

Regional councillors lukewarm on Metrolinx ideas

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After plenty of debate, York Region decided against putting forward a position on Metrolinx's shortlist of revenue tools.

Newmarket Regional Councillor John Taylor suggested the region should at least express support for the idea of new, dedicated funding sources to support transit and transportation infrastructure expansions, while also making it clear additional property taxes were a not an option.

He proposed sending a message to transportation planning body Metrolinx and authorizing York chairperson Bill Fisch to act on behalf of the region on the matter during the summer council break.

Members of regional council were split on the idea, with most agreeing new revenue tools are needed, but also expressing doubt

the region's input would have any effect on Metrolinx's investment strategy document, which must be submitted to the province by Saturday.

Mr. Fisch was skeptical about how much impact the region's comments would have at this stage and suggested it may be best for council to wait and see which tools end up in the final report.

"We actually had a similar report before us when I was on the Metrolinx board four years ago and we had a discussion on which revenue tools we felt were most appropriate," he said. "I guess that report got buried."

That said, Mr. Fisch had no issue with council informing Metrolinx of its support for revenue tools, in general, and the need to invest more heavily in transit.

Vaughan Regional Councillor Gino Rosati, however, had reservations about oversight

of the funds they would generate and also Metrolinx's ability to live up to its mandate.

He agreed something needed to be done, but worried things could go off the rails in the event of a change in government, for example.

"If we don't do this right, we'll be paying more taxes, with very little in return," he said.

Markham Regional Councillor Gordon Landon advised caution, while Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Vito Spatafora stressed property taxes were off the table.

The majority of council members, including Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen, agreed and added two more options to the "no" column.

"We do need to do something," Mr. Van Bynen said. "However, payroll taxes, new property taxes and fare increases are non-

starters for me."

A number of council members expressed support for a dedicated sales tax, but Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi and several of his colleagues stipulated it must be applied provincewide.

Markham Deputy Mayor Jack Heath emphasized this point and cautioned not doing so could simply lead people to make large purchases, such as automobiles, outside of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area to avoid the tax.

Markham Regional Councillor Jim Jones stated his opposition to penalizing drivers with tolls in the absence of more options and suggested some funding already set aside for roads would be better spent on expanding public transit.

In the end, council rejected Mr. Taylor's amendment on a 10-9 recorded vote.

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