

July 26, 2007

Dear Mr. MacIsaac and GTTA members

This is related to the presentation being made to you tomorrow about various GTA transit plans at your meeting. I hope you're able to read through this, see my points without maps, and that my worries can influence your thinking on all of this.

I don't know how much sway you have over the City of Toronto's transport and transit planning, but I firmly believe we're blowing a couple of superb transit opportunities along with a few hundred million \$ and harming two transit systems by not going beyond Metro-era planning on our Waterfront.

The problems begin with the Front St. Extension, a \$255m + road folly that has been allowed to have its EA approval live on despite maybe a decade or two of languishing. As it currently sits, (before the provincial Environment Minister under appeal for an Individual EA, though they say it's been sent back to the City for further testing/resolution etc.), the FSE would push Front St. past its current terminus at Bathurst through the railtracks and link it to the Gardiner while providing a local road through the former industrial area of Liberty Village over to Dufferin, acting as a rat run to the Lakeshore there.

My big thing is: Where are the transit options?

Despite the quarter-billion cost, we've not been able to explore whether there are effective transit options to the project, including simply adding more GO trains. The GO trains are so close that they have to moved and messed around with for a lengthy time and a lot of money, maybe \$60 million, or the price of a couple new trainsets.

I was pleased that you heard Mr. McNeil's opinion of it at the winter forum at St. Lawrence Centre, but I don't believe any podcast of his remarks made it onto the stlc site, though others have. I've a bit of a suspicion of a conspiracy theory about the FSE and stifling the impacts on GO, as I've felt the impacts were downplayed considerably by some city staff to the civic politicians, even though the presentation of the City of Toronto to you does show that GO is considerably more important to bringing tens of thousands of people into the City than the road network. I believe Mr. McNeil said that the FSE would mess up the GO lines/tracks for a few years - and there was a reference on the Steve Munro site to this too awhile back.

So this Metro-era planning still has enough resonance at City Hall that it has had its support kept, though it's now much tighter, the last two votes being 21-19 and 22-20 in favour of keeping it alive.

I'd be in favour of keeping it alive if we could somehow switch momentum to exploring all the transit options in a broader corridor study - and I've been suggesting this but the TTC commissioners owe Joe P and Mayor Miller too much and are too linked to party politricks to really push transit. There's a strong advantage to switching over the focus to a transit focus as all three governments are aboard with doing something, and there's a \$50Mill reserve fund collecting interest already, but it's for cars.

Yet it's a horribly costly mistake to support Metro-era planning, both for multi-millions, the missed transit options, and the harms to the transit systems.

I'll try to be logical, though it's a complex situation, and I don't have the resources nor skills to send along maps etc. etc.

Basically there's a huge travel demand east-west along the waterfront into the core - still. GO is a mainstay, but demand exceeds capacity, and the Gardiner/Lakeshore is also horrendously clogged at times with pollution and time-wasting congestion, though there's largely SOVs and no car-pooling.

There's also a pinch-point at the base of High Park near the Humber which limits how much can come into the City, unless we start more lakefill. I think this is a logical spot to start on a corridor study for the best ways of bringing people in, both for dollars and sense. In theory we have the theory right, with our transit-first OP, but we refuse thus far to look at transit options in a more logical fashion.

GO is the obvious fix for taking some of the traffic away - and if one GO train takes out about a lane of car traffic, the two lanes of FSE could be wiped out by the costs

(more or less) of moving the GO tracks and we'd have maybe \$160 mill of savings/avoided spending. In the time we've been waiting for a decision on the FSE from the Env. Min, over four years, we could have built enough GO trains to take out the Gardiner/Lakeshore, assuming other infrastructure issues were fixed.

It would seem nobody's keen on saving \$160 million.

But it gets worse.

The official City of Toronto position for transit is yes, we are too considering transit, here's the WWLRT, which is now part of the Transit City documentation and is rumbling along with the fuller weight of well-paid staff. Yet it too is Metro-era planning, and it presumes that the FSE is in place, and we are NOT going to let transit be restored to Front St. - Front St. is for cars, despite it being lined with existing dense destinations and connections.

The WWLRT is also in EA processes, and there's little interest in exploring a broader look at things in the form of a corridor study. In the original EA of that line, also now maybe 12 or so years old, I can't quote precisely but they only saw a 2% modal shift for the \$350 million, with the target shift being lower Etobicoke. Again, more GO trains would be waaay cheaper.

It pains me to be against a transit project, but this too gets worse.

The WWLRT doesn't really mention this, but if there's an upgrade to the capacity of the line, then we also have to upgrade the link into Union Station, perhaps another \$150 million. This is in advance of much of the development of the Waterfront (another ?, and I worry that we don't need to block lake breezes from flushing our bad air any further). So we might have c \$half-billion in this WWLRT project, which is second rate anyway.

