

**TRANSPORTATION: Greater Toronto mayors put pressure on minister**

# Province refuses call to use gas taxes for GO Transit funding

BY LISA QUEEN  
STAFF WRITER

Despite heavy pressure from Greater Toronto mayors, Transportation Minister Tony Clement said Queen's Park is too cash strapped to hand over any of its fuel tax to help fund GO Transit.

Clement suggested the Tories may be willing to consider the proposal when the provincial deficit is eliminated.

But after assuming \$2.5 billion in education taxes from local property tax bills, he said it's not reasonable to expect the province to part with any portion of the fuel tax.

"It's a worthwhile debate. It's not an outrageous debate. It may be a premature debate."

Clement neglected to mention that in return for taking over more education costs, the province passed on a number of new costs to municipalities, including social housing and provincial highways.

The swap was supposed to be revenue neutral, although many mayors and councillors insist they were saddled with the lion's share of the costs.

Clement's argument didn't sit well with the mayors, who met

for their monthly meeting in Oakville Friday.

"My eyes welled with tears when you were telling us about uploading (of education costs)," Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell said.

He pointed out the province's Who Does-What panel recom-



TONY CLEMENT

Transportation minister rejects plea from mayors

ended using the fuel tax to help fund transit systems three years ago.

"It's been talked about for years and years and years. It's long overdue," said Bell, who chaired the panel's transportation committee. "It's time to get on with it. It's not premature."

Other GTA politicians agreed.

Toronto Councillor David Shiner argued that when drivers fill up their cars at the pump, they assume a portion of the fuel tax goes directly to roads and transit.

On average, for every litre of

gas, 14.7 cents goes to provincial taxes and 13.6 cents went to federal taxes in 1996.

According to Shiner, handing over one cent of the provincial tax would put \$50 million in the pockets of municipalities.

Cities could then use that victory as leverage to get one cent of the federal fuel tax, he reasoned.

"One penny is all we're asking for."

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion accused Clement of being hypocritical.

"Why in the world did you turn over GO Transit to us without these answers?" she said.

"If the fuel tax is premature, then the turning over of GO Transit is extremely premature. It's as simple as that."

Mayors were also frustrated Clement refused to grant them the power to operate cameras to catch drivers who run red lights, although he did agree to discuss the issue with cabinet.

"A few months ago, I was almost killed by a red-light runner. It's a personal issue," Ajax Mayor Steve Parish said.

"The roadblocks that have been put up (by the province), in my mind, just don't carry any weight."

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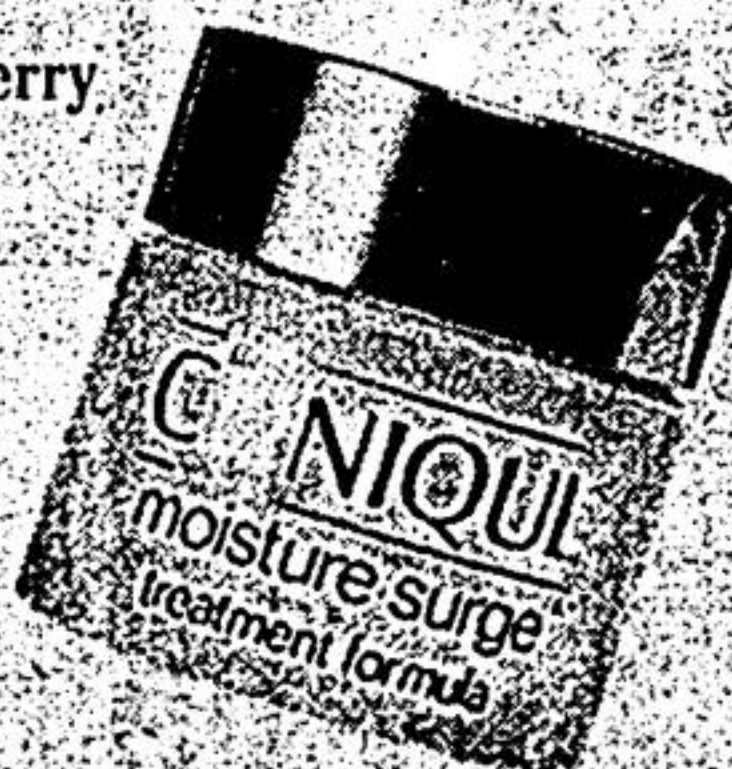
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