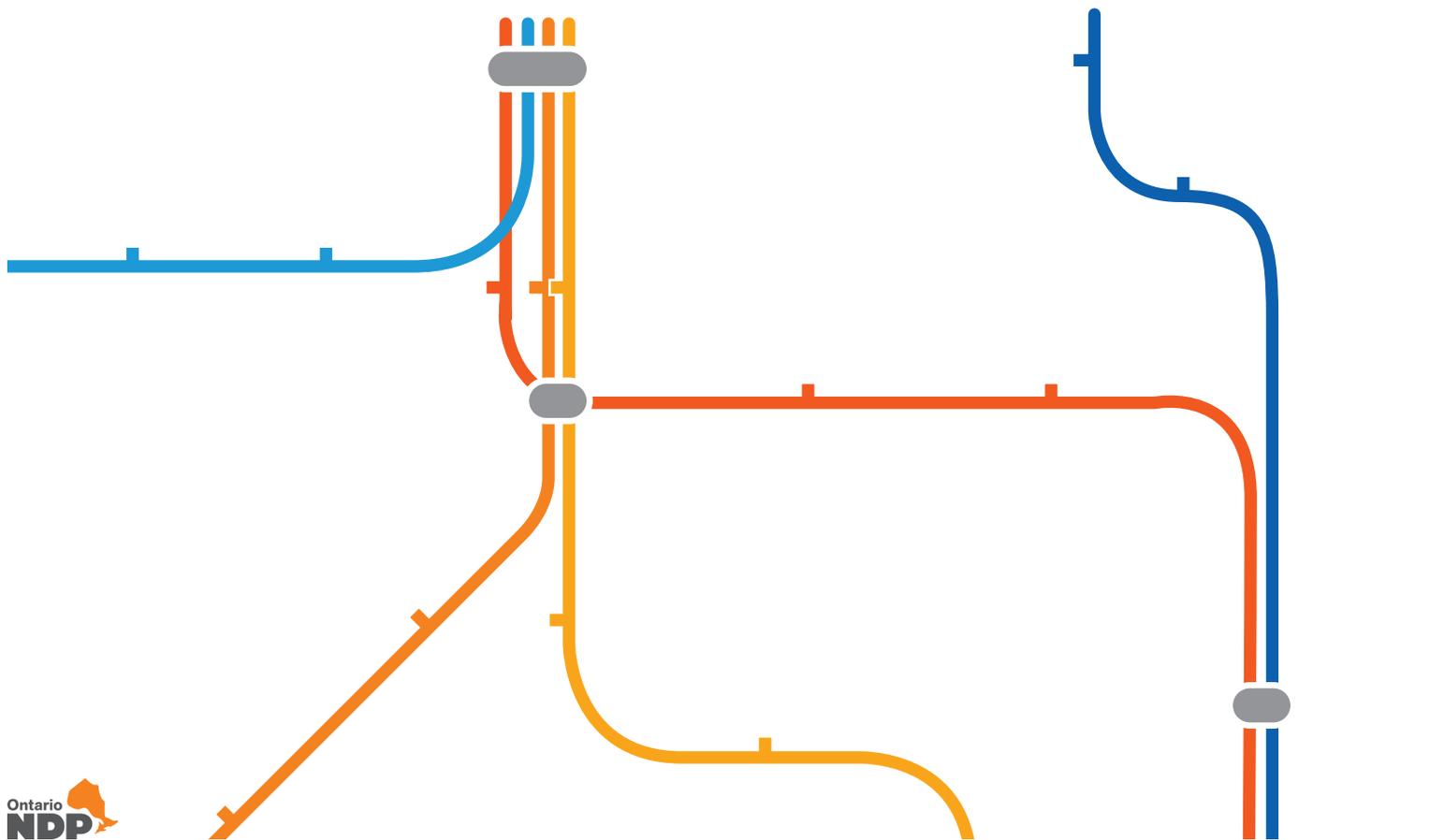


CONSULTATION PAPER ON  
**TRANSIT & GRIDLOCK**





## Letter from the critics

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Ontario families are busy with work, school and family responsibilities. They can't afford to spend hours each day stuck in traffic. But that is the reality today in many cities in Ontario. In fact, people living in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area now face the longest commute times in North America. Traffic congestion is not only a huge stress on families, it constitutes a major drag on economic growth and productivity.

