

TORONTO STAR OP-ED NOV. 23, 2016

GTHA transit needs a boost from new municipal funding sources

Getting the region moving again will require new sustainable sources of revenue beyond the sources currently used by municipalities



The Greater Toronto Hamilton Area "continues to confront a \$2-billion a year capital funding gap to build out the regional transportation plan, and at least another \$1.6-billion per year by 2022 for operations and maintenance," write Jan De Silva and Sevaun Palvetzian. (Chris So / Toronto Star) | [Order this photo](#)

By **JAN DE SILVA**
SEVAUN PALVETZIAN

Wed., Nov. 23, 2016

• Winter is coming to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). As the temperature falls, the blood pressure of commuters across the region rises as their journeys become even more congested. Delayed by increasingly limited capacity and waiting for infrastructure to be built, commuters are growing frustrated by gridlock in the streets and in government.

Despite this seasonal malaise, signs of optimism have started to appear.

Excellent progress has been made by recent provincial and federal commitments to infrastructure spending representing the largest transit investment in our region's history. Municipal-provincial cost sharing agreements, such as the one approved by Toronto earlier this month, are also adding significant funding.

Rarely, if ever, have we seen this level of alignment and collaboration among the three orders of government.

Although these provincial and federal government investments are historic, Move the GTHA's *Are We There Yet?* report calculates the region continues to confront a \$2-billion a year capital funding gap to build out the regional transportation plan, and at least another \$1.6-billion per year by 2022 for operations and maintenance.

This hole is simply too large for general tax revenues to fill, as Toronto Region Board of Trade pointed out in its 2011 report, *Reaching Top Speed*.

For the past five years, our coalition of 12 organizations — representing a diverse group of business, labour, environmental, health, and citizen advocacy groups — have been working to build

support for investing in a fully integrated regional transportation system, Metrolinx's The Big Move.

Getting the region moving again will require new sustainable sources of revenue beyond the sources currently used by municipalities. The choices will become more concrete when the Toronto city manager's report on new funding sources is released in the coming days. This report, expected to be introduced to executive committee on Dec. 1 and budget committee on Dec. 2, will inform the city's long-term financial plan.

We know these decisions are not easy, and that they will require strong political will. That's why we're encouraged by Toronto Mayor Tory's leadership in tackling the question of how the city funds its long-term needs and ambitions, including transportation and other priorities like affordable housing.

But, these sources need to be the right design, scope and scale to ensure maximum impact. In addition to being sustainable, they must also meet three basic criteria.

First, new revenue sources should be focused on building transportation infrastructure and operating new and existing transit projects. According to research by the Angus Reid Forum, 83 per cent of residents would be more likely to support new revenue tools if the dollars collected were put into a dedicated fund for transportation. Costs should be equitably shared among those who benefit across the city, but struggling segments of the population should not be unduly burdened. We know some in our city can contribute more than others. At the same time, we must also remember that commuters are already paying for transit projects directly through the fare box.

Lastly, governments should select projects for funding in a way that is transparent, efficient, and accountable. Governments at all levels need to demonstrate how they're spending our money, and to report on project progress and results.

Regional solutions are still required to solve the funding challenge; similar discussions need to happen in other municipalities. Investing in better transportation boosts economic growth, reduces carbon emissions, and contributes to thriving, complete communities. Making investments required to get our region moving again is simply impossible without using the broader range of revenue tools available to the City of Toronto and its municipal partners.

We urge and support Mayor John Tory and Toronto city council to endorse the bold solutions required to fund the city-region we want, and the transportation network we so desperately need.

It is up to civic leaders from the public, private, labour, academic and not for profit sectors to give Toronto City Council the support it needs. We can no longer defer the tough decisions on how to fund our region's mobility. It's time to get Toronto and our region moving again.

***Jan De Silva** is president and CEO, Toronto Region Board of Trade and **Sevaun Palvetzian** is chief executive officer, CivicAction. Contributors to this article included members of the Move the GTHA: CivicAction, Code RedTO, David Suzuki Foundation, Evergreen, Pembina Institute, Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, The Atmospheric Fund, Transport Action Ontario, Toronto Environmental Alliance, Toronto Region Board of Trade and Western GTA Move Taskforce.*