

POLITICS: 'Too many backseat drivers,' Opposition leader says

Hudak prescribes PCs to remedy province's woes

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Traffic congestion is making Ontario sick and Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak says he has the cure.

Mr. Hudak stopped by the York Region Media Group's Newmarket office for an editorial board meeting earlier this week to discuss a wide range of topics, including the upcoming provincial budget and health care.

The discussion also touched on congestion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and Mr. Hudak outlined his party's plans to get traffic and the economy moving.

For video of Mr. Hudak's editorial board meeting with York Region Media Group, go to yorkregion.com



As it stands, congestion costs the GTA an estimated \$6 billion annually in lost productivity. At 80 minutes, according to Statistics Canada, Toronto's average commute time is considered the worst in North America.

"Ontario's future success is going to depend on the GTA," he said.

"What's eye-opening is \$1 out of every \$4 produced — not in Ontario, but Canada — comes out of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and if this heart of Canada's economy is clogged up, its arteries costing us more and more of our time every day, we'll never get back on our feet. So we do need to expand our transportation."

Buses and light rail transit will have a role in a PC transportation plan, Mr. Hudak said, but the emphasis will be on highways and subways, including construction of the on-again, off-again Bradford bypass and Yonge Street subway extension to Richmond Hill.

His party's plan would also see the TTC's subways and LRT lines incorporated under GO Transit's umbrella and the GTA's crucial commuter corridors, such as Hwys. 400 and 404 and the Gardiner Expressway, uploaded by the province and overseen by transportation planning body Metrolinx.

"The province needs to seize the wheel," Mr. Hudak said. "There are too many backseat drivers."

Frequently, the agenda on the roads and

transit file is led by local or regional councils, who may not always be looking big picture in terms of establishing an inter-regional transportation network, he continued.

"We've killed a lot of trees with all of these reports, but we haven't made a lot of progress on laying down roads or rails," he added.

By putting more of the transportation system under the purview of Metrolinx and GO Transit (a division of Metrolinx), Mr. Hudak may be moving toward creating a system similar to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, whose service area includes New York City, Long Island, the southeast portion of New York State and part of Connecticut. The MTA oversees the region's buses, subways, commuter rail lines and several bridges and tunnels.

Since its establishment by the state legislature in 1965, the MTA has continued to expand and now serves an area of more than 5,000 square miles and nearly 15 million residents. The authority has spent about \$72 billion during the past 23 years to repair and improve its infrastructure and is poised to undergo its first significant expansion in 60 years, expected to cost \$22 billion.

That being said, the MTA also faces a debt of about \$33 billion.

Transportation is an important issue and the debate over what we build and how we pay for it is quickly coming to a head.

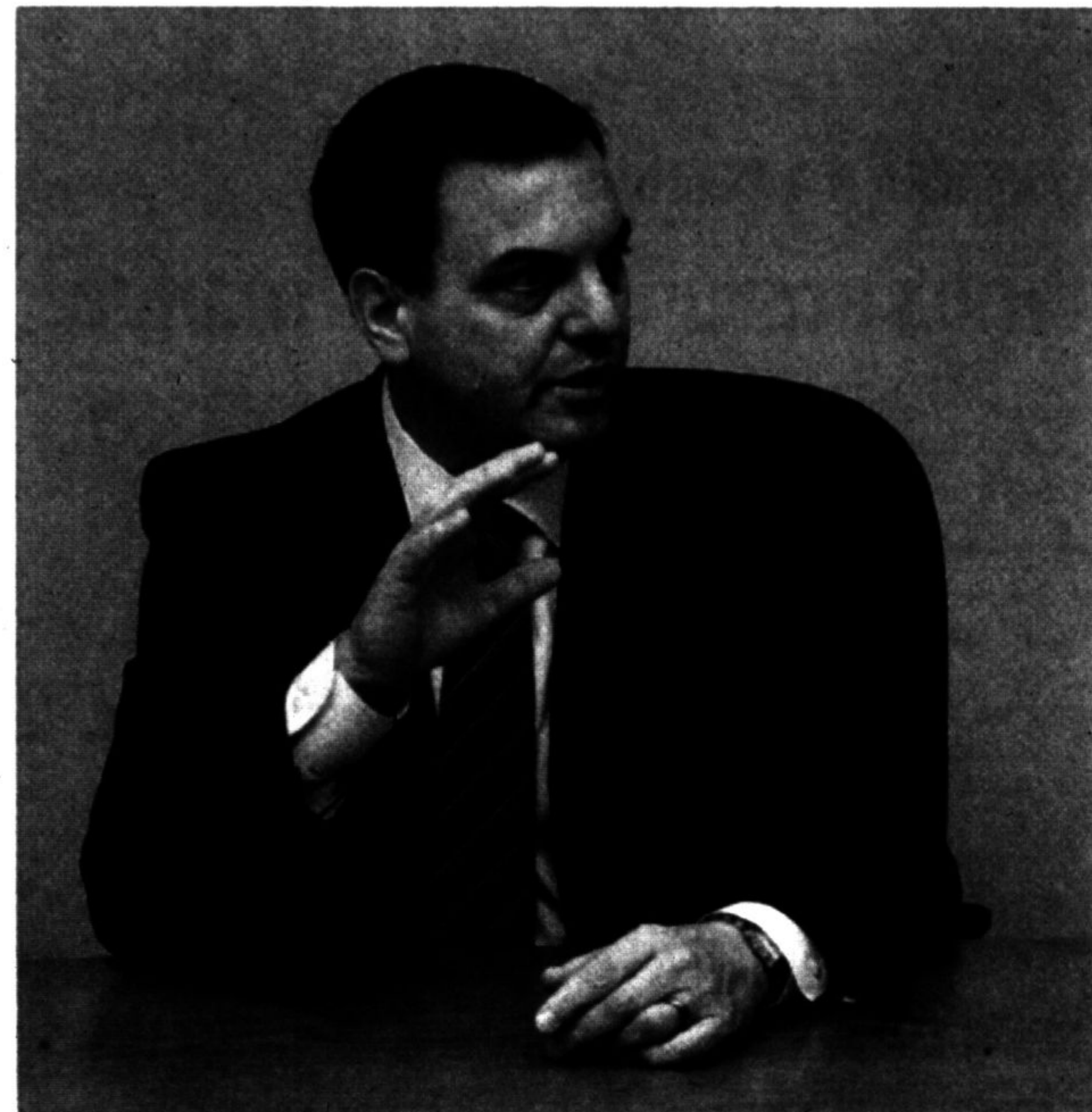
Metrolinx's investment strategy document is due by June 1 and is expected to include recommendations for a series of new revenue-generating tools, such as road tolls, parking fees and sales taxes. Opinions, so far, on the subject have been mixed.

Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne has rhared the construction of new transit and transportation infrastructure one of her big priorities. She has repeatedly said the province needs to take action to repair crumbling infrastructure and build for tomorrow and will have to find a way to pay for it.

The Toronto Region Board of Trade also recently came out in support of establishing new dedicated revenue tools to generate the estimated \$34-billion Metrolinx will need to construct its next wave of Big Move projects.

The board's discussion paper proposes a 1-per-cent regional sales tax, parking space levy of \$1 per space, per day, 10-cent-per-litre regional fuel tax and 30-cent per kilometre toll for single drivers to use high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

If all four were implemented, they could generate more than \$4 billion per year.



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak took part in an editorial board meeting with York Region Media Group journalists Monday.

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