

## **Traffic crisis looms, report warns**

### **GTA has no plan to address extra crush of swelling population, consultant says**

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Think traffic is bad now? Just wait till 2031, a new report warns, when morning rush hours will see 100,000 extra cars jam Toronto's roads and 50,000 new riders crowd onto its public transit system as the region's population swells to eight million.

And to begin preparing for what could be a transportation mess, the report suggests, it may be necessary to show some politicians the door.

The study, commissioned by a construction industry coalition and led by respected transportation consultant Richard Soberman, criticizes the provincial government for having no plan to deal with the coming crush of cars and people.

"The hard, cold facts of the matter are that today, there is no such thing as a GTA transportation plan," Dr. Soberman, an emeritus professor of civil engineering at the University of Toronto, told a news conference at Queen's Park yesterday.

The study also suggests that politicians, who come to the table with inherently "short-term" outlooks, should have a reduced role in running transit agencies such as

the Toronto Transit Commission or the province's new Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

"There's nothing wrong with elected officials, but they are not necessarily the people who can take the hard look at needs and priorities and spend money in the proper fashion," Dr. Soberman said.

The city councillors that sit on the TTC are too focused on the next election, he argued, and are unlikely to support good ideas that are unpopular in their own wards.

He said the move to put more politicians on the TTC in the 1990s was partly responsible for bad decisions that have seen public transit stagnate in Toronto, even more than a lack of funding from provincial and federal governments.

And if the GTTA is to succeed in co-ordinating public transit and major roads across the region, he argued, it has to be a politician-free zone, too.

"The mayor of East Gwillimbury is going to be voting on whether the TTC is going to have new buses. And that's no way to run a railroad," Dr. Soberman said, adding that the province must also give the new body dedicated funds.

Failed mayoral candidate Jane Pitfield raised the idea of reducing the role of politicians on the TTC during her campaign, but Mayor David Miller rebuffed it.

TTC chairman Howard Moscoe says stripping the TTC or the GTTA of its politicians is a bad idea.

"The problem that the TTC had, was that it was not political, and its board was made up of so called citizens appointees -- you can read that as patronage appointments," he said, pointing out that Jeffery Lyons, the lobbyist involved with the city's computer-leasing scandal, was once an appointed TTC commissioner.

Mr. Moscoe was accused of "political interference" in TTC labour relations and its recent purchase of 234 subway cars through a \$674-million sole-source contract with Bombardier.

With politicians making the decisions, voters have more control over their public services, he said: "Our boards of directors are elected, because we're a democracy."

Dr. Soberman's report also takes issue with the City of Toronto's Official Plan, saying road expansion will be necessary, despite the plan's emphasis on addressing future growth with only public transit.

"Without any road construction any place in the City of Toronto 25 years from now, you're either going to see very, very acute congestion and frustration, or the city is not going to achieve its aspirations for employment growth," Dr. Soberman said.

"New employment is going to go someplace else."

The report says the lack of a long-term transportation strategy has led to a piecemeal approach to funding public transit, which makes it impossible to plan for the future.

"We really have to put a stop to the kind of funding that is very short term, and which picks particular projects that make great photo opportunities," Dr. Soberman said.

His study, funded by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance, took the province's population growth plans for the next 25 years and looked at where jobs were likely to locate in order to project what rush hour would look like in 2031, assuming current travel patterns continue.

The report predicts more travel between Toronto and its exploding suburbs, and between suburbs, as jobs and people remain dispersed.



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