Over the last nine years, government has spent a lot of time talking about reducing congestion, but traffic on Ontario's streets and highways only seems to get worse. Big transit plans are unveiled, but are too often delayed or stalled due to budget cuts or bickering between governments.

Meanwhile cities continue to sprawl and new homes and workplaces are built without access to transit. And little is done to support more active modes of transportation like cycling and walking. Other cities – in North America and Europe – seem to be able to expand transit, reduce vehicle use, and build people-friendly communities. So can we.

We want to hear from you about your priorities and suggestions. And we want to share a few of our ideas.

Together we can reduce gridlock, make transit more affordable and convenient, and build healthy and sustainable communities.

Sincerely,



Rosario Marchese  
MPP Trinity–Spadina  
Critic for Urban Transit



Jonah Schein  
MPP Davenport  
Critic for the Environment and GTA Issues

## Defining the Problem: Worsening Gridlock, Longer Commutes

Ontario families are spending more and more time stuck in traffic.

People living in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) face the longest commute times in North America – averaging almost an hour and a half a day.<sup>1</sup>

And the situation is getting worse. Within the next twenty years, there will be one and half million more cars will be on the roads in the GTHA alone – an increase of 50%.<sup>2</sup>

Congestion is not only a frustration and a stress to families – it hurts our economy. According to the Toronto Board of Trade, traffic congestion costs our economy about \$6 billion dollars a year in lost productivity, an amount that will soar to \$15 billion by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

As well, our heavy reliance on vehicle use is threatening our health and environment. According to the Ontario Medical Association, air pollution causes about 6,000 premature deaths in Ontario each

year and 60,000 hospital visits.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the longer people spend in vehicles, the less time they have to be physically active - a significant problem in a province where physical inactivity and obesity already cost taxpayers more than \$3 billion dollars a year in lost productivity and health care costs.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, vehicle use is a large part of a transportation sector that produces one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario.<sup>6</sup> These emissions contribute to climate change and the costs incurred by extreme weather events.

How have we got to this situation of growing congestion and transportation woes?

One reason is that, in recent decades, investment in transportation has simply not kept up with rising population and demand. Investment in urban infrastructure in the 1960s and 1970s has fallen off over the past twenty years.<sup>7</sup>

Today, cities are expanding, but many new areas are inadequately serviced by transit. There is a lack of coordination of local transit systems across jurisdictions, making regional travel difficult. And transit fares are rising, even as routes are eliminated and service is cut in cities like Ottawa, Mississauga and Toronto.<sup>8</sup>

Too much population growth in Ontario has been in the form of urban sprawl, creating low-density areas that are costly to service with transit. Ontario's Environmental Commissioner has made it clear that while the province's Growth Plan is a step in the right direction towards building mixed use communities, it does not go far enough in ensuring that communities are close to places of employment and adequately connected to and served by transit.<sup>9</sup>

Governments in other places have made strides to expand access to transit, plan transit-friendly communities, and promote active transportation – all of which, when combined, can significantly reduce gridlock.

1 Toronto City Summit Alliance (2010). Time to Get Serious: Reliable Funding for GTHA Transit / Transportation Infrastructure, p. 18. A 2010 OECD report put the costs at \$3.3 billion, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2009/11/10/oecd-traffic.html>

2 Toronto City Summit Alliance (2010), p. 19

3 Ibid., p. 19

4 Ontario Medical Association (2005). The Illness Costs of Health Pollution. <https://www.oma.org/Resources/Documents/e2005HealthAndEconomicDamageEstimates.pdf>

5 Katzamrzek, P.T. (2011) The Economic Costs Associated with Physical Activity and Obesity in Ontario. *Health and Fitness Journal of Canada*. <http://www.healthandfitnessjournalofcanada.com/index.php/html/article/viewFile/112/78>

6 [http://www.eco.on.ca/index.php/en\\_US/pubs/greenhouse-gas-reports/2011-ghg---meeting-responsibilities-creating-opportunities](http://www.eco.on.ca/index.php/en_US/pubs/greenhouse-gas-reports/2011-ghg---meeting-responsibilities-creating-opportunities)

7 Toronto Board of Trade (2010). The Move Ahead, Funding the Big Move, p. 6

8 Residents of Kitchener are facing a 36% fare increase over the next four years. <http://www.therecord.com/news/>

[local/article/659082---transit-riders-face-36-per-cent-fare-increase-over-four-years](http://www.eco.on.ca/local/article/659082---transit-riders-face-36-per-cent-fare-increase-over-four-years)

9 Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (2011). Annual Greenhouse Gas Progress Report. <http://www.eco.on.ca/uploads/Reports-GHG/2011/Climate-Change-Report-2011-endnotes.pdf>, p. 8.

