



Cities Centre
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

February 5, 2012

Dear Toronto Councillors:

Transit is the lifeblood of our city. After several false starts and radical shifts in direction that have disastrously impeded progress, recent events have put the ball squarely back in your court. This is a defining moment for our city and we urge you to consider the following in your deliberations.

With up to 1.7 million riders per weekday the City could not function without an efficient, comprehensive transit system. Transit is as important to car users as it is to transit riders, since without transit our already congested road system would grind to a complete halt. Planning for desperately needed public transit expansion within the City of Toronto, however, is currently in a state of disarray and the Mayor's current plans will not provide cost-effective solutions to the City's pressing transportation needs. As transportation researchers, professionals and concerned citizens, the undersigned urge City Council to adopt the following three-point plan for restoring the City to a practical, effective strategy for building the transportation system that the City's citizens need and deserve. The time is now for Council to take the lead in building tomorrow's Toronto. The three steps that Council needs to take to restore transportation planning in this City to a sensible path are:

1. Return the eastern section of the new Eglinton Avenue rapid transit line to an at-grade alignment.
2. Restore other key transit projects to fast-tracked implementation.
3. Reinvigorate long-range transit planning within the City.

Attachment I to this letter describes this three-point plan in greater detail. Attachment II includes xxx letter signatories in addition to those immediately below.

Sincerely yours,

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ATTACHMENT I

A THREE-POINT PLAN FOR IMPROVED TRANSIT IN THE CITY OF TORONTO

1. Return the eastern section of the new Eglinton Avenue rapid transit line to an at-grade alignment. High quality rapid transit along Eglinton Avenue is absolutely essential to the development of an improved transit network within the City. This was recognized in the Metrolinx “Big Move” regional transportation plan through the designation of Eglinton as a priority corridor for immediate investment. The decision to bury the central section of this line, although costly, can be justified given the land use density and the relatively narrow roadway along this portion of the corridor. The current plan for the portion of the route east of Brentcliffe Road to also be buried underground, however, is not sensible for many reasons including:

- The roadway rights-of-way along these suburban roadways are very generous and provide ample room for an at-grade alignment. Plenty of room remains to accommodate car and truck traffic.
- A well-designed LRT line will carry many more people per hour than a lane of roadway. Furthermore, no road capacity need be sacrificed along these portions of the route: the generous road allowances can provide for both the existing number of lanes and the new LRT line. The objective of any transportation system is to move people, not vehicles. Building at-grade LRT lanes does not constitute a “war on cars”, rather it represents a way of maximizing mobility for trip-makers travelling in the corridor.
- Forcing all higher-order transit underground as a matter of principle is a misguided policy. It ensures that most transit expansions become prohibitively expensive and cannot be justified on the basis of the number of people the system will carry. The result is that we end up building much less transit than we need because we spend our precious dollars on artificially expensive underground lines when much more cost-effective at-grade solutions exist. To say that we need to bury all higher-order transit lines because people “like” subways misstates the issue. What people want is reliable, frequent service that takes them where they need to go. People “like” subways because they generally provide such frequent, reliable service. They will also “like” other technologies that provide similar service levels, whether they are underground or not. Indeed, there is nothing fundamentally attractive about having to go underground in order to make a trip. Transit lines should be buried only when necessary – i.e., when economically and operationally justified – not as a matter of abstract principle.
- Eglinton Avenue is a prime example of the wastefulness of this policy. Quite literally billions of dollars are going to be needlessly spent burying the suburban portions of this line, with very limited benefit to a limited number of trip-makers. As noted by John Lorinc in a recent *Spacing* article, the current plan to bury all of Eglinton has not been subjected to any form of cost-benefit analysis.¹ If such an analysis was undertaken it would surely demonstrate the clear inefficiency of the plan. No private-sector firm would be so wasteful in its use of company resources. These billions can and should instead be spent building other much-needed transit lines in other corridors within the City. Tens of

¹ <http://spacingtoronto.ca/2012/01/30/lorinc-whos-going-to-be-the-grown-up-on-the-eglinton-crosstown/>.

thousands of people are going to be denied improved transit services if this decision is not reversed.

- We firmly believe that no knowledgeable transportation professional would support such an inefficient and unnecessary proposal for a transit line. To our knowledge no such professional endorsement of this plan exists. It is the obligation of Council to ensure that such momentous decisions are properly considered and properly supported by sound professional analysis and advice before billions of taxpayers' dollars are needlessly spent.

