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Independent transit consultant, Brendon Hemily, says there are different perceptions on what is considered fair contributions toward transit

Ontario riders chip in big for transit

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Ontario transit users contribute one of the highest percentages of operating costs for transit in the world.

“I believe transit users are already contributing significantly. I think there’s great complexity caused by multiple conflicting objectives and there’s also a lot of complexity caused by different perceptions of what’s fair,” said Brendon Hemily, an independent transit consultant with over 25 years of international transit experience.

Hemily explored transit’s fair share in contributing to mobility at the 10th installment of the [Transport Futures](#) Mobility Pricing Summit held in Toronto recently.

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Users of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) pay 71 per cent of operating costs, compared to users in New York City who pay 41 per cent and 25 per cent in Los Angeles, says Hemily. In Los Angeles, for example, the rest of the operating costs are covered by multiple kinds of subsidies from the local, state and federal levels.

Nationally in Canada, users pay 55 per cent of the operating costs of operating transit.

In Ontario, provincial subsidies cover 10 per cent of transit operating expenses and there is no federal operating assistance in Canada.

Hemily pointed to Toronto in the 1980s and 90s, when the transit system had capital and operating formulas.

“It provided stable funding and predictable funding so you really could increase fares by

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the inflation rate by little amounts every year because you knew what the rules of the game were. The transit system, the municipalities and the province all knew in a very predictable way what was going to be happening.”

Only additional special investments like subways were on an ad hoc basis, he said.

“Since 1995, it has been characterized by a total ad hoc approach where money and programs appear and disappear.”

He added that there is currently a focus on capital investment and a lack of focus on operational funding. He noted that Quebec and British Columbia amortize capital costs into their operating budget.

In smaller communities transit is clearly just a social service, said Hemily, but in larger cities such as Toronto there are niche markets where transit is a very good option compared to cars. In Europe there is a directive towards separating policy and delivery of services, which Hemily says is a move in the right direction.

The introduction of new technology, like smart cards, can sometime offer opportunities for policy changes, said Hemily.

Canada faces institutional silos that are “incredibly significant.” Transit is operated under a single municipality, though there are different departments that run transit, traffic, parking and bike sharing.

“Even in large metropolitan areas, there may be more of an opportunity to affect modal shift, but it requires even more complicated structures or enhanced organizational coordination,” he said.

Hemily also explored the idea of a regional fare structure to shift people where there is more capacity. He pointed out that in Paris, commuter rail is the same fare as the city system within the same Zone 1.

Metrolinx was created as a forum to bring together the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area’s transportation agencies and should be facilitating such discussions. Hemily noted that Metrolinx does not have taxing authorities like its counterparts in Vancouver and Montreal.

“They still have lots of difficulty in implementing and using them, but at least they didn’t waste all the time we’ve been wasting just trying to even get investment strategies sorted out,” he said.

An ongoing series of learning events that began in 2008, Transport Futures explores the complex interactions associated with transportation demand management and infrastructure funding issues.