

**ELECTION 2010: Funding shortfalls hamper projects**

# Transportation key issue in upcoming election

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Traffic might not move quickly in York Region, but election promises to battle gridlock are flying fast and furiously.

"My issue is always, that's a nice plan, how are you going to pay for it?" said Marty Collier, a traffic consultant and founder of the Transport Futures conference.

Traffic may be a hot topic on the campaign trail, but local and regional governments already have transportation master plans and those are subservient to Metrolinx's overall plan for the GTA, he said.

It's potentially confusing, Mr. Collier said and voters might be better served talking about quality-of-life issues and how to create roads that serve all users, not just cars.

The past four years have been all about putting the rapid in the region's transit.

Viva launched its semi-express service in 2005, but the funding for exclusive lanes for the buses only came through last year.

Just as shovels went in the ground on Davis Drive in Newmarket and Hwy. 7 East, word came down from the province that, as a result of the recession, funding would come slower than expected.

The first rapidway, along Enterprise Drive in Markham, opens later this year, but it will take about 10 years, instead of the planned five, to build the remainder of the system.

Meanwhile, tunnel-boring machines carving out the Spadina subway extension into Vaughan will soon arrive after years of delays. The extension is expected to open in 2015, but for some, that's not good enough.

Vaughan mayoral candidate Mario Racco was a local councillor, involved in landing the original deal to bring the subway north to Hwy. 7 and he now thinks Vaughan Mills, Canada's Wonderland and a planned hospital mean it should be extended to Major Mackenzie Drive.

"I know I will be successful. The only question is how quickly," he said.

Despite the strong words, the reality is there is little more a mayor, or even a local council can do, than lobby and pass resolutions and Mr. Racco knows the subway won't happen without additional federal and provincial funding.

The province has a long-term transit plan that does not include expanding the Spadina line past Hwy. 7 and Ottawa hasn't stepped forward with \$6 billion in funding Premier Dalton McGuinty hoped it would contribute for GTA transit.

"We have to stop playing politics and waiting for an election to give the money," Mr. Racco said.

"We believe we have the solution, but it's expensive."

In the meantime, progress can be made battling gridlock by better co-ordinating traf-

fic lights and slowing the release of building permits until developers have provided necessary road infrastructure, he said.

As another proof of local success Mr. Racco pointed to the reconstruction of Dufferin Street, which includes new landscaping, HOV/bus lanes and bike lanes.

It's what Mr. Collier describes as a "complete street" and it's a model the region is looking at using elsewhere.

But the Spadina extension isn't the only subway expansion on the table.

The region was about to move forward building Viva bus lanes on Yonge Street when the province announced a subway extension on the Yonge line to Hwy. 7 was a priority.

Four years later, the planning is done, the required \$2.4 billion is nowhere to be found and Metrolinx is evaluating the subway's importance alongside other unfunded projects.

In the meantime, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham are continuing work on plans to revitalize the area from Steeles to High Tech Road, adding as many as 50,000 new residents by 2030.

Mr. Racco is one of many prospective candidates touting the need to lobby the government on behalf of the extension, but he is not the only one.

On the Markham side of Yonge Street, Regional Councillor Jim Jones has been beating the drum for the subway and other proj-

ects outside municipal jurisdiction.

At recent debates, he has talked about the need for the 407 Transitway — a provincial project with a 2023 completion date — and even the importance of developing high-speed rail along the Windsor-Montreal corridor.

Markham Ward 2 candidate Marlene Gallyot serves on a community committee in favour of the Yonge subway with Mr. Jones. She would like to see the still-hypothetical line extended to Major Mackenzie.

If southern residents feel like they're playing the waiting game for subways, northern residents and politicians feel the same about highways.

The extension of Hwy. 404, north to Ravenshoe Road in Georgina is considered crucial to developing employment lands and easing movement through Newmarket, Georgina and East Gwillimbury.

After years of talk, shovels finally went in the ground this summer, but promises it would be complete by the end of 2012 were quietly replaced by news July 2013 was more likely.

"At this point, if that's what the province is saying, I can live with that," Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi said. "The 404 is our connection to everything."

The highway is a crucial part of the town's future and one of the things he hears most when talking with local residents, he said.

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