2. Restore key transit projects to fast-tracked implementation. The saving of billions of dollars through restoring the suburban portions of the Eglinton LRT line to a surface alignment makes possible the fast-tracking of several other desperately needed transit capital projects within the City. These savings must not be taken back by the Province for allocation to other purposes (debt reduction, etc.). This money was and is committed to transit improvements within the City and this commitment must be maintained. What we are arguing for in this letter is a far more effective employment of these precious committed dollars to maximize their impact on improving transit within the City (which, again, is of regional as well as local importance given Toronto's central place within the GTHA). Previously planned, approved and prioritized projects which should be reinstated for implementation are:

- *Construction of higher-order transit on Finch Avenue West.* In 2011 Finch West carried 38,100 riders per day² (comparable to ridership levels on the Carlton and Dundas streetcar lines and only about 10,000 fewer riders per day than the Sheppard Subway) and urgently needs upgrading to a higher-order transit service.
- *Higher-order transit extension of Sheppard East.* Connection of Victoria Park (and its north-south transit lines), the Consumers Road employment district and central Scarborough to the existing Sheppard subway line is an important component of building an improved transit network in Scarborough.
- *Conversion of the Scarborough Rapid Transit (SRT) line to LRT.* SRT vehicles are reaching the end of their service lives, the line is approaching capacity, and an upgrade of the line to LRT is another critical component in improving the Scarborough network.

3. Reinvigorate long-range transit planning within the City. Looking beyond the very pressing need to make wise decisions immediately concerning the three key east-west corridors Eglinton, Sheppard and Finch, in the medium term a comprehensive plan for the Toronto transit network is desperately needed. Ad hoc, one off decisions are no way to build a cost-effective, attractive transit network. Network connectivity and coverage are critical to providing transit services that are maximally useful, as is the thoughtful matching of the supply of services to meet the spatial patterns of current and future travel demand. A systematic review and analysis of past, current and new plans and ideas is urgently required so that we have a thoughtful, defensible, cost-effective plan for moving forward in the longer term and so that we never again fall into the chaos in which we currently find ourselves. This will involve making decisions about other important corridors within the City, notably a downtown relief line, north-south lines, the Waterfront LRT line, and others. But these decisions need to be made within a comprehensive planning process, not as a series of independent, ad hoc decisions.

² http://www3.ttc.ca/PDF/Transit_Planning/Ridership_and_cost_statistics_for_bus_and_streetca_routes_20.pdf

Planning is a continuous process, not a one-shot deal. The problem is not that we have done too many planning studies, it's that very little has been implemented from most of these studies and at the same time we have lost sight of the big picture. We need to restore a commitment to long-range network planning (prioritization of funding, integrating land use and transit investment) or we will just continue to muddle through project-by-project, horse-trading our way from one crisis to the next, missing opportunities and wasting time and precious resources.

One model for such a study is the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan Review (MTTPR) which was undertaken in the mid-1970s. At the time Metro Toronto's transportation plans were in a somewhat similar confused state due to the cancellation of expressway plans for the city and the failure of a transit scheme proposed by the provincial government to provide a feasible alternative to the cancelled expressways. Planners from Metro, the TTC, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation and Communications, academia and the private sector all worked together to develop a new comprehensive plan for Metro Toronto. A similar team, consisting of staff from the City, TTC, Metrolinx, academia, and other experts, provided with a clear mandate from Council, could provide to Council the independent, professional, comprehensive plan for its approval that is needed to move beyond the personal preference approach, overly politicized environment in which we currently find ourselves and to provide a sound framework for moving the City's transportation agenda forward over the longer term.

Concluding Remarks

The current emphasis on investing all transit capital funds to unnecessarily bury all of the Eglinton LRT line and pushing ahead with an unjustified Sheppard subway line to the exclusion of a more balanced, cost-effective transit plan that would benefit vastly greater numbers of Torontonians is unsupportable. It will inflict punitive social costs on large numbers of our citizens who will receive no relief from unacceptably poor transit service and unremitting congestion on our roadways.

The current policy is radically out of sync with best practice in cities around the world (Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary, New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Munich, Berlin, Stockholm, Madrid, London – the list goes on and on) which are: (a) succeeding in shifting modal shares in favour of transit (and non-motorized modes as well) while not disadvantaging drivers (i.e., they are making things better for all trip-makers), and (b) using a range of appropriate technologies to do this, matching technology to need, rather than insisting on a “one-size fits all” approach, regardless of facts, needs or costs. In particular, LRT and BRT technologies are being used world-wide to cost-effectively provide transit services that are competitive to the automobile, with these services being matched to land use densities, travel demand patterns and network configurations as required. If Toronto is to compete successfully with these world cities, then it must aggressively pursue a rational, best-practice, well-designed transit policy.

At the moment, our transit policy falls far short of these needs. We can still reverse this unfortunate situation, but we must act now before billions are wasted, opportunities are lost and a congestion-induced irreversible downward slide in our productivity, growth and quality of life occurs. Toronto's success as a global city is not foreordained. We need to work on it day-by-day, in every decision we make. Let's make the best ones possible with respect to our transit system!

**ATTACHMENT II
ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES**