

Road to transit heaven will be paved with facts: James

Transportation Tomorrow Survey reveals surprising truths about who's going where in the GTA — and hints at where we'd really get the most bang for the buck.



DAVID COOPER / TORONTO STAR

A horde of daily commuters passes between the TTC and GO Transit sections of Union Station, serving downtown - by far the top destination for transit users in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

By: Royson James Toronto Politics, Published on Fri Jan 16 2015

Facts and fiction

To hear a city councillor claim that Scarborough deserves a quarter of Toronto's subways because it has a quarter of the city's population is to confirm that we've lost our minds on the transit file.

To hear the councillors along the Finch West corridor bellow that they want a "subway or nothing" when Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) would provide premium transit service for the next 50 years is to plunge the listener into despair.

Everyone thinks himself a transportation expert because he moves around the city — or has travelled to other towns. Most of us don't know what we are talking about.

Our planners have done a poor job presenting the facts. Our propagandist politicians have done a masterful job promoting the transit dreams we covet.

And the transit well is poisoned.

The antidote may be a counter-assault of facts — information to guide our designs. This might stop us from making billion-dollar mistakes as the region rushes to make up for lost time in building transit.

One fountain of facts is the Transportation Tomorrow Survey, a periodic testing of where people in the Toronto region are travelling each day and how; their destination and origin; their mode of travel. The University of Toronto gathers the information, and one imagines that planners and politicians mine it religiously to inform their decisions.

Ten transit findings

The Transportation Tomorrow Survey is a periodic testing of where people in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton are travelling each day. It reveals how they get there, and where they are going to and coming from. The data, gathered by the University of Toronto, is designed to be used to help with transportation planning. Here are 10 findings from the 2011/2012 survey, some reassuring, others not so much.



5 GO trains are the preferred choice for travel in all 905 areas, but ridership share is lowest in south York Region.

6 Transit has the lion's share of trips headed downtown, but the car is still dominant, overall, accounting for 70 per cent of all trips to all destinations across the GTA.

1 **50%**

On any given weekday morning, half the commuters on transit are headed downtown. And 13 per cent of all travellers — whether on foot, bike, car or transit — end up downtown. The airport area is the second most-common destination.



7 Most transit travellers to and across Toronto in the morning do at least one subway, bus or streetcar transfer to complete the trip. Some 30 per cent of TTC users don't take the subway, opting for bus or streetcar only.

8 Traffic demands dropped in the early 1990s as Toronto lost 200,000 jobs, including 40,000 jobs downtown. The jobs did not fully return until 2012, juiced by a downtown job growth of 50,000 in the past five years. Downtown Toronto now has the highest jobs total in history: 500,000 jobs.

2 **416**

The 416 area code is the premier travel destination for the region. Some 85 per cent of transit trips in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area end up in the 416. And 45 per cent of all travel modes, including auto, land commuters in the 416.

3 Proportion of 905 area code commuters who drive to work in downtown has dropped to 25 per cent; in 1986 it was 45 per cent.

4 Transit carries three in four (74 per cent) of 905ers heading downtown — a huge increase from 55 per cent in 1986. GO Transit's share of such passengers tops 80 per cent, up from 58 per cent in 1986.



9 Jobs and condo growth downtown are putting pressure on transit movements. For the first time since 1986, most of the growth in travel to downtown has come from within Toronto with travellers using subway and surface routes. Streetcar and subway routes no longer have the capacity to move the increasing ridership anticipated over the next decade.

10 **1 in 4**
Between 20 per cent and 25 per cent of Toronto residents don't have access to a car in their household.

