

Coming soon: one million more cars to Golden Horseshoe

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roads, with more than 60 per cent of respondents to a recent Environics poll, commissioned by the Toronto Board of Trade, agreeing the GTA's roads have reached a "crisis point".

A survey conducted by Leger Marketing for the CBC found half of Canadians surveyed said they would pay \$3 a day for road tolls.

Another poll, conducted by Angus Reid for the Toronto Star, showed 37 per cent of Torontonians moderately support and 18 per cent strongly support the idea of a congestion charge — a fee levied on motorists in

a particularly congested part of a city.

Inaction is not an option, according to some experts.

The Greater Toronto CivicActionAlliance, a coalition of civic leaders in the GTA, estimates over the next 20 years, about two million people and one million cars will move into the Golden Horseshoe area.

If nothing is done over the next 35 years, the annual direct and indirect costs of congestion will grow from \$6 billion to \$15 billion, the alliance said.

The problem becomes even more complex when considering the \$50 billion Metrolinx estimates it needs over the next 25 years for various transit improvements.

One man has stepped forward with a plan he said could solve many of the GTA's traffic problems.

Just like municipal water, all of Ontario's roads should be metered and paid for when they are travelled on, Transport Futures learning events founder Marty Collier said.

The rates paid would take into account a vehicle's fuel consumption, the time of day and size and popularity of the road used.

This approach is the only way to get cars off the road while raising money for public transit and road repairs and creating green jobs, he said.

Sounds like a gargantuan project, right?

It's not necessarily as big as you might think, Mr. Collier said, noting it could be accomplished with transponders in every car for tracking road use and charging accordingly.

"People often say to me, 'Well, that's just a tax grab', but I say, it's a time grab," the York University graduate said. "People can no longer go where they need to in a reliable fashion. If this got 10 per cent of drivers off the road, all other car journeys could be quicker. It's simple. Would you rather be in the car or with your family at your kid's soccer match? Would that be worth 10 cents per kilometre?"

Before a metering system could be implemented provincewide, trials would have to be completed in commuter towns and cities to test its effectiveness, he said.

That's where York Region's drivers would come in.

"I think York Region might be a place where there would be enough political support," he said. "It was very progressive in its implemen-

tation of VIVA, which had never been done before."

Similar to metering trials in Portland, Oregon, project volunteers would be given transponders and receive rebates from the Ontario government for the 14.5 cent gas tax they pay per litre.

If the trial was as successful in Ontario as it has been elsewhere, Mr. Collier believes car numbers on our roads would be reduced immediately.

As for drivers who choose to stay on the roads, he said Hwy. 407, a privately run toll highway, proves motorists are ready to pay to avoid "busy and dangerous" highways, such as Hwy. 401, which has become the third-busiest highway in North America.

"It's not a silver bullet, but it's a shiny bullet," he said.

Getting cars off the road would also significantly decrease carbon emissions, he said.

One potential stumbling block is getting politicians on board.

In York Region, representatives of both sides of the political spectrum were open to the idea of road tolls, but hesitant to accept too much change at once.

Newmarket-Aurora MPP and Progressive Conservative transportation critic Frank Klees said although he is keen to accept certain kinds of tolling, he had privacy concerns with Mr. Collier's metering plan.

"(High occupancy vehicle) lanes currently restrict people from driving unless they have more than one person in the car," he said. "These lanes are often empty, while the other lanes are full. It's possible to give people a choice to get a transponder to use the HOV lanes, should they wish to pay."

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