

City News

Finance TTC transit expansion with zone fares: report

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The huge cost of improving and expanding transit service in Toronto can be alleviated by implementing distance-based fares on the TTC and charging the public more to ride during rush hour, a new report says.

Changes to the public transit pay system were among the key recommendations by **Residential & Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** to help foot the \$50 billion bill for The Big Move, Metrolinx's transit plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

"Public transit fares are inefficiently designed in several ways," the report stated. "First, with the exception of GO Transit, fares do not vary systematically with distance travelled.

"This inefficiency encourages urban sprawl because people can live far from work and commute by transit at low fares. Flat fares also discourage people from using transit for short trips, and this low demand makes it difficult to justify expanding service to nearby suburbs."

The report advised a zonal scheme with peak and off-peak fares. The changes would be "facilitated with the Presto fare-card system."

TTC chair Karen Stintz said Tuesday that distance-based fares are “certainly something that we will be looking at,” but added that it won’t be considered until Presto “is widely implemented across the system.

“It would be difficult right now with the way we collect fares,” she said.

“Once we have Presto...that’s the time that we can talk about zone-based fares.”

Presto is a fare card system that will allow commuters to travel seamlessly through eight transit systems across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

It’s already used at 14 TTC subway stations and is expected to be ready at all stations, buses, and streetcars by 2016.

Adding tolls to all 400-series highways and other major roads is also recommended, with the report calling it “the most attractive funding scheme for the GTHA in terms of adhering to the user-pay principle, economic efficiency, consistent and sustainable revenue yield, and equity.”

Other ways to generate necessary revenue included: restructuring on and off-street parking fees, with maximum-stay regulations replaced by escalating hourly rates, implementing either a commercial parking sales tax or a parking levy, and adding a regional fuel tax and/or a vehicle levy and/or a regional sales tax in the GTHA.

“In combination, reform of transit fares and parking pricing, a regional parking tax or levy, and some form of comprehensive road pricing might yield enough revenue to fund The Big Move,” the study concluded.

In the meantime, premier-elect Kathleen Wynne said addressing transit in the GTHA was a “huge priority” as she prepares to succeed outgoing Dalton McGuinty.

Changes are inevitable, she stressed.

“It’s not whether we’re going to create a revenue stream...it’s which of those tools we’re going to use,” Wynne said Tuesday.

“For the GTHA and beyond I think it’s the No. 1 condition that we need to get right in terms of economic growth.”