

Region surplus to go to reserves, capital transportation program

By RICHARD VIVIAN
The Champion

Halton Region will put a \$20 million surplus into a capital transportation program and reserve funds despite the efforts of several councillors to offer a tax break.

"It's important to recognize that the majority of the surplus comes from non-recurring items," said Jane MacCaskill, Halton's commissioner of corporate services. "We don't know how these figures may change."

The bulk of the surplus is the result of a \$6.4 million decrease in Greater Toronto Area pooling costs for 2001 and a \$1.8 million accrual reversal related to previous GTA pooling years.

The pooling is a required and fluctuating payment made to the Province to offset social service costs.

The surplus also represents a \$4.5 million reduction in the allowance for tax appeals and \$2.5 million in Provincial Offenses revenues from 1998 to 2000.

"These numbers (pooling expenses) could change. We have no control over it," Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale reminded council. "We should never use this sort of one-time surplus to fund operating costs, because that money may not be there next year."

At Wednesday's meeting, council approved a staff recommendation that saw the surplus split between the transportation capital program (\$8,273,528), the social housing reserve (\$3,726,730), the police debt charge surplus reserve (\$694,933) and the police tax capital reserve (\$1,323,855).

Several councillors spoke against the surplus distribution, saying the money, at least in part, should be used to decrease taxes.

"We aren't reducing taxes that our tax-

payers paid too much for, we're simply putting them in reserves," said Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison. "Some of that money should go back in the taxpayers' pockets through tax reductions."

Added Councillor Rick Malboeuf, "When we have a budget deficit, the onus is on the taxpayer to make up that shortfall. I believe that when there's a surplus, some of that should be returned."

But the surplus is being used to protect taxpayers from spikes in expenses (mostly pooling) in future years, pointed out Regional Chair Joyce Savoline.

"We're using the money to protect the taxpayer from the spikes that will occur — this is not a maybe — in the future. Reserves aren't a hidden fund," said the chair, adding the Region doesn't deal in deficit budgets. "I'm not in any way embarrassed to say that we have healthy reserves, because we are using them in a very responsible way."

