

GREATER-TORONTO OFFICIALS WILL FOCUS ON GETTING PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR CARS AND ONTO A TRAIN IN \$5-BILLION, 20-YEAR PLAN

Trains key to future transit scheme

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

Whenever you talk to your neighbours, friends, co-workers or family, transportation in and around Greater Toronto invariably becomes a topic for discussion.

Getting back and forth from work is often the hardest part of any traveller's day, with horror stories aplenty of gridlock, traffic jams, overturned vehicles and crazed motorists. But arriving at the cottage is no picnic either, nor is getting your son to a supertime soccer game 30 minutes to the east.

To say nothing of the 250 million trucks that dart across the highways, loaded with goods needing timely delivery.

Traffic congestion is costing the economy nearly \$2.5 billion a year and, with the GTA expected to add 2 million residents over the next two decades, the situation will only worsen if actions aren't taken.

On Friday, the Greater Toronto Services Board is set to unveil a comprehensive document outlining proposed solutions to traffic congestion for the 70 per cent of freeways that are operating at total capacity during rush hours and interior roadways that are unable to handle the crush of new homeowners.

Armed with a \$550,000 budget, the GTSB has fine-tuned a plan first released in January that details an ambitious approach to transportation that will require the next 15 to 20 years — and about \$5 billion — to fully implement.

"There is no question that over the last 15 years, no one in the GTA, as well as the provincial and federal governments, have done anything like this. We are all equally guilty of not doing what needs to be done," explained York Region chairperson Bill Fisch, who also heads the GTSB's transportation committee.

Ironically, Fisch was 10 minutes late for an interview yesterday morning, after a stalled truck slowed traffic on Leslie Street to a crawl.

"For the first five or 10 years, we will just be catching up to what should have been done. We can budget programs from year to year, but the dollars are so high that people will just not see the changes fast enough. It will take three to four years before one more GO train gets added because we have to wait for improvements at Union Station. There has to be some patience," Fisch said.

The core of the report deals with improvements for GO Transit, with all-day service in York Region, plus increased train and bus services. It is the most inexpensive way of getting people out of their cars.

The report touches on a variety of solutions, including co-ordinated transit services, extended subway and GO train lines, reserved bus lanes in rush hours, various lanes and loops to allow buses to bypass lines of traffic and no-parking, standing and stopping zones on key bus routes.

High occupancy vehicle lanes, and rapid transit across Hwy. 7 and Hwy. 407 are other options, although a deal would have to be

struck with the private consortium that bought the electronic toll highway from the province.

The plan establishes key transportation centres, or transit gateways, across the GTA, where commuters could park their vehicles, purchase tickets and grab transfers to rail and subway lines, as well as rapid transit services.