## Ideas

**The NDP is committed to practical action to reduce gridlock. We are convinced there are things that can be done now. In the last election we proposed a transit strategy that included a commitment to fund 50% of municipal transit operating subsidies to municipalities that make transit more affordable by freezing fares, and a significant expansion to transit in the GTHA, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa and Hamilton. Going forward we plan to do much more.**

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## Discussion Questions

*Is your commute working?*

*What's going well?*

*What are the problems you face in getting around?*

*What are your major concerns related to transit and transportation?*

*What would make transportation easier for you?*

## Access to Transit

Improving access to affordable and convenient transit options is key to reducing congestion on roads.

To succeed, we need transit strategies with concrete targets, supportive policies, and sustained funding.

However, Canada is the only country amongst OECD nations without a national strategy for transit. And while provinces like British Columbia and New Brunswick have provincial transit plans, Canada's largest province – Ontario – does not.

Ontario does have a regional transit plan for the GTHA. In 2008, the Ontario government announced The Big Move, a 25-year plan to expand transit in the GTHA. The Plan entails building or expanding subways, GO Transit, light rail and bus lines to create an integrated regional transit system. If implemented, 80% of GTHA residents would live within 2 km of rapid transit.

The problem is that the plan will cost \$50 billion (in 2008 dollars) to implement and the government has only committed \$16 billion and has delayed discussion of where to find the rest of the funding. Without dedicated funding, there is a real danger that badly needed components of the plan – all day GO Transit service, a new downtown relief line in Toronto, light rail in Hamilton – will never be built. Indeed, the government has already reduced funding for light rail lines in Toronto – by \$4 billion in 2010 – delaying their construction by 5 years.

Simply put, progress is too slow. It is unacceptable that Madrid built 150 kilometres of transit lines between 1995 and 2007, while Toronto built just 15 km.

There is widespread recognition of the need to establish a sustained funding base for transit. Municipal leaders, business leaders and unions all call for this. Municipalities – and higher level governments – should explore funding options, but they also need to ensure that funds raised actually go to transit and not general revenues. At the same time, these funding options must not unfairly burden Ontario families who have little alternative to driving their cars and who are already struggling to make ends meet. A public discussion of how to fund transit in a fair and sustainable way is long overdue.

Ontario families need better local and regional transit service, but they also need better options when it comes to longer distance travel. Ontarians have faced repeated cuts to inter-city transportation service. Greyhound cut bus service in Southern Ontario in 2010, and is poised to make cuts in Northern Ontario later this year. VIA has reduced train service along the Windsor-Sarnia-Toronto corridor, and the Ontario government continues to show little interest in moving head with high speed rail between Windsor, Ottawa and Montreal, despite study after study indicating that it is economically viable. Finally, the Ontario government has cut the Ontario Northland passenger rail, which was a lifeline to northern communities, and will only become more important when mining in the Ring of Fire proceeds.

Clearly, the status quo of flashy announcements followed by cuts and delays blamed on the fiscal situation isn't working for Ontarians. And far-fetched promises to build subways everywhere, without saying where the money will come from, won't help either.

Ontario needs a clear provincial transit strategy, with sustained funding, supportive planning policies and clear targets.

## Ideas

**Ontario's New Democrats are committed to practical solutions to improve access to transit now. In the last election, we committed to reinstating guaranteed provincial support for municipal transit operations. We called for an end to backroom deals with developers that have allowed urban sprawl to continue. And we proposed a permanent roads fund to fix up roads in rural Ontario.**

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## Discussion Questions

*What are your priorities for transit expansion?*

*How do you think transit expansion should be funded?*

*Should there be dedicated taxes for funding, or should it come from general revenues?*

*What role should the province play in implementing transit?*

*Can you transfer from one transit system to another (are systems coordinated?)*

## Making it pay to leave the car at home, better use of existing roads

People often think the logical solution to gridlock is simply to build more roads. Unfortunately, past experience shows that road expansions are not only costly, they simply induce more people to drive, making any relief from gridlock short-lived.

