

# Traffic gridlock — what's the solution?



Everyone has experienced it. Many endure it every day. It's the ordeal of being stuck on a traffic-choked highway or road staring at an endless line of brake lights. *Shifting Gears*, a three-part Metroland West Media Group special series, reveals that traffic congestion not only has serious social and environmental implications, it also impacts the economy at a cost of more than \$6 billion annually. Here is part three.

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Greg Hill isn't a happy camper. After spending the last few months cycling to work, the Milton resident has had to revert back to driving. Until winter turns to spring and the weather improves, he'll be stuck in slow-moving traffic, wishing he could pedal his way past the long queue of vehicles on Derry Road.

Hill, 55, isn't an avid cyclist, nor is he a recreational pedal pusher. His decision to bike to work was two-fold: rising fuel prices was an economic driver and knowing that he'd have the ability to zoom past stop-and-go traffic was another great motivator.

On May 27, he left his car keys behind and biked to work in Mississauga for the first time.

In Waterdown, Philip Homerski is getting a lot of mileage out of his vintage 10-speed bicycle, which he purchased for \$20 at a garage sale in Burlington. Three or four times a week, he makes the 10-km commute to downtown Hamilton astride his gently-used bike. (Visit [insidehalton.com](http://insidehalton.com) for a video of Homerski on his morning commute.)

Hill and Homerski are among a growing number of people opting to use alternate modes of transportation to get to and from work.

According to the National Household Survey, 12 per cent of commuters relied on public transportation for the longest part of their trip in 2011 — a 1 per cent increase over the number of Canadians who reported taking public transportation in the 2006 Census of Population. Of the more than 1.8 million public transit users, 63.5 per cent commuted by bus, 25 per cent by subway or elevated rail, 11.2 per cent by light rail, streetcar or commuter train and 0.3 per cent by ferry.

In 2011, some 880,800 commuters reported walking to work, while 201,800 pedaled their way to their destination. In Hamilton, the number of public transit users is up 0.6 per cent, while the number of people who walk to work is down by 0.5 per cent.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, Toronto, which includes Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills, saw a 0.2 per cent increase in the number of people who cycled to work compared to data collected in 2006. However, the number of people who walked to their place of employment decreased from 4.8 per cent to 4.6 per cent.

## Two million morning trips in GTHA

According to a Metrolinx report, more than two million automobile trips are made during peak travel periods each morning in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), a region that spans 63,359 lane-km. By 2031, that number is expected to balloon to three million.

Municipalities — and the Province — are grappling with the problem of traffic congestion. With the average commuter spending more than 80 minutes trying to get to and from work and the economic impacts of gridlock exceeding \$6 billion, there's no question that a solution is needed. But what that solution is and how far it is from materializing varies depending on whom you ask. Some suggest building new roads or expanding



Greg Hill of Milton often cycles to work. His commute takes him down Derry Road and into Mississauga. *Eric Riehl / Canadian Champion (Follow on Twitter @halton\_photog)*

existing roadways. Others are pushing for increased public transportation networks. A few say a cultural shift is necessary.

According to a Metrolinx report, if we don't act now, traffic congestion will worsen, negatively impacting the region's economy and impairing the quality of life of many families.

"I think that the 400 series highways, they'll be completely gridlocked without some massive investment in public transit or people making what you would call more rational decisions about where to live and where to work," said Darren Scott,

a full-time professor and associate director of McMaster University's school of geography and earth sciences.

The Province is moving ahead with plans to implement aspects of The Big Move, a Metrolinx project. The \$50-billion, 25-year transportation infrastructure plan calls for more than 1,200 km of rapid transit to be built so that more than 80 per cent of GTHA residents will live within two km of rapid transit. The plan, when completed, would also see more than 7,000 km of new lanes, trails and pathways constructed for pedestrians and cyclists. The aim is to make walking and cycling safe and encourage healthy lifestyles.

If The Big Move goes as planned, in 25 years, commute times will have decreased despite a 50 per cent population increase in the GTHA.

So far, \$16 billion has been committed to Big Move initiatives, such as the Mississauga Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, the York Region vivaNext Rapid Transit project and the Toronto Union Station revitalization.

Plans for The Big Move's next wave include the implementation of a \$600-million Dundas Street BRT project, which would see 40 km of new dedicated bus rapid transit lanes on Dundas Street from Brant Street in Burlington to Kipling Station in Toronto. This project is currently in the planning stages.

Flamborough Councillor Judi Partridge is calling on Metrolinx to consider extending that BRT project to service Waterdown, which

## transportation study timeline Mid-Peninsula Highway and Niagara to GTA corridor

