

Support for Metrolinx Big Move and 'Next Wave' Priority Projects

Submitted by the Richmond Hill Board of Trade, Newmarket Chamber of Commerce, and Vaughan Chamber of Commerce

Issue:

Over the past 20 years, there has been tremendous population and business growth throughout the Greater Toronto – Hamilton Area (GTHA), particularly in the 905. In fact, York Region is now one of Canada's fastest-growing large urban municipalities with nearly 1.2 million people and approximately 25,000 new residents moving there every year. Notwithstanding the many positives that result from urban intensification, increased traffic congestion typically accompanies population growth if infrastructure investments do not keep pace, as they have failed to do in the GTHA and beyond.

The average round-trip commuting time in the GTHA is more than 80 minutes and many residents grapple with far longer travel times to work as a red-hot housing market necessitates more first-time home-buyers to look beyond local markets. In fact, traffic congestion is estimated to cost the economy in the range of \$7.5 Billion to \$11 Billion per year, according to a study by the C.D. Howe Institute.

This level of traffic congestion, and lack of alternative transportation infrastructure, impacts not simply those directly commuting to and from the GTHA. Lack of public transit options leads to less choice for commuters and ultimately increased vehicular traffic, which results in costs to business supply chains such as movement of goods delays.

Failure of our transportation infrastructure to keep pace in the face of unprecedented growth also affects tourists and visitors to the wider-region and contributes to air pollution and carbon emissions. Recent investments by all levels of government in public transit, including the extension of the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension to Vaughan and construction of VIVA-YRT bus rapid-ways are welcome additions to the transportation network in York Region. It is clear that to maximize these investments in public transit infrastructure, support must be given for the Metrolinx Big Move transportation plan and 'Next Wave' priority projects including the Yonge North Subway Extension and the Relief Line in the context of the regional transit network.

Background:

Transportation and transit infrastructure is critical to the success of our region, our province and our country. For that reason we must focus on the big picture. Municipal boundaries act as transit boundaries that prevent effective movement of passengers. Transit policies and routes should be planned based upon population growth and need, not on municipal boundaries.

The busiest subway in Canada, the Yonge North-South line, has not been expanded since the 1970's. This despite the fact that York Region is one of the fastest growing areas in Canada contributing to some of the longest commute times in North America. To entice people out of their vehicles and alleviate traffic congestion, the Yonge North Subway Extension has become the top priority of the Regional Municipality of York and each of the nine municipal governments in York Region. In fact, transportation is the top local issue for the vast majority of York Region residents.

The Yonge subway extension and Relief line will complement investments made in our existing transit network and help connect the GTHA by integrating with neighboring transit options. They will also maximize the recent investments in GO Transit, VIVA-YRT, Eglinton Crosstown LRT, UP Express

connectivity to Pearson Airport, and the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension. They will ensure for greater connectivity with surrounding communities.

Already included in the Metrolinx Big Move and identified as 'Next Wave' Priority Projects, developments of this magnitude will lead to new business and job creation, intensification, and the attraction of more affordable housing as well as significant environmental benefits. In fact, by eliminating the need for 2,500 bus trips that currently service a stretch of Yonge Street each weekday, the Yonge North Subway Extension has significant potential to reduce carbon emissions and eliminate up to 28 tonnes of GHG each workday. Notably, the Yonge North Subway Extension has already received \$55 million from the Province for preliminary engineering and design, a notable investment that should be maximized.

We applaud the Governments of Canada and Ontario for making significant investments to expand and modernize the public transit system across the GTHA and beyond. While we have made tremendous progress over the past several years, we are mindful that there is still much more to do in order to create mechanisms for people to get from place to place throughout the wider-region.

Conclusion:

As populations continue to grow and densities rise throughout the GTHA and beyond, there is an urgent need to create connected infrastructure for future generations that ensures for the greatest range of mobility options. Projects of this size and scope require the financial support of all levels of government, over an extended duration of time. The longer we wait, the more expensive projects of this magnitude become.

Recommendation:

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the Regional Municipality of York and the City of Toronto to:

1. Together, begin the conversation on dedicating or sourcing revenue streams for Metrolinx Big Move and 'Next Wave' Priority Projects, including the Yonge North Subway Extension, given the benefits to the GTHA and wider-region for current and future generations.

Estimated Financial Impact to the Province

Cost-neutral to the government

OCC Policy Committee Position: The submitting chamber amended the resolution based on suggestions made by the Policy Committee. The Policy Committee supports the resolution as amended.