

Rapid transit will cost: region

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costly enhancement."

Mr. Fisch also pointed to the region's ambitious transportation and rapid transit initiatives, as well as waste management plans. "If we move forward in an aggressive way on all three of those fronts, we're talking about major increases," he said.

Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell, another member of the eight-mayor finance committee, called the budget "humongous" and worries the day may come when services have to be cut.

"My real fear, one that has never materialized in spite of all the downloading, is that we'll

hit a recession, where general welfare costs and social costs will go out of sight," Mr. Bell said. "It's never happened, but it's buried there at the back of my mind. No one is predicting economic gloom and doom, but our job as politicians is to keep any increases as low as we can. We can't just get in there and butcher services."

MODEST INCREASE OK

Aurora Mayor Tim Jones believes ratepayers are prepared to accept modest budget increases when they can see concrete reasons for them.

"What angers people is tax increases for the same level of services," he said. "In the early

1990s, we aimed to keep taxes down and maintain the same level of services. That isn't possible anymore. Barring revolution, you go forward with what you think is an acceptable level of service."

Mr. Fisch said last year's 5.7-per-cent regional tax increase, which added \$70 to \$80 to homeowners' tax bills, was due in large part to waste management services uploaded from area municipalities. "Last year, our regional costs only went up 2-1/2 per cent, but we took on new services," he said.

And he believes residents are prepared to accept increases for better services.

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