

## **Stintz will discuss zone-based TTC fares – once Presto pay card in place**

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TTC Chair Karen Stintz is open to a discussion about moving to zone-based transit fares, but not until the coming smartcard payment system is in place.

The suggestion comes as part of a report on funding infrastructure that argues that a flat fare for transit riders encourages urban sprawl and penalizes passengers who take short rides.

The idea is not new – many cities, including London, have zoned systems – but can be controversial. Advocates say a zone-based system makes heavy users pay up for their service while detractors say the poor are unfairly hit and that distance is a crude way to measure value.

Ms. Stintz would not take a position on the issue Tuesday but said it was one that warranted discussion. The Presto pay card isn't expected to be fully implemented across the TTC until 2016.

“Before we would make a decision to go toward zoned fares we would want to see what the impacts are on those who use the system,” she told reporters at City Hall. “But as it becomes more integrated, as we implement Presto, I think then we can begin a discussion about whether or not a zoned fare makes sense.”

[The report](#), authored by Trent University economist Harry Kitchen and Robin Lindsey, with UBC's Sauder School of Business, was commissioned by the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

Prof. Kitchen said he had made the same recommendation in 2008, only to have it pass unremarked. But this one landed with a bang. On Tuesday he was fielding multiple interview requests and received an e-mailed rant with “morons” and an expletive in the subject-line, feedback he forwarded to his co-author.

“I said ‘welcome to public policy debate in Toronto’,” he laughed in a telephone interview from Peterborough.

Prof. Kitchen was concerned that the reaction would overshadow the rest of the report, which includes thoughtful analysis on road tolls, sales tax, public-private partnerships and governance. But he insisted a new approach to transit pricing would be more fair, noting that government policy could soften any related impact on the poor.

“The more you use a service, the farther you travel, the more you should pay,” he said. “I would argue that most of the people coming to Toronto are not poor ... I don’t think you should distort the price, or hold the price fixed, to help a few while a whole bunch get a free ride.”

But long-time local transit advocate Steve Munro argued instead that a system allowing unlimited travel within a discrete period is a better solution. It’s an idea that the TTC is testing on St. Clair, where a transfer allows up to two hours of travel in any direction.

Mr. Munro said the situation is more complicated than is portrayed in the professors’ report. He noted that distance travelled is only one way to measure value to riders. People who wait in the snow for the Queen streetcar and then can’t get a seat might argue that they are paying more than the service is worth. People whose homes have access to a subway line, meanwhile, get a better deal for their token than those who have to take surface transportation.

“We have to be careful about what we call fairness in the fare system,” he said. “Time-based [pricing] addresses the equity issue a hell of a lot better than trip length.”