It's second rate because it's trying to do too many things. It's trying to expedite transit travel in from Etobicoke AND link the Ex to the core for developing the Ex as Joe wants to do, but the link from the Ex to the Union Station is way too twisty and turning and full of small stops to ever really bring a quick trip from the Ex to the Union Station.

As you know, I've been trying to be pro-active and positive and have been favouring adapting the FSE to a Front St. transitway for five years, after a quick start of a couple more GO trains and more recently another quick-start adaption which I'll outline later. The process has left me rather cynical about "carrupt" politricks including progressives and I have a rather dim view of all the alleged goals and progress to "green" and climate change staving actions, as transport emissions have been leading our emissions growth, but we fail to explore transit options right beside a major rail corridor with a heavily travelled and congested carridor beside it into very dense core destinations. But we also seem keen on building subways to sprawl - it's a carazy world eh?

But rather than the GTTA merely accepting and rubber-stamping the plans of the City, I think you should truly refocus some of the multi-millions into a proper corridor study that heeds what citizens wish to have done (transit please), with some effort put into exploring a Front St. transitway and a second transit option on the NW corridor, instead of the Blue 22.

I know this is getting long but...

A Front St. transitway linking Etobicoke to the core could bring a lot of people quickly into the core. I favour looking at what's required to bring transit from the near-ROW of the Queensway over to Dufferin. It may be outrageously costly.

But rather than deflecting the tracks south with a lot of twists and curves etc., just keep going straight on the north side of the rail corridor, where yes, a bit of land would have to be expropriated but not nearly as much as a road would take and some speculative owners wouldn't be as rich, but they'd still get a decent retirement, and there are some smelly things about some of this land too.

A stop at Dufferin, but also a stop at/near Strachan Ave and the GO stop where transfers could take place and Liberty Village could get better transit/access. (This area is a mess and a lot of money should have been spent ahead of the development to

eliminate the at-grade rail crossing which is about twice above warrants I believe - and likely just build a bridge over the thing and too bad for upper Strachan s of King.

When it comes to crossing over the NW railtracks, rather than tunnelling, and removing the cleaned up soil at the Bathurst St. lead refineries that cost us \$40 mill to cleanup to a certain point, a bridge just for transit might be okay, as the heritage aspect of Fort York could be well appreciated by transit riders and the land of the north ramparts clawed back from the rail companies wouldn't have to be clawed back from the cartillery (the FSE encroaches).

From there, Front St. is wider than other streets of the core, and a ROW could be inserted to speed the transit travel into the core with a connection at Spadina too. (This is important as GO doesn't offer much else in the way of stops to link up with transit system beyond Union and the out-of-core Ex)

I've suggested that the ROW be split up so the eastbound is on Front St. and cribbing from an earlier idea of the FSE, a diagonal cut-through a lot at the NE corner of Spadina and Front occur so the westbound ROW is on Wellington, also laden with dense destinations/towers.

There is a need to provide a more robust transit system in the critical east-west lakefront corridor and the WWLRT doesn't cut it, and the TTC is also messed up in this area, and would become moreso with the FSE, because the EA didn't look at what happens to transit when the cars get let off the Gardiner at Bathurst St. There's a wrong assumption that everyone dutifully and obligingly carries along on Front St. even though the practice of the daily tide of cars is that it behaves like a toxic flood through whatever entry point is given. So the TTC commissioners and city staff etc. are ignoring this little problem while they wear their other hats and the majority of them support the FSE because of the party politricks trumping their logic, though in some cases that's not the case, as there's not a high amount of transit logic there in the first place.

So I strongly suggest that a first order of business for the GTTA with the waterfront aspects of the Transit Ctiy plan etc. is to first resolve what of say 10 transit options to the Front St. road folly are the more logical, and provide a proper screen with all costs attached of all the implications of the various road and transit improvements in the broad swath of the core east of the pinchpoint of the lower part of High Park, with Queen St. as the northern boundary (actually use the alignment of the 1949 Queen St. "subway", the Waterfront on the south and the CBD east of Yonge St. as the east boundary.

