



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

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2016 11 10

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Comments on Metrolinx Discussion Paper for the Next Regional Transportation Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this discussion paper. Transport Action Ontario is a long-standing Ontario-wide NGO advocating for rail-based public transportation. We are also a core member of the Move the GTHA (MTGTHA) collaborative.

We recognize that the Discussion Paper is only the first step in the process to update the RTP. We look forward to further engagement as the process continues.

1. Vision, Goals and Objectives of the next RTP

In general, we support the vision, the 6 goals and the 19 objectives listed in the paper. The objectives are very high level and we understand that there would be numerous programs and initiatives for each.

1.1 Additional Goal – Using Evidence-Based Decision Making

We believe there is one important area that is missing, either as an additional objective under Goal D (“A Well-Planned Region”) or as a stand-alone Goal G. It relates to use of evidence based decision making for project screening and prioritization. It seems that there is a robust set of tools for decision making being contemplated, as the discussion paper talks about the RTP Screening Process, the Business Case multi account framework and the Project Prioritization Framework. The importance of using tools like these for decision making and publishing the results cannot be over emphasized, as it would reduce public cynicism and improve public support for the RTP and project decisions.

2. Opportunities for Better Transit and Transportation

2.1 Next planned rapid transit network will be smaller than in 2008 plan. It needs to be developed based on evidence

The discussion paper indicates that the updated RTP will have a different focus than the 2008 RTP, which recommended a dramatic expansion of major transit infrastructure across the region. The next RTP will focus more on the need to make the best possible use of the region’s transit assets and maximize the return on prior investments.

It appears that it will assume a built-out network of GO RER, First Wave Projects and Next Wave Projects. These will be supplemented essentially with an integrated, frequent and improved bus and streetcar feeder network, and other local transit improvements. Only limited additional rapid transit projects will be identified, based on remaining gaps and additional service needs.

This is a dramatic departure from the 2008 RTP. As cited in the Backgrounder to the recent report “Are We There Yet?” by MTGTHA, there are about 35 rapid transit projects identified in 2008 that are currently entirely or partially unfunded. Most of these have the potential of being dropped from the next RTP, including important projects like better GO service to Richmond Hill and Milton, 407 Transitway, and service to Seaton.

We are not opposed to this new prioritization effort, assuming it is based on evidence, including ridership modeling and business cases. The evidence needs to be published transparently.

2.2 Updated Schedule for GO RER needed

The next RTP needs to provide an updated schedule for GO electrification and implementation of GO RER. What is the new timeline? There are 16 new diesel locomotives on order and 125 Bi-level commuter cars starting in 2020. This does not indicate any start to electrification soon.

2.3 Role of Local Transit is Key

We agree that the next RTP needs to emphasize the role of local transit. Expanding the grid of frequent transit networks and connecting to GO and rapid transit stations will be very important in the context of a new plan of a smaller rapid transit network. Transit priority measures such as reserved lanes on arterials or expressways, queue jump lanes and transit priority signals will be needed.

An integrated fare system across all transit providers is important. However, fare integration cannot cause a major change to the TTC's fares system, as this provider carries the great majority of GTHA transit riders. Fare by distance for the TTC will be very unpopular.

The Ontario Government should be prepared to subsidize local providers that suffer a revenue decline due to fare integration

2.4 Transparency on GO fares

We need an explanation as to how GO fares are calculated. It is not a true "Fare by Distance" system as the cost per km drops for longer trips. It is not even a simple base fare plus cost per km as regression analysis cannot find a formula. Also fares for the same distance vary by corridor. It is time to explain how the fare system works and justify it. There is currently NO transparency in this whatsoever.

2.5 Full Costing of Next Plan, Including Local Transit and Local Roads, is Crucial

The 2008 RTP suffered from a lack of detail on costs. It cited a capital cost of \$50B for the regional rapid transit network, with only very high level statements on how this was calculated. The figure excluded capital rehabilitation costs and investment in local transit or local roads. There was also very limited information given on operating costs.

The public needs to be given the total story.

The next RTP should not repeat these mistakes.

Capital, operating, maintenance and rehabilitation costs of the next rapid transit network should be presented in sufficient detail, using industry-standard unit costs and costs for similar types of facilities, so that the public understands the costs.

Similarly, capital costs to improve local transit to a frequent grid network need to be quantified. This includes vehicle (bus/streetcar) costs and road improvement costs, such as widening for dedicated lanes, queue jump lanes and improved signals.

