

Mixed emotions about transit plan

BY CHRIS TRABER
AND SANDRA BOLAN
ctraber@yrmg.com
sbolan@yrmg.com

A Metrolinx shortlist of 24 potential public and corporate-funded ideas to raise \$2 billion a year for the next 25 years to fund transit and infrastructure is receiving mixed reaction from York Region taxpayers.

Walter Pilar of Stouffville said some of the suggestions were pretty good, while others were "foolish".

"The cost of setting up tolls is astronomical," he said while waiting for a GO bus to Toronto in downtown Stouffville yesterday.

The recommended 0.5-cent/litre fuel tax that could raise \$300 million to \$400 million a year by 2021 tax "makes no sense," he said.

"Increasing taxes is a no-no," he said.

Mr. Pilar did admit a downtown parking surcharge would get him on the bus more regularly.

He's not a regular rider, but after fighting downtown traffic over the weekend, he opted to hop on the bus for a meeting he had to attend.

Aurora's Elise Ander drives to her Toronto bank manager job daily. She is not impressed by the spectre of gas taxes and highway tolls.

"It's not a heartbreak," she said of the gas tax. "And I agree that it could encourage you to cut fuel consumption, buy fuel-efficient cars and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, but it would also boost the cost of moving goods, affecting business."

What draws her ire are proposed tolls on 400-series highways and some Toronto-owned roads, such as the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway.

They could raise up to \$1.5 billion a year at a cost of 10 cents/kilometre. Installing and administering tolling technology would be costly, but could help reduce congestion, the report stated.

Ms Ander isn't impressed.

"I avoid the 407 because of the expensive tolls," she said, adding she uses Hwy. 404 and the Don Valley Parkway. "In addition to gas, parking and maintenance, they want 10 cents a kilometre? That's about \$16 extra a day to get to work. I'm not liking the math."

Metrolinx may recommend a



WALTER PILAR: Stouffville man says a proposed tax on gasoline "makes no sense" in the GTA.

10-cent increase on the 618 million annual transit trips in the region. It could generate up to \$45 million, according to the report.

Newmarket's Ryley Young relies on GO Transit. Without a car, he pays \$8.25 for a one-way trip to Toronto's Union Station.

He has endured previous fare hikes and anticipates more.

"I don't drive, so I have no choice," Mr. Young said. "GO is still cheaper than a car, so I'd pay."

What many York residents, including Mr. Young, find bothersome are the additional cash grabs contained in the report.

These include an employer payroll tax based on the employer's proximity to transit lines.

Based on 2009 employment figures, a 0.5-per-cent employer payroll tax could raise between \$810 million and \$920 million by 2021.

Also offensive to some is a parking space levy at transit stations, a 5.2-per-cent property tax increase and a 1-per-cent sales tax on consumer goods.

Sean Tucker commutes on GO Transit from Newmarket to Toronto.

The decision was reached when he was paying close to \$30 for parking in private lots. Fare hikes and costs are unavoidable, he said philosophically.

"Unfortunately, it's a fact of life," he said. "Toronto scrapped free parking at TTC stations. What do you do? Add \$3 to park here?"

The whole notion of having



A transit proposal could hit you in the pocket with more taxes and tolls to travel around the region and the GTA.

the public pay for transportation through population growth is "a murky area", Mr. Tucker said.

"You can't ask the province or region to foot the bill," he said. "But, whatever is decided, it has to be in a manner that's not too harsh for the average person."

Newmarket's Ron Kaarto is empathetic to the hurdles Metrolinx faces.

Retired five years, he recalled the years of waiting for YRT, VIVA, and GO connections to TTC lines to his job in Scarborough.

His trek often began before 5 a.m. and, subject to weather, could take three hours one way.

"It's a challenge raising those kinds of funds and sustaining the transportation system," he said. "I'm not complaining. They've all done a good job."

The public transit system works, he said.

"You can get around if you educate yourself," he said, fanning a number of bus schedules.

"What would irk me is a situation where we'd be taxed to the point where it'd be more than the cost of a car lease and insurance. You can't hurt seniors' fares. That would be a rebound scenario and you'd lose a lot of customers."

The report's recommended revenue streams also impact builders.

Municipalities already charge fees to developers, but they can be increased on a per-project basis.

A boost of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per new residential unit would generate \$25 million to \$50 million per year.

Developers could end up paying more for land in the vicinity of specific transit improvements.

Developers or land owners could be required to provide facilities, such as transit stations, cash or infrastructure and they could be taxed on revenue generated by the property. Property taxes could rise to reflect the increased value of the site.

The report also suggests allowing lone drivers to use high-occupancy toll lanes for a fee and tracking your travels through odometer readings or GPS transponders at a charge of .03 cents/km.

Big Move implementation economics: revenue tool profiles, completed by AECOM KPMG and released Tuesday, looks at potential money-makers and ranks them by criteria, such as their sustained revenue potential, cost of implementation and if they could result in positive changes for commuting habits.

The final investment strategy, to be submitted to Queen's Park in June, recommends a blend of levies and taxes on businesses, developers, drivers, commuters, property owners and consumers.

Whitchurch-Stouffville
News Digest

Visit yorkregion.com for more on these and other stories

Justin Hines singing at Parkview celebration

Justin Hines is coming home for a good cause.

The popular singer-songwriter and former Whitchurch-Stouffville resident will perform tomorrow at Celebration of Spring, Parkview Services for Seniors' annual fundraising dinner, at Meadowbrook Golf and Country Club.

The event will also include a silent auction.

Mr. Hines has performed around the world including at the Beijing and Vancouver Olympics as well as the Pan Am Games in Mexico.

His fifth studio album is due for release next month.

He has Larsen Syndrome, a rare joint dislocation condition that requires him to use a wheelchair.

Parkview has been extending care and services to seniors in Stouffville for almost 50 years. It offers long-term care beds, apartments and cluster homes at its property, between Weldon Road and Ninth Line south of Main Street.

Funds raised will support the ongoing care of residents by providing equipment as well as social and recreational activities.

For ticket information, call 905-640-1911 ext. 221 or 905-640-1940 ext. 21.

CORRECTION

Student misidentified

Paige Shaw, 6, of The Progressive Montessori Academy was wrongly identified in a photograph that appeared in the March 28 edition promoting the Young at Art exhibit at the Latham Gallery.

The Sun-Tribune regrets the error.

Inside Out Decorating

We are now open earlier!



6380 Main Street
Stouffville • 905-642-5883
www.insideoutdecorating.benjaminmoorepaints.com

NEW STORE HOURS
Mon. to Fri. 8am-6pm
Thursday 8am-7pm
Saturday 9am-5pm
Now Open
Sunday 10am-2pm

Joanne
Wallpaper

on Sale thru the
month of April



Benjamin Moore