

Telecommuting becoming more common: Oakville Chamber president

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It currently offers limited access to public transit.

Other Big Move projects include a \$1.7-billion investment to improve service along 121 km of the Lakeshore West and Lakeshore East GO Train lines between Hamilton, Toronto and Oshawa.

According to Metrolinx, the GO Lakeshore Express Rail project, which is also in the planning stages, will provide more frequent, faster and higher capacity service by upgrading the existing trains from diesel to electric propulsion.

GO rail service expansion in works

A \$4.9-billion GO rail service expansion is expected to bring two-way, all-day service on the Milton, Kitchener, Barrie, Richmond Hill and Stouffville lines.

Metrolinx officials said the expansion, which has no clear completion date, would bring fast and reliable regional transit service in and out of downtown Toronto through the day, in the evenings and on weekends.

Project funding is always an issue, said Bruce Zvaniga, Burlington's director of transportation.

"But sometimes, it's actually the easiest aspect of a project to address," he said.

"The hardest one is actually figuring out how

best to spend the money, not how to get the money. And that's often the challenge: Where do you spend your dollars first; where is the valuable investment?"

Metrolinx has posited several funding strategies, ranging from a one-percentage point increase to the harmonized sales tax to a business parking levy to a regional fuel and gasoline tax.

Mike Spicer, director of transit for the City of Burlington, believes that municipalities must prioritize their goals in order to move people throughout the region.

Burlington is doing just that by revamping its Transportation Master Plan. Spicer would like to see the flow of traffic move at a reasonable pace and believes plans that improve roadway accessibility to all users will result in moving people quickly and more efficiently.

"I think we have opportunities to do things differently and look at things a little differently than we may have done in the past," he said.

Some businesses are accepting that challenge, in an attempt to circumvent gridlock that keeps employees from getting to work in a timely manner.

"One of the solutions that is becoming more common is telecommuting. So people will work at home for a couple of days a week.

That certainly takes people off the roads," said Oakville Chamber of Commerce President John Sawyer. The new Siemens office in Oakville is a good example of that.

"They have 800 employees who work out of that building, but at any given time, when you go there, there are probably about 400 people. The rest are telecommuting," he said.

Acknowledging that some businesses are more adaptable to telecommuting, Sawyer said another solution includes allowing employees to work flexible hours so they do not have to be on the road during peak periods. It's a strategy that some Oakville businesses are attempting.

No single solution, says Zvaniga

Zvaniga believes that there's no single solution to gridlock.

"I think the problem is, when we look to improvement, what we often do is make it easier for people to live further from where they work," he said. "We put in HOV (high-occupancy vehicle) lanes and now the drive to Toronto doesn't seem as bad if you can find someone to ride in the car with you," he said.

A combination of improvements to regional transportation, including more frequent GO Transit service and the possible implementation of dedicated truck lanes on the Queen

Elizabeth Way (QEW) and 400 series highways, could relieve the pressure, noted Zvaniga.

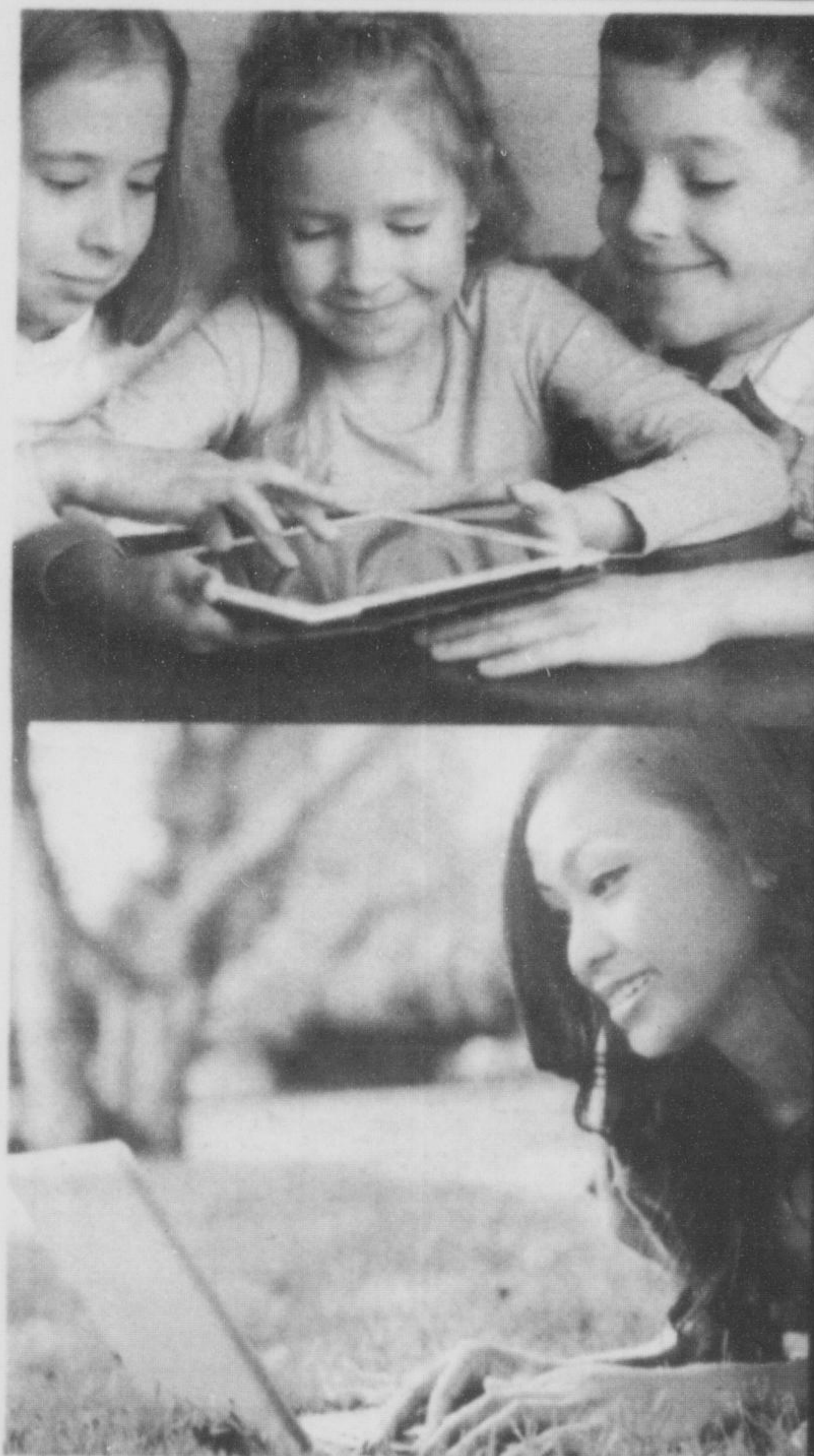
Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn, who's also parliamentary assistant to the minister of transportation, said he has been bringing the problem of traffic congestion to the government's attention for years.

As a result of his own experiences commuting back and forth between Oakville and Queen's Park, Flynn said he is working on a number of initiatives aimed at easing the gridlock problem.

He has identified some areas of concern, including the time it takes to clear relatively minor incidents on the highway.

"Nobody has been hurt, the tow trucks are there, the police are there. What's at stake here? What is the investigation about? Is it going to result in charges under the Highway Traffic Act? Are the insurance companies going to have a beef about whose fault the accident was?" he asked. "When you look at the amount of money involved in that, compared to the amount of money and productivity that is being stalled in the traffic jam created by that relatively minor incident, you realize it makes good sense to do a much better job at clearing these."

Flynn has been working with the Minister of Transportation to iron out some kind of



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