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Infrastructure

Separate transportation planning and politics, RCCAO says

'Ask and pray' method doesn't work, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario study finds

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De-politicizing Ontario's transportation planning process will ultimately help the construction industry plan for future work, states a construction industry official.

"With a continuous expansion plan you have continuous work for the construction industry," says Andy Manahan, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) executive director.

The RCCAO recently commissioned *Transportation Opportunities in the Greater Toronto Area*, a study written by transportation expert Dr. Richard Soberman. The study concludes that transportation planning in the Greater Toronto Area is being driven more by political considerations than public needs or cost effectiveness.

"A program like MoveOntario 2020 has projects which will not be completed for another 12 years. The money for those projects will be released over several years and possibly by different governments," says Manahan. "Projects can get cancelled — we have seen this before. One suggestion [in the report] is enshrining the funding in legislation."

Soberman describes the current approach to funding transit initiatives as "ask and pray." Municipalities have to make funding requests to provincial and federal governments and then "hope for the best."

Road tolls should be considered to fund GTA transportation needs with a move to region-wide pricing Soberman states. Tolling only expressways in Toronto, could lead to employer relocation out of the city. Gas tax transfers and a GTA-wide vehicle tax could generate \$6 billion for transit planning needs.

Soberman described the MoveOntario 2020 and Toronto Transit City transit plans as examples

of “top-down planning”. Elected officials dictated what their professional advisors will implement, without proper environmental or engineering studies to see their viability

“A reversal of the usual approach in which proposals are generated by professionals, in response to identified needs, for consideration by the body politic,” states Soberman.

The study notes that both Ontario and Toronto transit plans expect to accommodate future travel demand through public transportation expansion. The RCCAO notes that from 1986 to 2006, the total population in the GTA and Hamilton grew by about 45 per cent while transit use increased only 13 per cent.

MoveOntario 2020, with its 52 proposed projects is essentially “an amalgam of politically driven wish lists”. Toronto Transit City’s intention to use light rail in its expansion plans could be seen as an “undesirable intrusion” in some communities, states Soberman.

The study present the following projects as transit priorities which would reduce travel times and automobile dependence:

- A continuous LRT service between eastern Scarborough and the Downsview subway station along the Sheppard Avenue corridor.
- A continuous transit route linking Scarborough and Mississauga within the Eglinton Avenue corridor.
- Integrate the Brampton Acceleride project, the Hurontario corridor, and the Mississauga Transitway.
- Extension of the Yonge subway north to Langstaff, including modifications to a number of existing stations and new train control systems to increase system capacity.
- Protection of a right-of-way in the Finch Hydro corridor for potential long-term use as a bus-way for both public and privately operated buses.
- Improved transit access to Pearson International Airport from Union Station.