To encourage full participation from all Ontarians, bring better balance to our province-wide transportation system and avoid the impoverishment and decline of rural and smaller communities we strongly suggest the CCAP be amended to include astute investments in expanded passenger rail and bus services. Elimination of the "Northlander" train, uncertainty over the future of VIA Rail Canada, its dated equipment and limited service area and large cuts to intercity bus service suggests the Province must take a more proactive role in low carbon, better integrated intercity travel.

Transport Action Ontario assisted with the preparation of "Network Southwest", a plan for incremental public transportation improvements in south-western Ontario and it can be viewed on our web site. It is based on broad public input and would certainly facilitate the transition to a low-carbon mobility system in the region. The County of Oxford recently released its "New Directions" public transportation tool-kit as part of its "Future Oxford" sustainability plan and it has been widely endorsed by communities throughout the region. Both documents are entirely complementary to Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan.

## **Issues specific to the North.**

Communities in northern Ontario share climate-change concerns and, while they can participate in and benefit from domestic and industrial energy efficiency measures, they face increasing isolation by the absence of low-carbon intercity and intercommunity public transportation options. The Northern and Eastern Ontario Rail Network (NEORN), an advocacy group affiliated with Transport Action Ontario,

has thoroughly studied the region's transportation problems and how they inhibit transition to a sustainable, low-carbon future. We encourage you to review the informative and constructive materials on their web site.

Many northerners may consider subsidies for electric cars to be discriminatory unless balanced by more accessible and affordable, low-carbon public transportation options as in the case of the GTHA. They may also consider electric cars impractical because of the relatively long travel distances and the heavy burden on the battery for cab heating in extreme cold.

**Increased use of GO Transit to mitigate land-use and house price considerations.**

Much concern is being expressed over the growing unaffordability of housing in the GTHA and the tendency of people to live in lower cost areas and engage in long, daily, currently carbon-intensive commutes into the region. A solution currently being proposed is to release areas of the Green Belt for large housing development to better balance demand and supply. Transport Action Ontario considers this potential remedy short-term, in direct conflict with provincial climate change and land-use initiatives, and firmly opposes it.

We believe a potential solution includes for the extension of GO services much further into south western Ontario (Barrie/London/Windsor/Niagara arc) to allow low-carbon commutes from more affordable housing stock in more distant communities. With VIA Rail's future being uncertain, the Province could ask Ottawa for funding to operate and expand current passenger rail operations in the region and require that community transit is fully integrated with expanded GO rail and bus operations. VIA's current operating model does not fulfill this need.

Transport Action Ontario generally opposes new highway projects penetrating the Green Belt and considers that low-carbon passenger rail (networked with buses) has major environmental and community sustainability benefits, especially if ultimately electrified. California, a partner in Ontario's cap and trade plans and a competing jurisdiction in the new, innovative economy, is taking this approach. Our neighbour, the State of Michigan, is doing very much the same.

In conclusion, Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan is bold and addresses many issues of concern to province's residents and global society in general. Greater plan inclusiveness and robustness is possible by further consideration of the root issues outlined in this and our prior communication.

Thank you for providing this opportunity for input and we look forward to further dialogue during subsequent planning stages.

Yours sincerely,

***Ken Westcar***

Kenneth Westcar

Board Member,

Transport Action Ontario

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