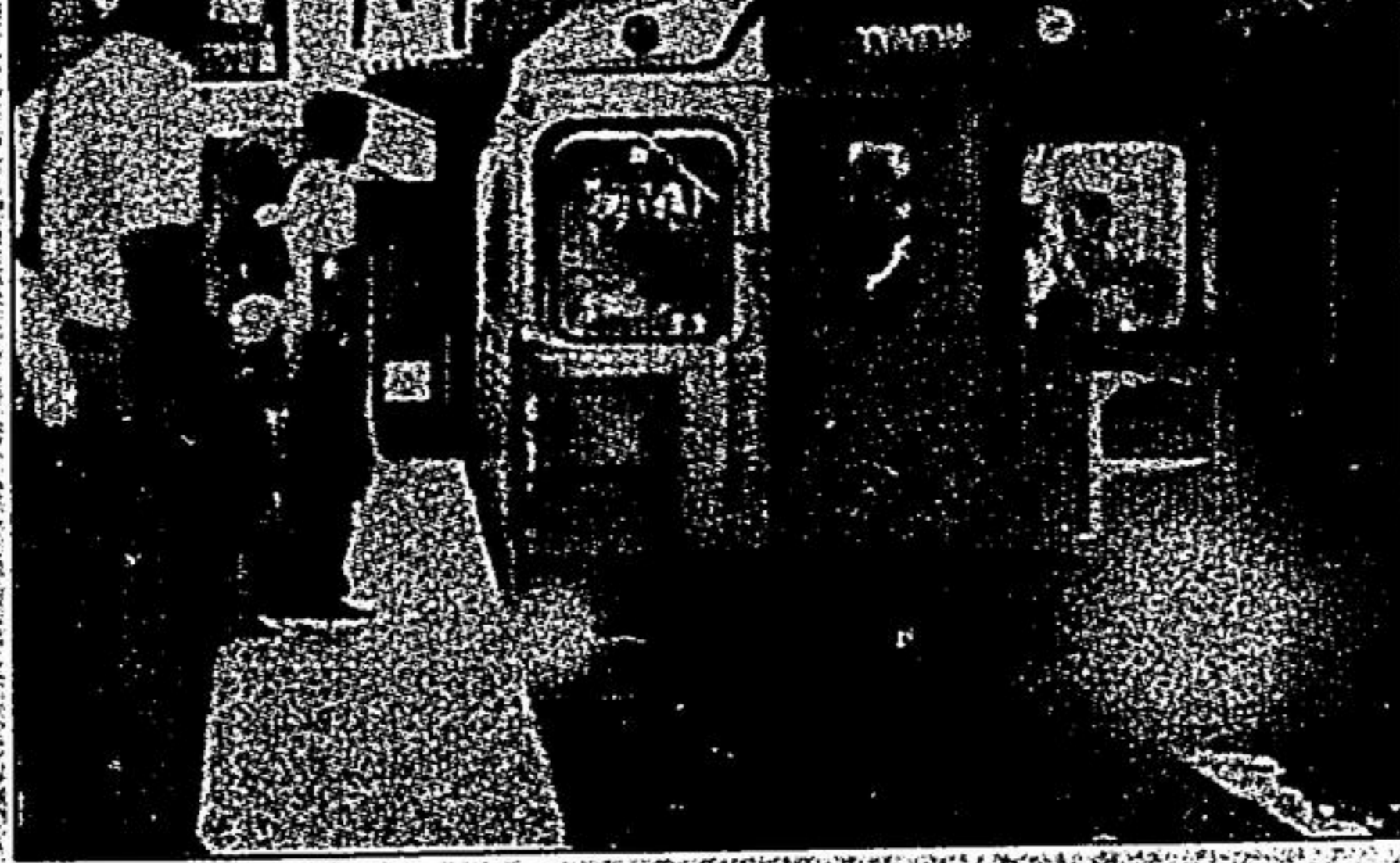
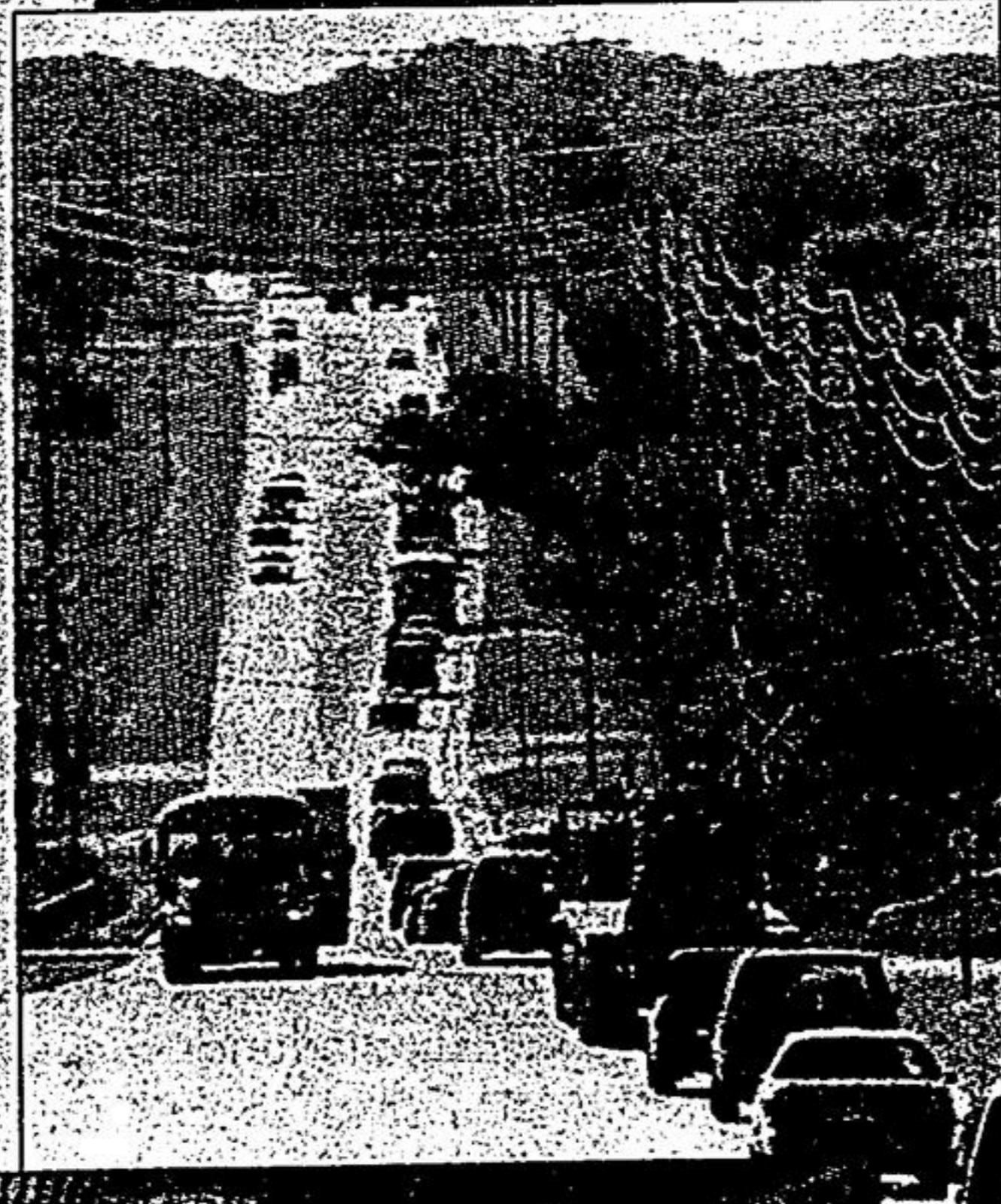
"People have to be convinced to get out of their cars and into a comfortable train," said Fisch. "There must be an attraction of getting downtown smoothly."

