

NovæResUrbis

CITY OF TORONTO EDITION

VOL 14 • 46

FRIDAY • NOVEMBER 19 • 2010

TRANSIT OVERHAUL

Major changes needed

Profound changes to transit agency governance, planning and funding are essential for the future growth and success of transit expansion in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

A new study, written by Dr. **Richard Soberman** and commissioned by the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, calls for a significant shift in the prevailing governance model for transit agencies. It suggests politicians are not well-suited to sit on boards like **Metrolinx** and the **TTC**.

In “Delivering Transit Service in the GTHA: Where We Are Is Not Where We Want To End Up,” Soberman notes that “hospitals, universities, major transit agencies, VIA Rail, airports and other providers of public services manage to function effectively under policies established by government bodies through professional boards.”

“Micro-management by elected officials periodically represents a serious challenge for effective decision-making,” the report asserts, adding “there is a significant difference between policy direction and tinkering at a level that requires sound judgement based on professional qualifications.”

“If we expect to have profound changes in travel behaviour, we’re going to have to have profound changes elsewhere,” Soberman said at a media briefing on the report’s release yesterday.

He added that the current funding model is not sufficient and funding should not be based on project-specific funding applications. Rather it should be legislated to provide an amount of certainty in the money flowing to transit agencies.

The report also addressed population growth and the connection between transit infrastructure and land use. Soberman noted that between 1986 and 2006, the GTHA population rose 44 per cent while transit use rose 15 per cent, and between 2006 and 2031, Metrolinx projects population will grow by 44 per cent while transit use will grow by 132 per cent.

However, Soberman stressed that transit expansion does not always bring increased density or transit use.

“If you build it, they don’t always come,” he said. “We built the Sheppard Subway. What does the Sheppard Subway carry? Four thousand and five hundred people an hour.”

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• Richard Soberman

The report also points out “[t]he immediate area around Kennedy Road and Eglinton Avenue, for example, served by subway, RT and GO commuter rail stations, never really developed as anything more than the 1950sstyle strip mall development that exists today, with the exception of a few high-rise buildings.”

“By contrast, the second highest concentration of employment in the GTHA, centred in the vicinity of Pearson Airport, is very much automobile oriented and can hardly be considered as an example of transit-oriented development. Obviously, it takes more than just greatly improved transit accessibility to promote concentration and intensification,” the report adds.

Soberman also added his voice to the growing group of road pricing proponents, stressing that whatever form the financial tool may take it needs to be region-wide, treating motorists equally, and it has to address both use and congestion impacts.