

# Transit trouble demands new ideas

York Region woman studies innovative transportation solutions from around the world

BY PATRICK CASEY  
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Four years ago, Frances Eddleston was shocked at the lack of transit options she faced after pulling up stakes from her longtime home in Toronto and moving to York Region.

Today, not much has changed for the native of Hemel Hempstead, England, a naturopathic physician who has now established a practice in Newmarket.

Greater Toronto highways are stressed with commuter and business traffic while rates continue to rise on the Hwy. 407 toll road, making the convenient east-west route too expensive for many drivers.

There remains only two early-morning GO Transit trains offering commuter service from Bradford to Toronto on weekdays and York Region has less than five months before the Jan. 1, 2001 deadline to implement a regional transit system.

But instead of accepting the norm, Eddleston has spent her free time documenting examples of innovative methods various countries are using to help their citizens get around.

Around the world, long-abandoned train tracks are being revamped, with governments, private businesses, unions and banks forming alliances to address their transportation needs, including the introduction of magnetic levitation trains, high-speed and very high-speed trains, as well as upgrades to existing services that will entice users out of their cars and on to the rails.

"In England, after British Rail was privatized, they stripped and restored their trains and it's amazing how service levels have increased. It wasn't until I moved to Newmarket that it became so obvious how poor the train travel is," Eddleston explained in an interview yesterday. "It stands out like a sore thumb."

"People are in love with the North American car, but it's a luxury we can't afford. Widening highways has not worked in England or Europe because it's a three to five-year solution, not a 15 to 20-year solution. The median between the Don Valley Parkway was left for magnetic trains — and what a difference it would make with a train going up and down that highway every half hour."

"We have to be creative in how we do things," she said. "If other countries can do it, why can't we?"

Germany is the only country to introduce a magnetically levitated (maglev) service with magnet trains that float about 10 mm above the track on a magnetic field. Because the train floats, there is no contact with the ground, requiring little maintenance, less noise and travel as fast as 500 km-h.

In 1996, Japan opened a 42.8-kilometre maglev test centre between the villages of Sakaigawa and Akiyama.

High-speed train lines are used in Japan, France, Italy, Germany and Spain, some scheduling service around freight trains on conventional tracks and others using dedicated high-speed railway lines.

And in Italy, the ETA 500 is a very high-speed train that can reach speeds of 300 km-h between Milan and Naples, while a new project in Australia remains in the planning stage.

However, Scott Roberts, assistant vice-president of public affairs for CN Rail, said passenger service is not a profitable venture for the firm, arguing one passenger train costs as much to operate as six freight trains.

*"The services are stressed, but it's not a crisis yet."*

*People only act when there is a crisis."*

"Fast-moving passenger trains will slow down the freight trains," said Roberts. "If you set those six freights aside, it affects everybody, including the lumber customers and automotive industries."

"It has a downstream impact on the balance of the economy."

But Roberts wouldn't rule out CN opening more of its track to other firms, including GO Transit, to make more passenger travel a reality.

"We are a freight railway and we have a plant built primarily to handle freight," he said. "But we can accommodate passenger travel where windows exist and there are potential windows available."

"If GO wants to add additional services, they know which door to knock on to find out what's available."

GO Transit senior information officer Edmund Shea said long-range plans are tied to government funding assistance, while immediate relief involves additional rush-hour trains in centres such as Markham and Richmond Hill that



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Dr. Frances Eddleston displays artists' conceptions of modern rail systems that might take York Region residents to work.

were added earlier this year.

"We know people are not just working nine-to-five and we are adding trains where we can," said Shea. "We are trying to squeeze in some extra trains."

"Major expansion costs a lot of money and there is only so much we can do. Our rush hour is at capacity at Union Station and that remains the key."

Markham Mayor Don Cousens recognizes the frustration level of drivers and says relief will only arrive in the form of funding for subway and rail enhancements.

His vision includes linking several Toronto streetcars together and placing them on existing GO Train lines travelling north on Yonge Street.

"You would have immediate all-day service and you could connect the Richmond Hill line over to Markham to help the south end of the region," said Cousens, adding a pilot project, which could occur within a year, makes more practical sense than a 20-year transportation and transit plan approved by the Greater Toronto Services Board in July.

"The window talked about by the GTSB is not soon enough. Most of the people could be dead, buried or out of business. We can't wait. We are not going to keep the economy going unless we come up with other solutions."

Less revolutionary ideas for train travel improvements include sim-

ply enhancing services on the current trains, with the installation of computer linkups and televisions, or providing daily newspapers and meals.

A gymnasium with bolted stationary equipment could also be installed, with showers available at Union Station.

Yet Eddleston blamed the apathy for change on the transit providers, who have cut service levels in a bid to save money, at the same time federal and provincial governments continue to underfund the system.

"The services are stressed, but it's not a crisis yet. People only act when there is a crisis," she said. "Unless we have an alternative, people will continue to rely on their cars."

"And that will only lead to a tremendous setback in our economy."

Meanwhile, York Region is trying to get its regional transit system operational, with public input meetings scheduled for Sept. 12 in Richmond Hill and the following evening in Newmarket.

"York Region has to get its act together," said Newmarket Regional Councillor Diane Humeniuk, chairperson of the region's transit committee. "We can't work in isolation."

"We have to connect with the Greater Toronto Services Board and other abutting regions to have a strong voice together. And unless other levels of government get involved, we will be in trouble."

## REGIONAL News Digest



### WHAT'S HAPPENING

Glad Days  
August

Stores throughout York Region

Sandra Baker enjoys a bouquet of gladioli and you can, too. Epilepsy York Region is selling the flowers this month at stores including Loblaw's, Wal-Mart, Southbrook Farms, Fortinos and Longo's. Corporations can also get involved. For example, Allstate purchased 220 bouquets this year and some restaurants have purchased blooms to give to their customers. Call 508-5404.

### Skating stars take to ice

Some of the biggest names in Canadian figure skating will take part in the 39th annual Figure Skating Boutique Summer Skate Competition, hosted by Skate Canada — Central Ontario.

The event will be held at the Thornhill Community Centre Aug. 16 to 20.

Canadian ladies champion Jennifer Robinson and fellow team member Jeff Langdon will be among the 960 skaters expected to attend from across Canada, the U.S. and Japan.

Tickets for the event will be on sale at the door. Fans can also purchase a ticket to attend five days of competition for \$15.

### Clarification

A photograph and headline accompanying a story in the Thursday, Aug. 11 edition of the Economist & Sun/Stouffville Tribune inadvertently implied people should not enter a White Rose store at the Yonge and Mulock plaza in Newmarket.


The story, which described in detail the problems shoppers and business owners have with the planning of the plaza's parking lot, did not intend to suggest in any way that shoppers should stay away from the White Rose store.

We apologize for the error and for any confusion the headline and photograph may have caused.



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