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Re: Report No. 4(a)
Procurement Authorization – Advertising on the TTC

The issue of advertising on TTC vehicles and property, and the degree to which a sponsor would be allowed to pre-empt the TTC's image for their own purposes, takes on a new urgency in a Toronto where we seek revenue anywhere. Public space is now a commodity to be sold, not a benefit to be enjoyed free of commercial distractions.

Beyond these comments, I am not going to lecture the Commission on the appropriateness of using sponsorships as a revenue tool, but rather will ask basic business questions of the proposed contract with Pattison Outdoor.

What rights will Pattison gain through this contract? From past experience, we know that the creeping presence of vendors such as BMO hawking the credit cards in subway stations was allowed under the old contract although I doubt anyone foresaw this when it was approved. Does the new contract, and its revenue stream, cede control of our stations to advertisers, or is there some ability to constrain what they do? Would the Commission void the contract and lose its guaranteed revenue if it denied a proposal to remake a station in an advertiser's image?

Station makeovers cost a lot of money, typically tens of millions of dollars. What proportion of a project's cost would an advertiser need to cover to gain naming rights, and for how long? If the public sector pays, say, 90% of a project's cost, why should a private sector sponsor get exclusive naming and advertising rights?

Will "naming" include formal renaming of a station, a route or a rapid transit line including all references in signage, literature and online information?

Will sponsors expect a higher level of station maintenance and equipment reliability in return for their investment? What additional operating costs will be triggered, or resources diverted, to keep sponsored stations in first-class condition?

Earlier in this meeting, we heard a discussion of the designs for the new Spadina extension stations. After spending substantially on the architecture and décor, will we sacrifice this to the makeover inherent in a sponsored station?

We also heard about the desire for new station names such as "Black Creek Pioneer Village" for "Steeles West", and other stations have proposed new names. Will names that are the outcome of community consultation and preference disappear when someone purchases a station?

Ryerson University is touted as a potential name for Dundas Station. Could the University of Toronto “sponsor” York U Station?

I have no doubt that the Commission will approve this contract and welcome any extra revenue they can receive. However, the report recommending this action is totally silent on what, exactly, Pattison Outdoor will get as-of-right in the contract, or what policy framework they will work within.

Through this decision, Toronto will commit to twelve years of a major change in the look of our transit system in return for a comparatively small amount of new revenue. We deserve far more clarity and openness about what we are selling, and what, if any, control we will have on the product.