

GO funding pits Toronto against York

LISA QUEEN
Staff Reporter

York Region mayors say local taxpayers should keep the \$90 million they will contribute to Toronto's social costs this year if the city refuses to pay its share of GO Transit expenses.

"I think that's fair. I'm getting a little sick and tired of some of the stuff coming out of Toronto," said Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell, who chairs the region's transportation committee.

"You're not far wrong," Markham Mayor Don Cousens added.

They were responding to news reports that Toronto planners will release a report next month complaining about the city's \$23-million annual contribution to GO.

The report will argue it's unfair for Toronto taxpayers to pay for a service they don't use.

But Bell and Cousens say York taxpayers are in the same boat, because the province is forcing them to help pay for Toronto's social services.

York will contribute \$92 million to Toronto this year, but have no influence over how that money is spent.

And while York taxpayers will pay an average of \$50 to \$100 extra this year, Toronto taxpayers are enjoying a tax freeze.

"Fine, send us back our social money if you won't pay for GO. I'd be happy to be quoted on that," Bell said.

For the most part, GO serves residents from York, Peel, Halton and Durham regions, going to Toronto for work, sports and cultural events.

With the province no longer funding GO, Toronto is being

asked to pay 49.9 per cent of GO's \$100-million annual operating costs.

York's share is 11.2 per cent, which local politicians say is unfair because the region receives only four per cent of GO's service.

Peel will pay 15.6 per cent, Durham will pay 10.6 per cent and Hamilton-Wentworth will pay 3.1 per cent.

Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman is outraged his city is picking up almost half of GO's costs.

"It's the most ridiculous thing I have ever seen or heard in my entire life," he told the Toronto Star.

"Here we are paying 100 per cent of the TTC and the 905 are paying nothing but their fare. It's costing us over \$100 million above the fare to subsidize the TTC. Yet with GO Transit, 85 per cent of the people who use it are from the 905 and beyond."

Bell and Cousens suggested Lastman is griping as a way of getting more money from Queen's Park. Toronto received \$150 million in special loans and grants earlier this year, after Lastman complained about the impact provincial downloading will have on the city.

"Lastman just blusters and moans and complains and good things happen (for Toronto)," Bell said. "Maybe we should be crying and moaning and groaning too."

Bell argued Toronto benefits from GO because its downtown office towers — which pay huge property taxes to the city every year — are filled with workers living in the 905 communities.

If those businesses can't get their employees to work on a dependable transit system, Bell warned they could leave Toronto.



GLAD DAYS Above: Ontario Education Minister David Johnson presents a plaque to Glad Park Public School principal Walter Chewchuk at the official opening of the school last Thursday. Below: From left at the Glad Park ribbon cutting are principal Walter Chewchuk, student council president Scott Goldman, school council co-chair Marg Drudge, director of the York Region District School Board Bill Hogarth, trustee Virginia Hackson, board chair Bill Grothers, Durham-York MP Julia Munroe, Minister of Education David Johnson, and area superintendent Diane Finlay.

Photo by STOERD WITTEVEEN



Primary French phased out

JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Reporter

French in Grades 1 to 3 will be phased out for York Region public school students, because the province will no longer fund the program.

The new provincial funding formula eliminated grants for primary French, forcing both the York public and separate boards to decide whether to keep the 40-minute-a-day program.

The separate board hasn't decided whether primary French will continue.

The public board will phase the program out over a three-year period, beginning with Grade 1 this September.

The 40 minutes, now dedicated to French each day, will be added to other subjects.

Superintendent Jaimini Randev said most boards don't offer core French in the primary grades, introducing the subject in Grade 4.

When the North York board began offering 20 minutes a day in Grade 3 a few years ago, the concept was eventually adopted locally.

The recommendation to phase out primary French was presented at the budget meeting Tuesday night, but nobody appeared to oppose the decision.

Randev said those who do support the program can appear before a future meeting of the board.

Radio repairs cost \$500K

RICK VANDERLINDE
Staff Reporter

They say lightning never strikes the same place twice — but York Regional Police aren't taking any chances.

Last summer, two of the force's radio antennas were knocked out after lightning struck a King Township tower.

It was the first time in 25 years that lightning has crippled the force's radio transmissions.

"I don't know if it was because of El Niño or what, but it's never happened to us before," Insp. Bruce Herridge said.

When the lightning struck, radio transmissions were compromised for about two days while the antennas were replaced.

The force plans to make sure it doesn't happen again by placing "redundant" antennas at a lower level on the tower.

If the top antennas are knocked out, the others will take over.

It's part of an overall plan to boost the force's radio trans-

mission capabilities, in the face of increased "white noise" in the atmosphere.

"The market has been flooded with cellular phones and pagers, and that's causing some noise problems for us," Herridge said.

"It's not so bad that it's violating (federal) standards, but it is creating low-end noise."

An added problem is the proliferation of subdivisions in the

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region's south end, causing signals to "bounce around."

"It's not just skyscrapers that can cause the problem," Herridge said. "Low-lying buildings are a problem too."

About \$500,000 has been set aside in this year's budget to fix the problem.

Airport can fly if given the chance: owner

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to the services and support available at Buttonville.

Rubin insisted he needs a chance to prove his case, and said he can't understand why Cousens would want to see an airport built in Pickering when it could be done in Markham.

wants us not to be here," he said. Rubin said a GO train runs through at far end of property, so the rail line could bring in cargo or passengers from Toronto.

He is skeptical on plans for a Pickering Airport, but argued if one is built eventually, Markham Airport could be turned into a maintenance facility controlled