These 10 transit options are:

- more GO trains
- some other rail-corridor using transit from Etobicoke to the city
- yes, the WWLRT
- a Front St. transitway
- a King St. ROW
- a Queen St. ROW
- the 1949ish Queen St. subway idea
- the moving to 2011 plan that had a subway under Front St., that the feds recognized as a reality so they put the CBCs studios atop their building to cut out subway rumble - how many extra million was that I wonder?
- a hybrid of the FST and King St. ROW attained by diverting some of the King cars down on the east side of the NW railtracks to Front St. and on the eastbound use the remnant strip of the lands and gardens trust lands for our waterfront enjoyment thanks Gov. Simcoe that's now a nicely graded spur line from track level to street level at Spadina
- a variation of this that extends up to Queen St., which may be built over soon because of the goofs by the City and the lack of planning and control over planning, and how bereft the City is of both political will and transit vision
- a mixing of streetcar types on King and Queen that Steve Munro has suggested on his site
- one other idea of mine, still not totally formulated, but I'm running on empty and should get to some paying work soon vs. this...

The exploration of the hybrid of a FST and the King St. ROW has also fallen upon deaf ears and I don't really have much confidence in the TTC and councillors to actually listen to a new idea that doesn't fit in with their plans. Yet there's very very strong opposition to the ROWs from citizens and there are some reasons for this too - so

despite the blah-blah about the ROWs on King and Queen being in the plans, the streetcars might go on, but the streetcars would be deep and painful, and it's quite possible they'd take a long time to heal, if they did.

The City has been remarkably exasperating in its refusal and inability to rationally explore transit fixes to car congestion in this corridor despite the sustained bull. Even on the air pollution segments which are supposed to be why the EA hasn't gone ahead, the news doesn't get better as today there's a hint of a direct link between air pollution and health problems of obese people. And I don't have a lot of faith in how much exploring of air pollution the City really wants to do in downwind of the Gardiner because they've been approving so many new buildings while ignoring the improving of the transit, which they'll say is a real problem.

And the GTTA - if it wishes to be responsible and relevant - does need to insist that we look at all the transit options because GO is a brittle system and needs a back-up. A Front St. transitway could at least ferry large numbers of people out to Etobicoke if and when the GO messes up for whatever sets of reasons, and this is known to happen, and a lot of people are very inconvenienced with a lot of time and gas wasted.

The savings of doing a Front St. transitway could be perhaps as much as \$300 million, while spending maybe that amount. I don't know - it's just a set of guesstimates. But with the army of paid staff at all the various groups, agencies, and commissions and ministries, if we really did want to push transit for reasons of economic efficiencies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and peak oil, there's a ton of people already on staff, though I also think a lot of the staff are "carrupt", it's not just politicos.

But hiring someone from Europe would also be an option given the c. \$750M in expenditure - some mightn't like to have our "plans" exposed, but I think it'd be an idea cheaper at the price. One might think that even one year's of the interest on that \$50 million in the reserve fund for the road folly could fund such an exploration, and even do a good job - I know \$2million isn't much, but it'd be \$2mill more than has been officially spent on transit options beyond the WWLRT knee-jerk. Heck, one could even have a design competition - hmm.

Euro eyes might also see the potential for expanding transit along the NW/Weston corridor tracks or beside them, kinda like the Weston community coalition urges, but in the form of a busway or an LRT that is yet another unexplored travesty of imagination and circumstance, including near the Queen St. West triangle and 48 Abell site which really should have extra width for transit on the east side of the parcel built right in, but it's almost too late like the melting of the ice caps though we say we fight climate change.

There's also further sustained bull about cycling within the City's presentation. As someone who's been on the frontlines of cycling issues with maybe a decade on the various official cycling committees and other unofficial tilting at windshields, the City is doing dismally on cycling despite the blah-blah. We have minimal progress on a deficient bike plan, and similarly we seem very immune to embracing any new directions, let alone basic-bike friendly repairs. Safe east-west travel in the core is a great need, yet little is happening, including waiting for about two years for a study about how impossible it is to squeeze cars a little bit beside the Bloor subway and repainting the track-free Bloor for bike lanes at \$25,000 a km. for 8kms of a solid bikeway, even though other cities have had the political will and smarts to squeeze cars a bit beside their subways, and presumably not just 40 years after the subway was opened.

Recent events are putting a lot of the report into question anyway it seems.

If you ever wish to have an admittedly costly idea about improving the eastern end capacity of the Bloor subway advanced please advise, but I can't donate the ideas so much anymore as this five-year fight against the FSE folly is rather destructive and draining, and the Bloor St. bike lane has been a two year campaign, though it was raised in the Bike Plan consults.

I'll also try to get around to circulating this a bit more widely within political and citizen circles, though I'm reasonably sure it's not what everyone wants to read.

This may not function as a deputation, and I'm not sure if you are accepting deputations, but I am quite convinced we're making some major mistakes with many costs.

Please circulate this within your circles though, including perhaps to Mr. McPhail, and I do hope that you are able to consider my strong, long and detailed reservations about how flawed our "planning" actually is.

Sigh. But thanks for reading.

Carmudgeonly

Hamish Wilson