

# Gas tax share little help to transit system: Cousens

**York Region gets \$5.6M in provincial revenue sharing plan**

BY ROY GREEN  
Staff Writer

York Region's finance chief isn't happy with the share of gas tax revenue coming from Ontario.

The \$5.6 million coming to the region in the first year of the plan doesn't provide much help in funding transit growth, finance committee chairperson Don Cousens said.

"It's the beginning of something, but I'm not happy with the distribution. It's wrong to see Toronto walking away with so much money and us with so little — and us with so much to do," Mr. Cousens, the mayor of Markham, said Friday.

Toronto will get \$81.5 million in the first year of the revenue-sharing plan and \$355 million over the next three years, more than half of the \$680 million the province is providing to municipi-

pal transit systems in more than 100 communities.

The province collects 14.7 cents per litre in gasoline tax and the Liberals promised to divert one cent to municipalities beginning Oct. 1, with an additional half-cent Oct. 1, 2005 another half-cent Oct. 1, 2006.

The government will allocate 70 per cent of the money based on the number of transit riders in the community and 30 per cent on a per capita basis.

The program will become more relevant in the second and third year, especially when combined with a promised \$5 billion in gas tax revenues over five years from the federal government, regional chairperson Bill Fisch said.

"The provincial money is going to double and it will also increase as our ridership goes up," Mr. Fisch said. "It will probably be about \$15 million in two years and the feds will at least match that. If we're looking at \$25 million to \$45 million a year, that begins to get us where we have to go."

Quick Start, the region's rapid transit program beginning in 2005, will help improve ridership numbers, said Newmarket Regional Councillor Tony Van Bynen, a member of the transit committee.

"Our plan suggests a 30-per cent increase in ridership, which translates into a bigger share of the funds," Mr. Van Bynen said.

Even GO Transit, which will not receive any of the money, is happy with the provincial formula. GO chairperson Gordon Chong says the funds will mean improved connections between local transit and GO.

"If you get more frequent (local) service to tie into our service, our customers benefit," Mr. Chong said.

The government wants to encourage new systems as well as supporting current transit initiatives, Finance Minister Greg Sorbara said.

"In addition to supporting existing transit systems, we want to expand transit systems in areas where there's large population growth," Mr. Sorbara said.