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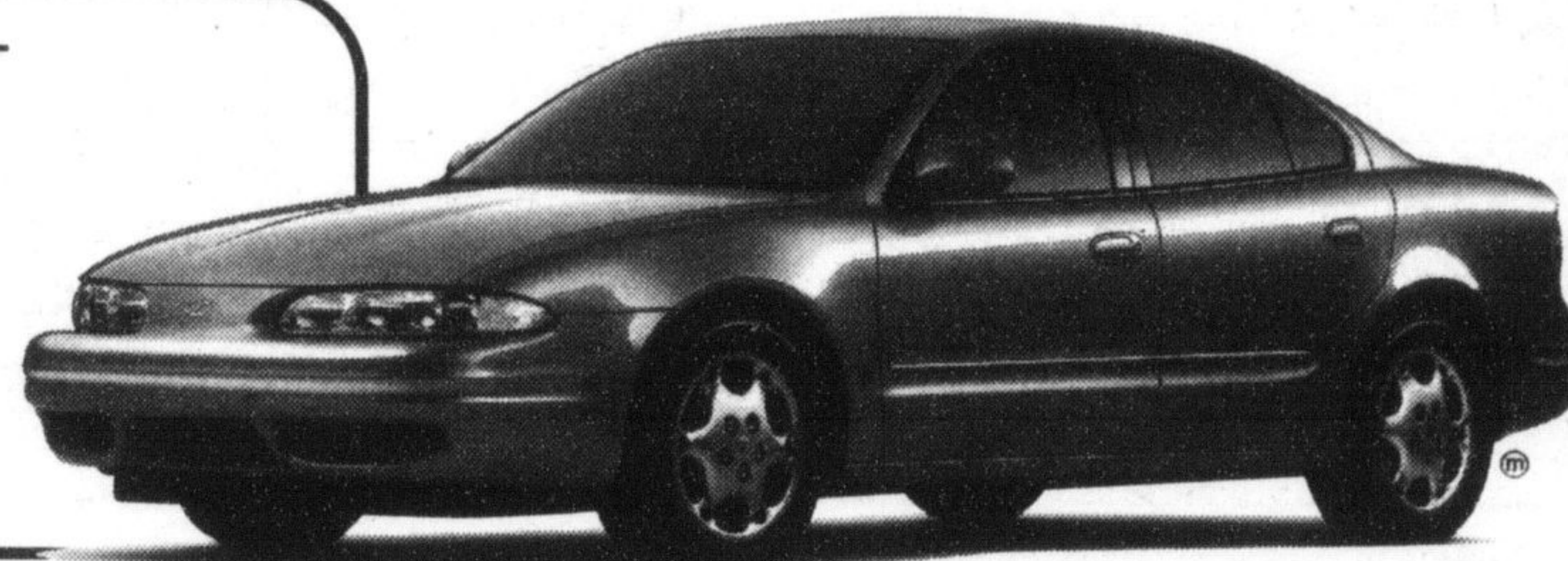
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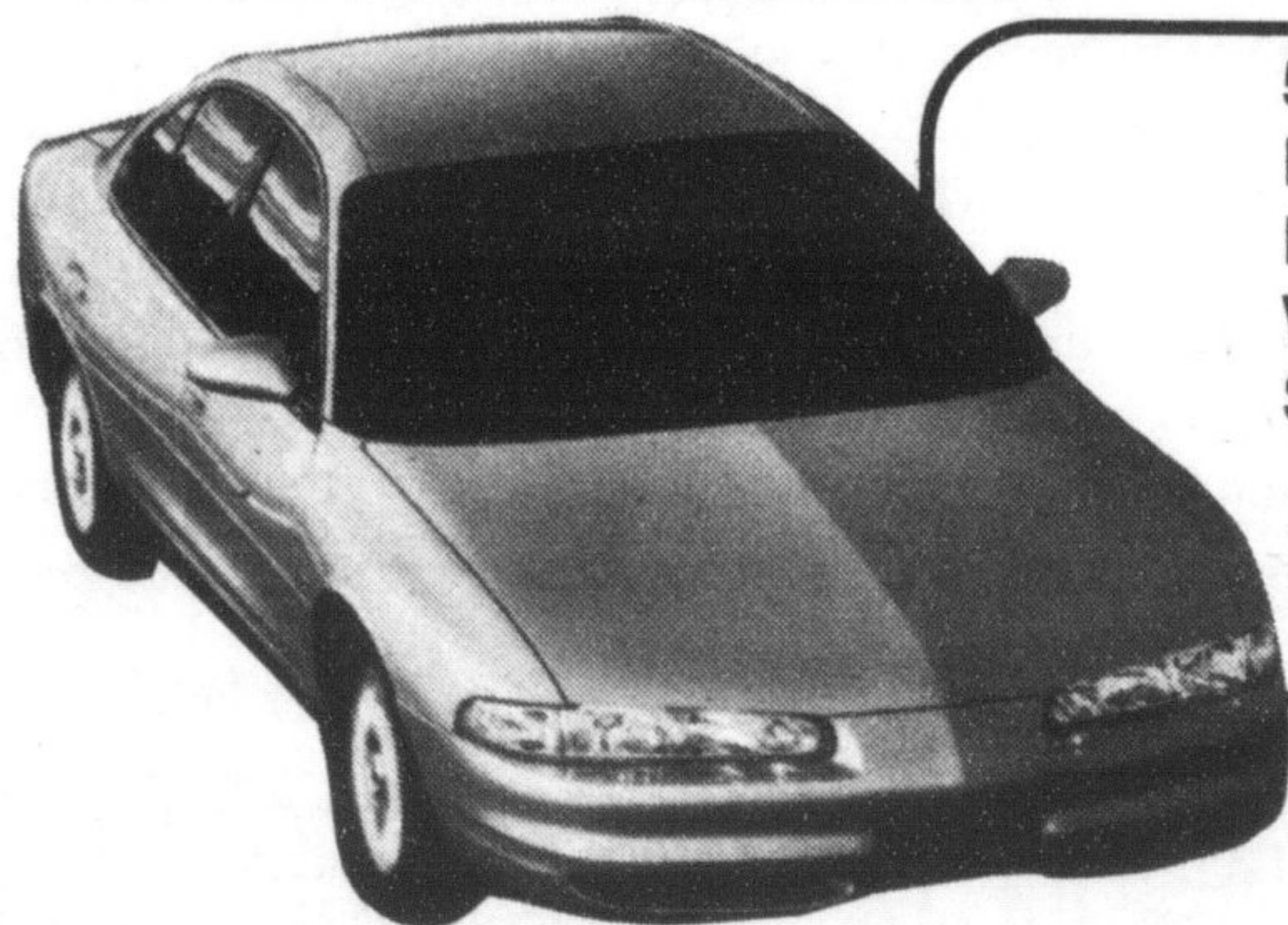


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