"As much as we love our cars, it's no fun to sit in traffic for 35 to 40 minutes. The idea is to have as much room for everybody so we won't have the delays. The GO system is already successful and people love it. Once Union Station is upgraded, we can improve the number of lines going in and improve the number of lines going north-bound."

Although the report will be released Friday, it will be early fall before the GTSB's finance committee identifies funding methods for the projects.

Fisch envisions such measures as gasoline taxes and licence fees being used to raise capital, plus a new development charge on all new residential units with upwards of \$600 per home directed toward transit needs.

However, the dol-



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Bill Fisch,
York chairperson

The Greater Toronto Services Board will unveil a \$5-billion, 20-year scheme that will focus heavily on getting people to leave their cars at home and hop on a GO or subway train to work every day.

lars are enough to scare the most staunch of supporters away, according to Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell.

"It scared the hell out of GTA politicians when it was first raised two years ago," said Bell. "When we first put a price tag on it, all of a sudden we looked around and wondered where everybody went."

"But the GTA is supposed to be the economic engine of the province and this cannot get dumped because no one wants to spend the money. It has to be a priority. We have talked about a dedicated source of funding for a long time, but it is going to take one heck of a sales job to get this done."

Locally, the region has budgeted \$108 million for transportation improvements this year, including widening of a dangerous stretch of Hwy. 9 west of Newmarket and the first stage of the Markham bypass from Hwy. 407 to Hwy. 7.

As well, the region is attempting to establish the York Transit Committee by January 2001, pooling existing bus services from area municipalities into one seamless system.

But with 19,000 new residents expected in York Region this year alone, Fisch says the future of GTA's transportation woes rests in the GTSB's massive undertaking.

"If we make this happen, we will have one heck of a success story," he said. "And if not, it will be one heck of a failure."

Highlights of York Region's portion of the GTSB transportation strategy, set to be released Friday morning.

Enhancing GO Rail Services

- Extending rush-hour service on the Bradford line between Union Station and Newmarket.
- A two-way, all-day service on the Richmond Hill line between Toronto and Richmond Hill.
- A two-way, all-day service on the Stouffville line between Markham and Union Station with extended rush-hour service to Stouffville.
- A new line serving Woodbridge, Kleinburg, Bolton and Downsview, joining the Georgetown line north of Weston station.
- Extension of the Richmond Hill line to Vaudor, and the Stouffville line to Uxbridge.
- A new line serving east Markham, plus a new north Toronto connection between Richmond Hill and Milton.

GTA Transit Corridors

- Transit corridors could accommodate rapid transit vehicles such as buses, streetcars, subways and commuter trains, including along Hwy. 7, and Hwy. 407 through Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham.
- A transit corridor from the proposed Vaughan Corporate Centre through York University and on to the Downsview subway station.
- A transit corridor along Yonge Street from Newmarket, through Aurora and Richmond Hill to the Finch subway station.
- A transit corridor along Hwy. 48 from Markham to the Scarborough RT line.

Enhanced GO Bus Services

- Service will connect smaller urban centres to the GTA transit network, including Kleinburg, King City, Schomberg, Nobleton, Oak Ridges, Holland Landing, Sharon, Queensville, Mount Albert, Keswick, Jackson's Point, Sutton, Pefferlaw and Uxbridge.

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