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Ontario transit advisory panel a necessary tool

Panel members say group is vital for transit future

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Despite opposition to the new provincial Transit Investment Strategy Advisory Panel, construction industry members of the panel say it is needed.

"I really believe that now is crunch time and if we don't get this right it could be off the table for years to come. I think that would be an absolute mistake," said Patrick Dillon, a panel member and business manager of the [Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario](#).

Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne announced the panel and its appointees on Sept. 18. In May, [Metrolinx](#) released its investment strategy that recommended an HST hike, a mobility tax credit, a business marking levy and a fuel and gasoline tax, all which combined are expected to total \$2 billion a year to fund the \$34-billion second wave of Big Move projects.

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The panel will meet with stakeholders to discuss Metrolinx's transit investment strategy recommendations and other options. It will report these findings back to government.

Critics, such as Progressive Conservative transportation critic Frank Klees, have said the panel is little more than a stalling tactic meant to delay a controversial decision.

"I think there is need for the panel and that we really look at what the balanced approach is to this funding," said Dillon, who commutes from Mississauga to Toronto.

"There is absolutely no doubt that there's gridlock throughout this whole region. There's also no doubt that the region is going to expand population-wise over the next 20 years. Sitting still is not an option."

The 13-member panel is led by Dr. Anne Golden, who was president and chief executive officer of the Conference Board of Canada from 2001 to 2012, and is composed of representatives from several sectors.

Panel member and [Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario](#) executive director Andy Manahan has been a big proponent of tools that mitigate congestion and affect driver behaviour, such as High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes.

"Some of the other panel members were talking about things like distance based insurance pricing. Those kinds of concepts are catching on to people who are not directly involved, that's good. People are thinking about how to use new technologies to relieve congestion," he said.

Manahan is optimistic that the panel will evoke change. He said former premier Dalton McGuinty's government chose to wait on the Big Move investment strategy in 2008 and now there is a minority

government which is more challenging.

“We do have a premier that almost right out of the gate in February, said congestion is a serious issue with respect to people moving around and to our economy. We have to do something about it,” he said.

“I think the more we talk about it and demonstrate through pilot test like the HOT lanes, that there are good solutions out there.”

It estimated that congestion costs Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) residents and the economy \$6 billion annually and that, on average, people in the GTHA spend 82 minutes a day commuting.

The government says if nothing is done by 2031, people will spend 109 minutes a day commuting.

Other panel members include Paul Bedford (University of Toronto), Cherise Burda (Pembina Institute), former Toronto city councillor Gordon Chong, Teresa Di Felice (Canadian Automobile Association), Iain Dobson (Real Estate Search Corporation), citizen member Kulvir Gill, Blake Hutcheson (Oxford Properties), Joseph S. Mancinelli (Labourer’s International Union of North America), Leith Moore (Ontario Home Builders’ Association) and citizen member Mohan Nadarajah.