David Crowley used to work for the TTC. He is retired and works as a transportation consultant. He has gleaned the following information from the latest survey (2011-2012) and other transit data:

- Toronto is the destination of choice. A full 85 per cent of all transit trips taken in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton region end somewhere in the city of Toronto. Ditto for 45 per cent of all trips: auto, bike, transit or walk.
- Thirteen out of every 100 persons travelling to work in the GTA and Hamilton end up in downtown Toronto. Almost half of them take transit.
- If commuters in the Finch West corridor want a subway to whisk them downtown, consider this: only 8 per cent of workers in that corridor are headed downtown. That's a similar percentage to King, Whitby, Aurora or Mississauga.
- By a three-to-one margin, 905ers choose transit over the car for their daily commute downtown. GO Transit carries eight out of every 10 such passengers, up from six nearly 30 years ago.
- TTC ridership is at an all-time high, but subway capacity is below what it was 15 years ago. That's mainly a function of operational constraints due to aging signal and track infrastructure now being fixed.
- Transit has the lion's share of trips headed downtown, but the car still rules for all other trips — a 70 per cent share to all destinations across the entire region.
- Some 29,177 people walk, bike or take cab to downtown jobs each morning — up 31 per cent in five years, and more than double the 1986 number.

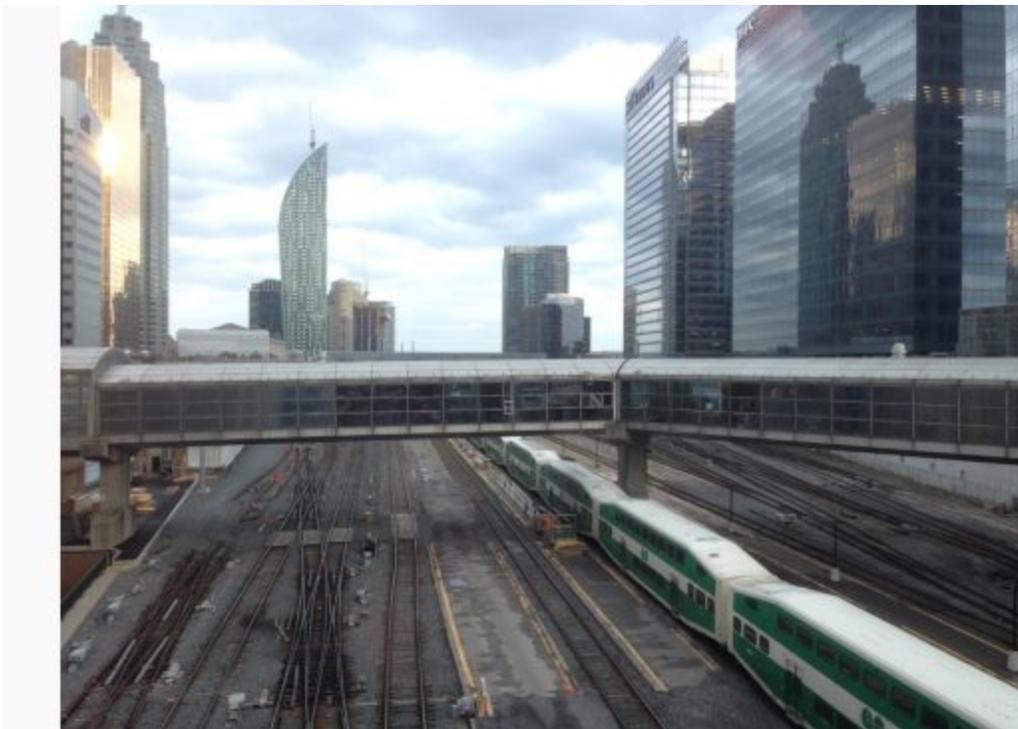
The TTS survey results begs several questions. For example, if so few commuters in the Sheppard East corridor are headed downtown, why the need for an express service like a subway to Yonge?

And if you will provide a subway, why stop at Don Mills when only half the passengers there want to get downtown? The Scarborough Town Centre station, by comparison, has 73 per cent headed downtown — comparable to Finch or Downsview stations.

Obviously, the farther out one goes, the fewer passengers travel to downtown jobs. What does that mean for the cost-benefits of plans for two-way, all-day service between Union Station and places like Kitchener?

What we do know is some politicians don't seem bothered by such questions. The Spadina subway is headed to Vaughan, linking it to downtown. How many workers travel downtown from Vaughan? About 9 per cent.

