

OPINION



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LETTERS POLICY

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Editorial

Premier's transit panel idea another stalling tactic

ISSUE: Kathleen Wynne wants to pay \$90K to consider Metrolinx transit recommendations.

Are we there yet? York Region commuters — packed on to overcrowded buses and trains or mired in stop-and-go traffic — could be forgiven for feeling a tad frustrated at the pace that oft-promised transportation improvements are materializing.

Certainly, we see signs of progress on sections of Hwy. 7 through Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan as part of the VivaNext bus rapidway project, but it's slow going and, in the meantime, construction taking place on those routes snarls traffic further and adds to the feeling of desperation.

And while the establishment of Bus Rapid Transit lines will no doubt improve the commuting experience for users and motorists alike, York residents are still waiting for some of the more significant projects included in Metrolinx's the Big Move regional transportation plan to materialize.

Earlier this year, Metrolinx's board approved an investment strategy intended to bring in the \$2 billion per year it says it requires to build the transportation projects needed over the next 25 years to alleviate traffic congestion that costs each of us, on average, 82 minutes every day and the economy an estimated \$6 billion annually.

The board's recommendations to the province included a GTHA-specific 1-per-cent increase to the HST, expected to net \$1.3 billion per year, a five-cent-per-litre fuel tax (\$330 million), a commercial parking levy (\$350 million) and new development charges as ways of generating the funds.

Metrolinx has suggested the move would cost an average two-car family \$977 more annually. The recommendations from Metrolinx's board followed months of consultations and public discussion in the media.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation in the GTHA, the

province swept in with an exciting announcement last week: further study.

Yes, rather than attempt to address the recommendations in a more meaningful fashion, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne unveiled a new advisory panel tasked with reviewing the investment strategy and consulting with stakeholders and area residents. Chaired by Dr. Anne Golden, the panel will also look at other options to pay for transit improvements and report back to the government.

Deja vu, anyone?

Progressive Conservative transportation critic and Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees called it a stalling tactic intended to delay making a decision on such a controversial issue.

It's hard not to think that way, given all of the discussion about new tolls, taxes and fees in the months leading up to the release of the investment strategy. Polling has already shown Metrolinx's recommendations aren't popular with taxpayers and the PCs and the NDP have stated they won't support new revenue tools to fund transit.

Given that, what, pray tell, is the panel's purpose? Metrolinx already studied the issue and consulted with residents ad nauseum.

Does the premier imagine the public and the opposition parties will warm up enough to the idea of revenue tools that her minority government will be able to pass them in the spring? Does she anticipate voters will suddenly forget Metrolinx's recommendations and rally behind the Liberal banner in the event of a snap election in the months to come?

Neither scenario seems particularly likely, so why pay Dr. Golden up to \$90,000 to re-visit steps Metrolinx and other organizations have already taken?

If the revenue tools won't fly, then the government needs to move on to its Plan B. If there isn't a Plan B, there really ought to be.

BOTTOM LINE: Transit has been studied enough; It's time for action.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Stouffville short on retailers

Re: Time for big-box lumber store, letter to the editor by Alex Tyrin, Sept. 19, and We need less big box, more Schell Lumber, letter to the editor by Jim McCarthy, Sept. 21.

I agree with Mr. Tyrin and while we're at it, lets build a decent supermarket, too.

We have lived in Ballantrae for exactly three years. You can't get much smaller than that. We have to travel to do any kind of shopping at all. We moved here thinking we could do most of our shopping in Stouffville but soon gave up in frustration.

We now shop in Aurora. It's a little further, but much better. If we were shopping in Stouffville, we would still be supporting the excellent small specialized shops that exist on Main Street, but now that we have to go to Aurora for necessities, we go to similar places there for specialty items. We rarely go to Stouffville anymore.

I'm surprised that Mr. McCarthy didn't notice all the suburban development in the north, south and east areas of town when he moved to what, in reality, is no longer a small town. The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is

happy to allow the sprawling development, which looks just like Aurora or Markham, and happy to take the property tax dollars from all of these homeowners. However they are reluctant to consent to the kind of retail development that is needed in what can no longer be called a small town.

Where do you think a large percentage of these newcomers spend their grocery, home improvement and disposable income dollars? The answer is other communities.

We've shopped at Schell too, but have found employees in Home Depot in Aurora to be just as friendly and helpful. Schell needn't worry about losing business if they were to build a Home Depot at Hoover Park. It will still have the same customer base it has now.

Perhaps Mr. McCarthy didn't move far enough north. Might I suggest Mt. Albert? It is a very nice small town with a Home Hardware building centre. Oh, and a very good supermarket next door.

As much as we all loved the 1960s, we can't hang on to them forever.

P. MOFFATT
BALLANTRAE

Move or lose farmers market, Stouffville

Re: Time to take another look at downtown farmers market, editorial, Sept. 19.

We agree. Time for a change at the Downtown Stouffville Farmers Market — move it or lose it.

Residents won't waste time going to such a poor showing of vendors.

There are many farms in the area that have a better selection of fresh produce and we've started to visit them.

Why should the municipality have to close Park Drive every Thursday for such a poor showing?

THE JOHNSTONS
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

Clearing customs horror for visitors

My wife and I from New Zealand are visiting my mother in Stouffville. We're having a great time, but customs clearance at Pearson airport was a horror.

Forty custom desks with only five of them occupied with customs people check-

ing in thousands of visitors.

Ninety-minute wait. Perfect way to discourage visitors.

Why?

ALLAN ABBOTT
NEW ZEALAND

'Terry Fox Way' OK

Re: A town so in love with Terry Fox warmly embraces his big brother, column by Jim Mason, Sept. 19.

As chairperson of the Whitchurch-Stouffville street-naming committee, it sounds like a good idea to name a street after Terry Fox on the local run's route.

So get the form from the town that is used to request a name, and submit it to us, along with a route map, and hope that it goes through a subdivision not yet named.

RUTH BURKHOLDER
STOUFFVILLE

Bravo, Schell Lumber

Re: Time for big-box lumber store, letter to the editor by Alex Tyrin, Sept. 19, and We need less big box, more Schell Lumber, letter to the editor by Jim McCarthy, Sept. 21.

Mr. McCarthy's response hit the nail right on the head. Having been a resident of this community and a customer of Schell Lumber Home Building Centre for almost 40 years, I feel compelled to have my say and share my experience in dealing with this local business.

I find the staff to be very professional, knowledgeable and experienced. The service they provide is beyond reproach. They are never too busy to listen and to give good advice.

This is more than I can say about some of the staff at the big box stores. If I am getting this type of service from my local store, I must ask the question — why do I need a big box store?

Schell is doing a fantastic job in this community and beyond and it has my full and continued support. With respect to their hours of operation, this is a management decision and they must decide if it is feasible or economical for them to extend their hours or even to open on Sundays.

Bravo, Schell Lumber.

JOHN HALL
STOUFFVILLE