A better approach is to reduce demand – particularly at peak periods.

Expanding access to transit options is one way to do this. But government action is also needed to encourage more efficient use of vehicles and road space, and to make alternatives to driving more affordable and attractive.

At present in Ontario, each car only carries 1.1 passengers. Increasing that to 1.4 would remove 344,000 vehicles from the road every rush hour.<sup>10</sup> Given rising gas prices, there is significant opportunity to promote carpooling. Carpooling has taken off in Quebec, with innovative ideas like a government registry, carpooling supported by Laval transit (where the designated driver is actually given a car for personal use)<sup>11</sup>, and even a new taxi-sharing program in

Montreal supported by the Quebec government.<sup>12</sup>

Increased vehicle occupancy can also be encouraged by building High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, which are being installed slowly in Ontario. Flexible work hours and tele-working can also significantly reduce vehicle use, and have been implemented successfully in places like Minneapolis and Washington State.<sup>13</sup>

A barrier to reducing vehicle use relates to the fact that many of the costs of driving are fixed and not linked to usage (e.g. insurance, ownership, license, etc), so there is little financial incentive to leave the car in the driveway and take transit instead. Free parking at workplaces creates a further incentive to drive.

Other governments are undertaking creative policies to address these perverse incentives.

First, governments are making transit more affordable. In Laval, Quebec, transit fares are reduced by 65% on smog days, and in Boulder, Colorado, bus passes are subsidized so that 60% of residents have passes (a law also requires developers of new residential areas to provide free bus passes to residents for three years). The City of Hamilton offers free transit to seniors over the age of 80, and heavily discounted annual passes of \$205 for seniors over 65.

Second, governments are leveling the playing field. California has a “parking cash out” law which

requires employers near transit to allow employees to forgo free parking at work and take a cash benefit instead.<sup>14</sup> Employees who bike to work have also benefited from a \$20/month tax credit in the United States since 2009.<sup>15</sup> Compare that to Ontario where the government made it more expensive to cycle in 2010, when it implemented the HST and ended the PST exemption for bikes.

Third, governments are rewarding drivers who drive less. In 2011, California implemented an option for “pay as you go” auto insurance which offers savings to drivers who reduce their vehicles usage.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, governments can and must make roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Safety is a major barrier to cycling: 60% of Ontarians say they would like to cycle more, but they are “worried about safety on the road.”<sup>17</sup> Provinces like Quebec and British Columbia have invested significant funds in cycling infrastructure like bike lanes and bike storage facilities. Other places – like New York – have expanded bike lanes and opened up streets to pedestrians, leading not only to safer walking and cycling, but also reduced congestion and increased economic activity.

In Ontario, however, the government has taken a go-slow approach to promoting cycling safety, delaying the release of a new provincial cycling strategy for more than two years.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cjad.com/CJADLocalNews/entry.aspx?BlogEntryID=10377528>

<sup>13</sup> Washington State implemented a Commute Trip Reduction law in 1991. <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/ctr>. And in the Netherlands, commuters are paid to avoid certain roads at high congestion times. Closure to home, Metrolinx’ “Smart Commute” program offers promise, although much more needs to be done to achieve the Big Move’s goal of “creating an ambitious transportation demand management program”.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.arb.ca.gov/planning/tsaq/cashout/cashout.htm>

<sup>15</sup> <http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/home/bike-work-20-bucks.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?section=news/consumer&cid=7822215>

<sup>17</sup> When Ontario Bikes, Ontario Benefits (2010), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Metrolinx, The Big Move & Our Environment.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.auto123.com/en/news/the-clic-initiative-green-carpooling-in-quebec?artid=144127>

## Ideas

**Ontario's NDP has shown leadership in promoting action to encourage alternatives to vehicle use, by proposing revised legislation to protect cyclists, calling for a "complete streets" approach to construction of new and rebuilt roads, and proposing a cycling infrastructure fund to help municipalities make roads safer for cyclists.**

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## Discussion Questions

*If you are a driver, what would make it easier for you to leave your car at home more often?*

*What would make other options – walking, cycling, transit – more feasible?*

*In general, what needs to be done to support pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders?*

*Which of the above ideas make sense to you?*

*What other ideas do you have?*

**Tell us what you think.**  
**We welcome your thoughts,  
ideas and experience.**



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