

02 Sep 2018

T.O. doesn't need another transit map

NDP-backed mayoral candidate and former city planner Jennifer Keesmaat shifted her campaign out of idle this week by proposing a “bold” and “real plan for transit” for Toronto. It’s anything but that. Keesmaat promised to build the planned downtown relief line three years early, expand the existing King Street Pilot and ban cars from other downtown streets, reopen the Scarborough Subway plan and cancel the eastern portion of Mayor John Tory’s “SmartTrack” plan.

She also promised to extend the Eglinton LRT to the airport, provide “enhanced bus service where appropriate,” build the Jane LRT and complete the Waterfront LRT.

Following her press conference, Keesmaat posted a one-page document detailing her \$50 billion “plan.”

Missing was any detailed costing, indication of whether and how much senior levels of government might kick in or indication of what tax hikes might accompany a push to build more subways, rapid transit and bus lines in a hurry.

It also appears to include a \$910-million assumption the province will cover the \$4.6 billion cost of building the Scarborough subway extension without requiring the city to kick in the money it’s already committed to the project.

Meanwhile, this is the same Scarborough subway extension Keesmaat fought tooth and nail against when she was city planner, suggesting in a 2013 memo reported by the Toronto Star that “The subway option DOES NOT make the list of (ten) priority projects when compared with other projects across the city.”

Keesmaat further suggested this week Mayor John Tory’s transit plan was drawn up “on the back of a napkin.”

Tory countered Keesmaat had been one of the “key architects” of the city’s transit plan and recommended it to council.

“Her plan is a risky proposition and that means nothing is getting built,” Tory said in a press release. “We’re going back to the bad old days of endless debates, endless re-drafts and endless talk.”

All of this demonstrates precisely why Premier Doug Ford needs to move ahead with his plans to take over Toronto’s Subway system, let Toronto keep fare box revenues and create a real regional transportation system.

Toronto’s transit system, and the subway in particular, serves the entire GTA. **Everyone agrees** Toronto needs a downtown relief line and that the city can’t afford one on its own.

Decades of petty and self-serving squabbling and mismanagement by ideologically driven councilors and staff — including Keesmaat — created the mess we’re in.

Getting it right is critical for the economic future not only of Toronto but the entire GTA.

We need progress, not more maps.