Operating and maintenance costs of the frequent grid network and other local transit enhancements to connect with rapid transit also need to be quantified.

2.6 Full Discussion on New Revenue Tools Needed

The full capital and operating costs needed for the next RTP, as discussed above, should be plotted out on a dollars/year basis, with a conclusion that a stream of \$xxB/yr is needed to fund construction, operations, maintenance and rehabilitation. This clearly identified quantum then would set the basis for a discussion on revenue sources.

We support the discussion paper assertion that the next RTP provides an opportunity to advance the public dialogue about transportation funding. This includes discussing current funding sources and the funding gap that exists. More importantly, it provides an opportunity to reconsider new revenue tools as a means of generating badly-needed funds as well as influencing travel behavior.

All levels of government seem to be afraid to impose a cost for driving that reflects the true value. Until we charge drivers something approaching the true cost of supplying roads for them there will continue to be congestion in the GTHA. Roads are subsidized much more than any form of public transit and all levels of Government are afraid to go anywhere near this topic. It is time for this to end.

There have been numerous expert reports, including the Metrolinx Investment Strategy, the Transit Panel report and reports by Toronto Region Board of Trade, Civic Action, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario and the Ecofiscal Commission that provide guidance on the principles of good revenue tools, details on different tools, and recommendations on which tools to select.

The TRBOT in particular issued a well-researched discussion paper in March, 2013 called “A Green Light on Moving the Toronto Region: Paying for Public Transportation Expansion”, which cited the need for new dedicated revenue tools and the increasing public acceptance (however reluctant) that higher taxation or user fees be considered. The report recommended 4 new tools to raise a total of \$2B/yr. The report concluded that if we want good infrastructure we have to pay for it. There is only so much that can be ground out of “efficiencies” in operations.

MTGTHA has proposed a transit summit involving all levels of government and other stakeholders to discuss new revenue sources and funding strategies to eliminate the capital and operating funding gap.

2.7 Need Transparency on Costs and Revenues

To maintain public credibility and support, there is a need to give full public reporting on expenditures and revenues to answer key questions such as

- How much revenue has been raised for the transportation program from identified revenue sources such as gas tax, asset sales, carbon cap and trade?
- What is the status of green bonds issued for public transportation?
- What is the financial transaction history and balance in the Trillium Trust?
- How much money has been expended by the province for on-going GO operations, incremental GO expansion and on the various rapid transit projects?
- What is the current level of subsidy for GO train service, especially the extension to Kitchener and West Harbor?

The on line portal promised in the 2015 Ontario budget likely could provide a good vehicle for transparent public reporting.

The need for transparent public reporting was identified by both the Metrolinx Investment Strategy (recommendation 5) and the Transit Panel report (recommendation 17).

2.8 Paid Parking at GO stations

As cited in the paper, the provision of free or heavily discounted parking is one of the key drivers in promoting car use, even when transit alternatives are available. Metrolinx is the largest parking provider in North America, with a total of 72,000 parking spaces. Current GO Transit fares include a hidden component for “free parking”. Metrolinx should take a leadership role and start charging for parking, potentially with a concomitant reduction in transit fares.

GO has to either charge for parking or give a better re-imbursment to passengers who get to the GO station by some means other than driving. These passengers are subsidizing those who drive and that is not fair. Parking costs need not be high enough to discourage drivers but drivers need to pay more for the privilege of parking.

2.9 Other Concepts in Discussion Paper Supported

We support other concepts in the paper, including a continued emphasis on mobility hubs, first and last mile transit, active transportation, congestion management, transportation demand management and urban freight movement. We have no specific comments on the discussion paper on these topics.

3. Opportunities for Regional Integration and Collaboration

3.1 Coordination of GO and VIA

GO Transit and VIA Rail Canada need to coordinate their services in Southwestern Ontario, Niagara, and east to Bowmanville so they work together and not in competition with each other. For example, the extension of GO service has all but killed VIA's services on the North Main Line to Kitchener and also to Niagara.

How can the government justify these extensions which help to destroy the VIA service on the North Main Line yet not help by running some trains further west to Stratford, St. Marys etc, to offer more travel choices? Has any thought be given to working with VIA instead of against VIA and to running the Kitchener service express to get the travel times back to what they were when VIA ran the service?

4. Opportunities for New Mobility

Although we recognize the importance of car sharing, on-demand services and autonomous vehicles, we have no specific comment on the discussion paper on these topics.

We welcome the opportunity to comment, and look forward to future engagement.

Yours truly

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