Little wonder Scarborough, at 13 per cent, say they deserve a subway.



TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

According to transportation statistics, people heading downtown to work overwhelmingly take transit, by a margin of 3 to 1. For a large proportion of commuters making a beeline for downtown from outside Toronto, GO trains are the mode of choice.

Origins and destinations

The farther one gets from the downtown core, the fewer commuters are headed there to work. That obvious fact — [borne out by a map of who's working downtown](#) — should be enough to scuttle the idea that every community can sustain a rapid transit rail link to the core.

- [Click here to see a map showing the percentage of commuters around the GTA](#)

But facts often get in the way.

Data from the Transportation Tomorrow Survey shows:

- Almost as many Pickering and Ajax residents travel to work downtown as those from central, northern and eastern Scarborough.
- About 74 per cent of TTC passengers at Finch, Downsview and Scarborough Town Centre stations are downtown-bound. Don Mills? Just 51 per cent. This may explain/reflect low Sheppard Subway ridership.
- The Scarborough Town Centre station, by comparison, has 73 per cent headed downtown — comparable to Finch or Downsview stations. But there's a caution: the percentage is high but the numbers are low — just 2,949 passengers in the morning peak, barely more than the 2,887 at Don Mills. Neither may be subway-worthy.

- Population numbers, even the number of workers, don't necessarily predict the number of riders that would use a transit line. The Sheppard-Yonge corridor has a growing population and many workers (16,600), but they are headed all over the GTA to work, and transit (two subway lines) is often not a competitive option. So, 2,380 took the car; 9,525 took transit; 179 took GO and 61 walked.
- The "City Above Toronto" will get subway service next year, linking it to downtown via the Spadina line. How many workers now travel downtown from Vaughan? About 9 per cent, not nearly as large a percentage as Richmond Hill, Oakville or Markham.
- In every section of the city of Toronto except north Etobicoke and Downsview, at least 10 per cent of the workers commute to downtown.
- North Etobicoke and Downsview — through which the Finch West transit line is supposed to run to connect passengers to the Spadina subway extension and into downtown — would be a graveyard for a subway, unless development or job creation patterns change. Only 7 per cent of riders from the city's northwest quadrant work downtown. Transit in that corridor needs to serve the frequent pick-ups and drop-offs of a local transit system, which distributes passengers to connections that take them to a variety of local and distant destinations. The few who need an express link to the subway might best be served by express buses, upgraded to a Bus Rapid Transit corridor like the one along Highway 7.

Click on each area to see the percentage of downtown Toronto commuters.

Downtown bound

Planners call this the Toronto-centred region for good reason. The 416 area code, Toronto itself — from the Rouge River in Scarborough to Etobicoke Creek on the Mississauga border — is the centre of attraction.

Of every 100 persons going to work in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton next Monday, 45 are destined for Toronto proper. And 13 of them end up downtown.

Those heading downtown overwhelmingly take transit — by a margin of 3 to 1. In planning jargon, the modal split is 75-25 in favour of transit.

It's not that those workers can't drive; most of them have access to a car. Rather, for them, transit to downtown Toronto is competitive in terms of cost, time and convenience.

Most readers understand that with 450,000 jobs downtown, PD1, or Planning District 1, is the supreme destination in the region. Nowhere else comes close. The airport centre trails as a distant second, with fewer than half as many. With that many people travelling to the financial district, it makes sense for rapid transit lines to converge there — hence the buzz at Union Station, Canada's busiest transportation hub.

Data shows that traffic demands dropped in the early 1990s as Toronto lost upwards of 200,000 jobs, including 40,000 jobs downtown. The jobs did not fully return until 2012, juiced by a

downtown job growth of 35,000 in the past five years. Downtown Toronto now has the highest jobs total in history.

Growth in jobs and condo homes downtown is putting pressure on transit movements. For the first time since 1986, most of the growth in travel to downtown has come from within Toronto, with travellers using subway and surface routes.