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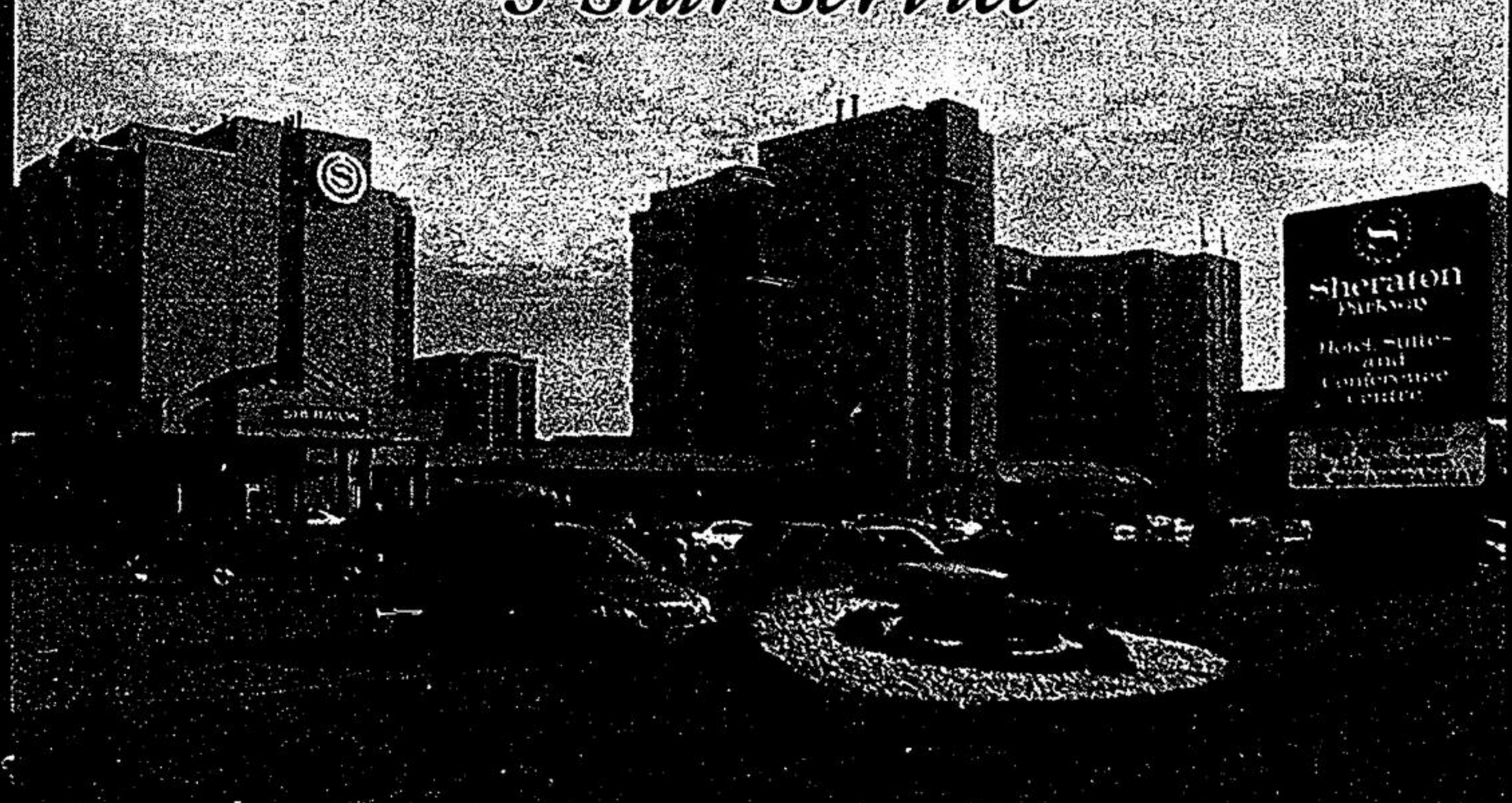
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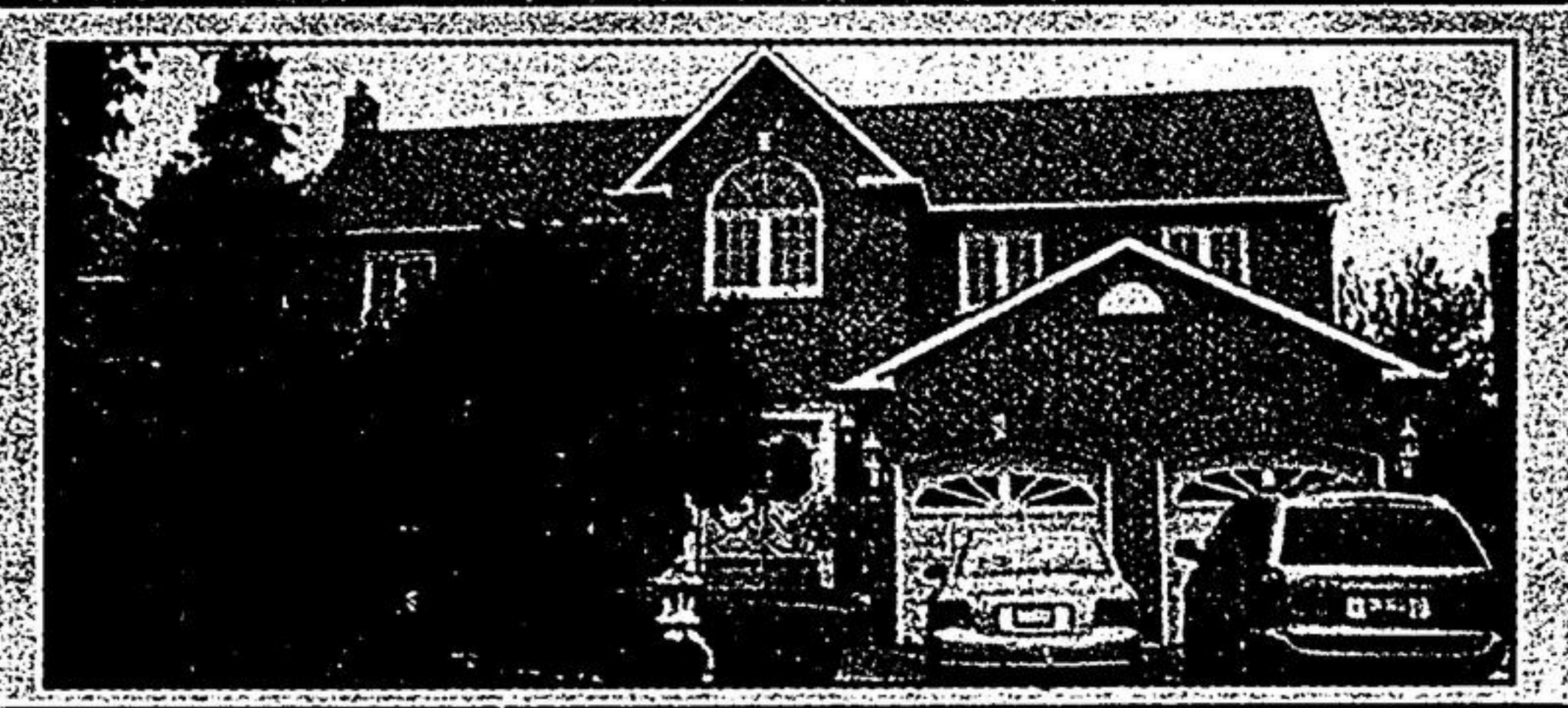
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