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Alternative funding key to fixing Toronto gridlock: Report

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A comprehensive transportation improvement plan that includes new funding streams for the Greater Toronto Area is needed to help the region secure future growth says the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance.

“There is no way to sugar-coat our transportation crisis,” says the alliance’s final report, *Breaking Boundaries: Time to Think and Act Like a Region*. “If we do not invest in long-term, comprehensive regional transportation and transit improvements shortly, the quality of life for residents of the Greater Toronto region, as well as our economic prosperity, will be in serious jeopardy.”

CivicAction’s Greater Toronto Summit 2011 earlier this year brought together more than 1,000 city builders from business, government, non-profits, labour and academics to discuss the issues and opportunities facing the region.

Among these participants were construction representatives such as the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

CivicAction’s report highlighted 10 challenges to be tackled by the alliance before its next summit in 2015.

These challenges range from labour and the environment to transportation.

CivicAction reported that the costs of congestion on the region’s transportation infrastructure will increase from \$6 billion to \$15 billion annually by 2030. Summit participants called for a federal-provincial strategy and long-term funding designated for transit and transportation.

CivicAction stakeholders recognize the fiscal constraints faced by governments.

To help tackle this congestion, they suggested increased funding through 12 potential funding sources identified in the report.

“Political and government leaders should join in the growing debate about these and other potential funding sources and help drive the discussion towards a consensus that Metrolinx can rely on when creating its long-term investment strategy, due in June 2013,” the report noted.

Four of the potential new funding sources that could collect \$1 billion to \$2 billion in revenues are roads tolls on Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) freeways, a regional gas/diesel fuel tax, a commercial parking levy, and a regional sales tax. High occupancy toll (HOT) lanes or express lanes on GTHA freeways could raise \$400 million to \$800 million in revenues for the express lanes and \$200 million to \$400 million for HOT lanes.

In addition to new potential funding streams, CivicAction also recommended that the federal government should make a long-term commitment of \$1 billion to \$2 billion per year designated to help fund GTHA transit and transportation.

Also, leaders from every sector will be needed to drive broad public support for a regional transportation plan and “stimulate informed public discussion of financing tools.”

CivicAction also said that Metrolinx, with support from municipal and other partners, should create “a significant and continuing public information campaign and consultations” to engage public support and input.

“There won’t be broad support for implementing the regional transportation plan, let alone funding it, until GTHA residents appreciate how much it will benefit them individually and what their role is in bringing about the improvements,” the report concluded.