

# Feds backing off transit funding 'atrocious'

BY JEFF MITCHELL  
Staff Writer

The federal government has delivered an "atrocious" setback to plans to expand public transit in York Region, regional chairperson Bill Fisch says.

He was reacting to news the feds have balked at a provincial plan to make the three levels of government equal partners in funding a 10-year, \$9-billion plan to bolster transit systems in Ontario.

The proposal, which includes the province re-assuming responsibility for GO Transit, was announced last month.

Fisch said the Liberals are reneging on a promise in their Red Book policy platform to join the transit funding partnership.

"The federal pledge was when the province comes on board, (they would) be there," said Fisch. "We got the province in and they're bailing out."

"It's atrocious, really."

While the province and the municipality can proceed with some improvements to GO Transit and York Region Transit, Fisch says the federal refusal to commit funds puts more ambitious plans, such as light-rail and other rapid transit solutions for gridlock in south-

ern York Region, in jeopardy.

"If they (the federal government) don't come to the table, we'll have two-thirds of the money we thought we'd have and that puts a real damper on the plans we had," Fisch said.

Oak Ridges MP Bryon Wilfert, whose area includes Whitchurch-Stouffville and northern Markham, objected to the criticism, saying the government has a commitment to transit; it may not fit the Queen's Park plan though, he said.

"Make no mistake, we are going to participate in this issue," he said.

With a budget coming out in December, Wilfert said it would be premature for Ottawa to commit to a multi-billion-dollar proposal right now.

"I think it would be imprudent... to suggest we're going to make an announcement on any capital funding until we see what the books are," he said. "Let's see what the budget entails."

There is still money left in a reserve fund created by Ottawa to assist municipalities with infrastructure projects, Wilfert said.

That stance amounts to another cop-out by the federal government, according to Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees.

"It's disappointing but not surpris-

ing," Klees said. "The feds have been long on rhetoric but very short on delivering on transit and other issues."

"There's always an excuse."

Klees said the province will press ahead with its plan to expand transit in partnership with municipalities,

despite Ottawa's lukewarm response.

"We've made it clear we're going to make these investments regardless of what the federal government does," he said.

"It's not something that's an option anymore for the GTA."

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