

# Municipal, gas tax could be on way to pay for new transit

*All-day GO trains.  
bus ways in plans*

BY SEAN PEARCE  
Staff Writer

Metrolinx's plans might be just the ticket to combat congestion in the GTA, but York Region residents shouldn't expect a free ride along the way.

To raise the \$100 billion needed Metrolinx, formerly the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, is looking at a variety of strategies to fund new and improved transit projects.

They include a 20-cent tax on fuel, road tolls, fees on non-residential parking, increased transit fares and the creation of a 1 per cent municipal sales tax.

That's the word from York regional chairperson and Metrolinx board member Bill Fisch, who said York Region can expect a whole host of benefits when the regional transportation plan is finalized this fall, but cautioned the improved initiatives may cost more than \$100 billion when all is said and done, which means taxpayers will likely have to shell out more to make the plans a reality.

"We'll need four or five billion dollars per year over the next 20 years (throughout the GTA)," he said. "The bottom line is that no matter what level of government it comes from, it all comes from us as taxpayers."

"When the GST went down the second time, I said we should take 1 per cent of that and make it a municipal sales tax," Mr. Fisch said.

"For us, we would have taken it as a transportation tax."

Those are just a select few of the possible funding strategies Metrolinx may end up employing to finance the projects it will outline in its plan and each is expected to generate \$1 billion per year toward them.

Metrolinx also plans to continue lobbying the province and federal government for more funding.

As it stands, Metrolinx has assurances of about \$12 billion in funding from the province, as part of MoveOntario 2020, but is still waiting for a commitment of nearly \$6 billion from the federal government.

Even if Metrolinx had the entire \$17.5 billion announced last June in its coffers, it would still likely require an additional \$82.5 billion over the next two decades.

Building the transportation network of the future is a costly endeavour, but residents can rest assured there will be plenty of bang for the buck, Mr. Fisch said.

York Region residents can expect to directly benefit from the construction of a network of dedicated bus rapidways, the institution of all-day, two-way service on GO Transit's rail lines and other service enhancements.

Indirectly, York Region residents will also win as Metrolinx's initiatives will allow them to travel to Toronto and other destinations much more quickly and efficiently. The introduction of the Presto smart card to the region in 2010 will also make transit a much easier method of travel, Mr. Fisch added.

Even so, there's still a lot more work

to be done, Mr. Fisch said. The need for the Bradford Bypass and extensions of Hwy. 404 and Hwy. 427 still need to be discussed as does finalizing the details for the Yonge Street subway extension.

"The Yonge Street subway has not been approved by Metrolinx yet," he said.

"I'm very hopeful that it will get approved so we can get started on the process by next year. I'm very encouraged by the fact the 'quick wins' included funding for the automated track signals, which is a precursor to building it."

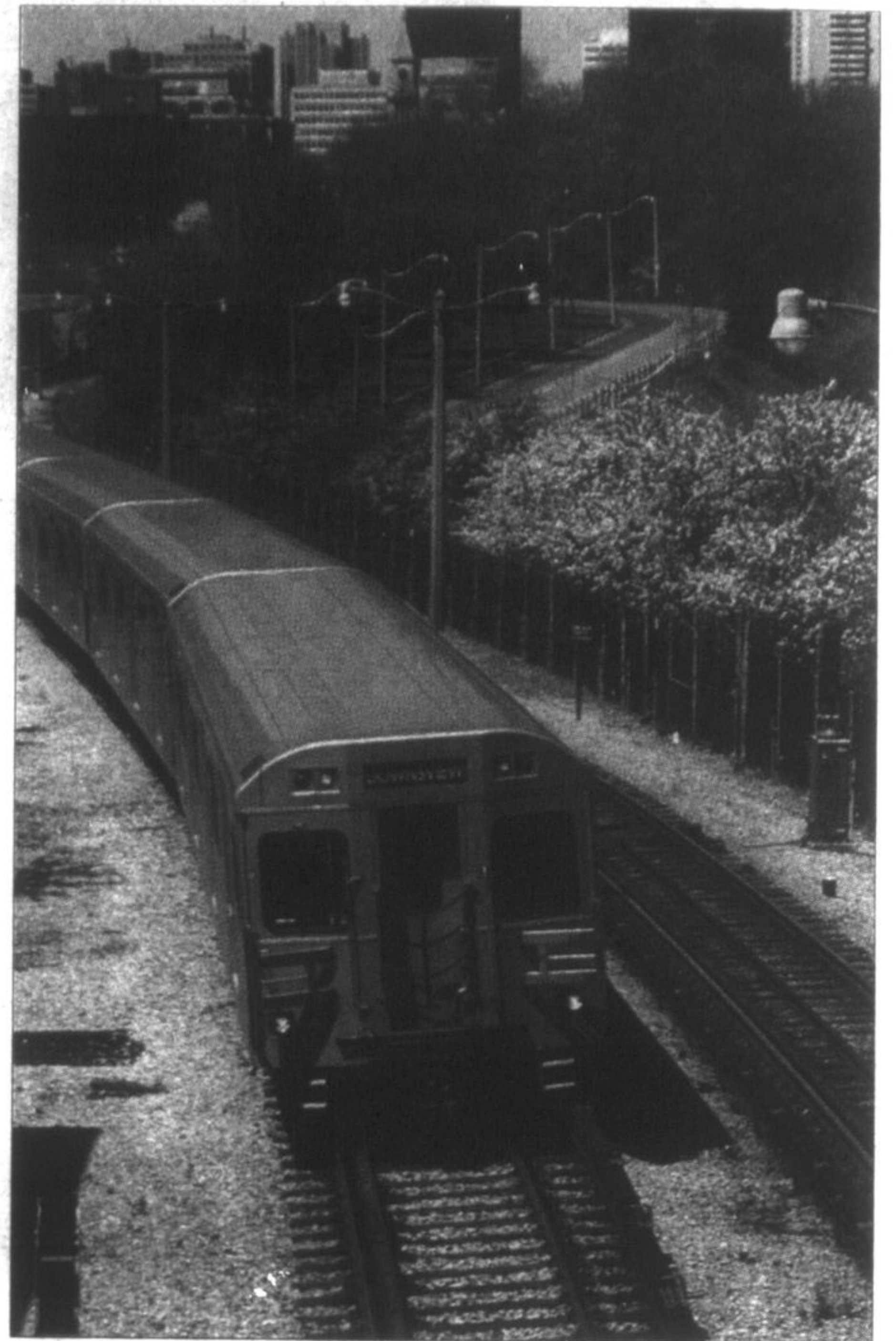
Such uncertainties surrounding key projects proposed for this area has led to some on regional council to express concerns York Region might be getting left behind at the bargaining table.

At the final meeting of York Regional Council before the summer break, Markham Regional Councillor Jack Heath expressed concerns the proposals contained in the white papers were too Toronto-centric.

Toronto is important, Mr. Heath said, but the big picture must be taken into account.

One of his big concerns is Metrolinx's plans have not included a way for transit riders to cross from York Region to Toronto, and vice versa, without paying a second fare.

His other concern is Steeles Avenue. "Steeles would be the best place for light rail or bus rapid transit," Mr. Heath said. "We are running rapid transit up on Hwy. 7, but Steeles Avenue is the border between York Region and Toronto and also runs into Durham and Peel (regions) and yet there's nothing planned for it."



The Yonge Street subway hasn't been approved by Metrolinx, but regional chairperson Bill Fisch hopes to get approval to start the process by next year.

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