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## Hudak's second transit teaser: traffic management

By John Michael McGrath

Progressive Conservative Leader **Tim Hudak** and MPP **Doug Holyday** gave reporters the latest peek at the Tory transit white paper, saying that their party would invest in a number of quick wins to reduce gridlock in the GTA before the Tory subway-building machine can get going.

The Tories, if elected, are also willing to consider high-occupancy toll lanes, something the government proposed in the 2013 budget. But photo radar? Forget it.

The core of the Tory plan - how to pay for the billion-dollar costs of the subways the party prefers to light rail or other transit modes - is set to be released on Wednesday.

"There are things the government can do today that are practical and doable to make that daily commute less of a torture," Hudak told reporters Monday morning.

The methods the Tories are touting are all one form or another of "active traffic management," using various control measures to restrict the flow of vehicles in some parts of the road network to ease the flow elsewhere.

Variable speed limits are one of the measures proposed: When traffic bunches up in one area of a freeway, signs upstream from the congestion lower the posted speed limit. The intent is to give the congestion time to clear before more cars can add to the volume.

Variable speed limits have been in place in Germany since the 1970s, and while the evidence for their efficacy in reducing accidents is well-established (drivers no longer speed headlong into stopped traffic) the evidence for easing gridlock is less apparent. In a 2011 analysis of the effect of German variable speed limit freeways, **Justin Geistefeldt** of Ruhr University concluded "capacity is – on average – only slightly higher than on uncontrolled freeway sections".

However, safety on German highways also has to take into account the German reliance on another tool that won't be welcome under a Tory government - photo radar. "No. And no means no on that," Hudak said in response to a question about the return of photo radar, which the government of **Bob Rae** introduced in 1994 and **Mike Harris** eliminated shortly after taking office in 1995.

(Staff in Hudak's office point to other jurisdictions that use variable speed limits but don't use photo radar, such as New Jersey.)

While photo radar won't be welcomed, Holyday said that the Tories are open to high occupancy toll lanes, where single-occupant cars pay for access to highway lanes that buses and car-poolers can access for free. The Liberals proposed converting select car pool lanes in the GTA to high occupancy toll lanes in the 2013 budget.

Hudak also pointed to the possibility of synchronized traffic signals, saying that Los Angeles increased speeds across the city by 16 per cent after introducing synchronization.

However, he may be underestimating that potential: University of Toronto engineering professor **Baheer Abdulhai** produced a report in April 2013 for the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** exploring the potential of decentralized and adaptive traffic control systems. Adding intelligence to the humble traffic light has the potential to add much more than 16 per cent to a commuter's average speed, he found.

MARLIN, Abdulhai's Toronto-built system, "offers unprecedented value to both municipal operators and motorists," he writes. "The system decreases delay at intersections by an average of 40 per cent and up to 75 per cent in some areas. It improves travel times on major corridors like Toronto's Lake Shore Boulevard by 25 per cent and decreases emissions by 30 per cent."