

# Mayor takes well-travelled route on transit future

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Toronto is used to taking the slow train to transit heaven, with enough detours and derailments to frustrate commuters.

At times, the crashes and delays are self-inflicted – and Mayor Rob Ford’s halting of Transit City is clearly such a case. Other times they are perpetrated by provincial masters who pay the freight.

Premier Bill Davis pushed the Spadina subway along the Allen Expressway – his answer to his axing the Spadina Expressway. Planners and transit-wise people argued the line should go up Bathurst St., where densities and ridership were greater. Today, they look at the under-capacity Spadina line and shake their heads at the “mistake.” •

Davis also demanded the TTC put in the Scarborough RT, arguing the new technology needed a demonstration project to help the province sell the new product of the Urban Transportation Development Corp.

The system works and carries a lot of passengers. But it is an orphan. Transit people had argued for a subway. Sure enough, riders hate having to transfer from RT to subway at Kennedy station, after transferring from bus to RT. Now, Transit City wants the RT replaced with an LRT. But the new mayor wants a subway.

Premier David Peterson had grand visions of transit across the region in the 1980s. The TTC brass talked about looping the Spadina and Yonge lines along Sheppard West, or Finch West or Steeles or the Hydro corridor. This would ease overcrowding along the Yonge line, they argued.

Premier Bob Rae succeeded Peterson and immediately urged the TTC build four subways – Sheppard, Eglinton West, the Scarborough RT and the Spadina line to York University. The city opted for just two – Sheppard and Eglinton.

Premier Mike Harris rode in, filled in the holes dug for Eglinton, losing anywhere from \$40 million to \$90 million, and allowed Sheppard to go ahead. This is the first leg of a Sheppard subway to the Scarborough Town Centre that TTC estimates projected would have the largest ridership of the four lines.

David Miller pushed a different vision, one with light rail vehicles in the middle of the roadway, giving them priority over cars and making a statement about the future of travel in Toronto. And he convinced Premier Dalton McGuinty and Metrolinx, the transportation agency the province set up to plan regional transportation.

With Transit City, the first leg of the Sheppard subway, ending at Downsview, would merge with an LRT and then have riders transfer to the RT in Scarborough and then transfer to the subway at the Kennedy station.

Ford wants the whole thing to be a subway.

Normally, one would expect the transit authority, the experts who run the system, to give us unimpeachable information. Some Transit City advocates are even suggesting the current TTC brass should stand up to Ford and tell him he's wrong to push subways. They chafe at the reports that Ford called in TTC chief general manager Gary Webster last week to order an end to work on Transit City and demand a report to council on subways instead.

Don't hold your breath looking for a palace coup. The TTC does what its political masters bid. And as often as we change masters, the directives change. This doesn't inspire confidence in any of its transit claims, but it is a survival tactic.

Ford meets with McGuinty Tuesday in a one-on-one to at least establish the starting point of their disagreement.

The federal government watches from afar, its political caddies reading the post-Ford landscape.

And Metrolinx, the agency that's supposedly in charge, lies low, in search of an opening to bring the sides together.

Yes, the TTC too often goes with the flow, spineless, some say. But who could possibly frame a transit future when the political leaders so often wreak havoc with Toronto's transit weathervanes.