This is good news: The transit corridors are there. So is the ridership. It should be cost-efficient to add service as TTC ridership jumps beyond 500 million.

But there is a glitch. Streetcar and subway routes don't have the capacity to move the increasing ridership anticipated over the next decade. Getting there is frustrating riders who moved to areas like Liberty Village but can't board transit as needed.

Transit ridership is on the rise to the east and west of the financial district, but hasn't returned to 1986 levels. When it does — soon, as trends suggest — will the TTC be able to accommodate them?

We're not talking tiny numbers. In Planning District 2, just west of the downtown core, almost 35,000 workers head for downtown jobs each morning between 6 a. m. and 9 a.m. By comparison, for all of Scarborough, the number is 40,260.

Remember that, when someone argues for matching subways to a population that's widely dispersed, as opposed to concentrated.



Steve Russell *p66 x

About three-quarters of commuters passing through Finch station, which connects with York Region transit and GO Transit, are downtown-bound.

The car is king

Almost one in four Toronto households do not have a car. But that isn't the norm in the suburbs outside Toronto, where, on average, residents are four to eight times more likely to own one.

In fact, in places like Pickering, Vaughan, Whitby as many as 12 per cent of households have three cars.

So, if these commuters choose transit, it is because it beats the car for cost and convenience.

Transit accounts for the lion's share of trips headed to downtown, but the car is still king elsewhere — especially when the destination is anywhere but downtown.

Transportation data shows:

- The car accounts for 70 per cent of all trips to all destinations around the GTA and Hamilton.
- Of the more than 80,000 morning rush-hour auto trips into downtown Toronto each day, 53,000 originate inside Toronto; York and Peel contribute fewer than 10,000 each; Durham, 4,558; Halton, 3,134; and Hamilton, 498.
- Curiously, more north Toronto residents (living south of Highway 401) drive to downtown jobs than people from Brampton, Mississauga and Caledon combined. There were 9,252 auto trips in morning peak hours from north Toronto to downtown, and 9,229 from Peel Region.
- The proportion of 905-area commuters who drive to work in downtown Toronto has dropped to 25 per cent; in 1986, it was 45 per cent.
- As the GTHA population has grown, the proportion of downtown workers who live outside the city has jumped to 37 per cent from 21 per cent in 1986.
- Planners are constantly scheming about how to get commuters out of their cars and onto transit, freeing up freeway space. In 1986, the auto share of travel to downtown was 45 per cent; today it is 25 per cent, a source of pride and sign of success.
- In 1986, 21 per cent of Toronto residents had no cars. By 2011, car-free households had grown to 23 per cent. Not surprisingly, downtowners are least car-dependent, with 45 per cent of households car-free.
- Despite this, 4,679 downtowners — an area normally considered to be south of Bloor St. — drive to downtown jobs. That's more than the 4,558 commuters who drive in from Durham Region. But, then again, there are 60,843 downtown households working downtown, compared with 24,617 from Durham.

Pointedly, access to downtown would not be sustainable if travellers to the core did not have the competitive option of taking GO Transit rail. GO trains carry 80 per cent of 905-area workers headed downtown, up from 58 per cent in 1986.

Surprise findings

- 9,252 auto trips are made in morning peak hours from north Toronto to downtown. More than all such trips from Peel Region (Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon) combined.
- More downtowners (4,679) drive to downtown jobs than commuters from Durham Region (4,558).
- 29,177 walk, bike or take cab to downtown jobs each morning — up 31 per cent in five years and more than double the 1986 number.
- About 74 per cent of TTC passengers at Finch, Downsview and Scarborough Town Centre stations are downtown-bound, but just 51 per cent at Don Mills (which may explain/reflect the low Sheppard Subway ridership). Travellers who transfer into those stations from the 905 region are even more likely to be headed downtown.

- In 1986, 21 per cent of Toronto (416) residents had no cars. By 2011 car-free households had grown to 23 per cent. Downtowners are the least car-dependent, at 45 per cent car-free, though in 1986 the car-free percentage was 47%.