

**Toronto Sun**

## **Put transit plans in high gear**

**Lack of foresight and timidity on public transit projects results in commuter chaos — gridlock**

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In the whirlwind that was her first week in her new job, premier designate Kathleen Wynne was pondering transit, in an interview with Sun Media.

While education and the provincial debt are her chief worries, transit is also top of mind.

It's no wonder.

Over the past 15 years, subway lines have been started and filled in.

The line to former finance minister Greg Sorbara's Vaughan riding was conveniently announced during a budget.

Subways became LRTs.

The result is commuter chaos. Gridlock.

Instead of doing what great cities do — building every year — our system has become a Mickey Mouse, toy train system.

It goes nowhere.

You can't get anywhere from here on public transit.

Wynne was talking "revenue streams," and while we all blanch with horror at the thought of paying more taxes, there are options.

A recent report by the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance** suggests paying by distance on the TTC.

I've advocated that for years. The report also suggested cheaper rates for off-peak travel.

Anyone who's travelled on the London Underground in the UK knows those two measures have been in place for years there — and work well.

London has zones fares. It's simple. The more zones you travel through, the more you pay.

And if you're a tourist, or someone who doesn't have to be at work for 9 a.m., you can get a low cost off-peak pass that helps ease the rush-hour crunch.

Pay by distance is long overdue.

The TTC isn't a social equalization program.

If people in the 'burbs want more transit, they should be prepared to pay for it. I suspect they'd be more than happy to shell out extra cash if they knew they were getting quality transit in return.

Wynne said the province needs to put a plan in place and stick with it.

“What we can't do is keep having a plan and revisiting it,” she said.

Metrolinx will be bringing out a GTA-wide strategy this summer.

“That's why I'm talking about the need to create revenue streams,” Wynne said.

“We're going to have to decide which of those tools we are going to use because otherwise we're not going to have that conversation about how we are we going to be able to build the next phase?”

It's a \$50-billion plan and the province has put in \$12 billion.

Among the “revenue tools,” Wynne said were on the table are congestion taxes, road tolls, payroll taxes, as well as transit bonds, suggested by another leadership candidate, Harinder Takhar.

London has a congestion tax.

If you live outside the M-25 — the ring road around London — you have to pay a charge to drive into central London.

You don't pay it if you use transit.

It's a user fee for people who want to drive and has the positive effect of forcing more people into transit.

That will get push-back here because, unlike in London, the suburbs don't have adequate transit alternatives in place to get commuters to work.

London built its sprawling system of underground, overground and bus links over century and a half — and they just keep on building. They plowed billions of dollar into transit to accommodate last year's Olympics.

Meanwhile, we keep timidly starting and stopping transit.

Worse, we let politicians dictate where the next subway line will go — instead of creating a vision of where transit needs to go and then building it.

Wynne is right.

Pick a plan — and build.

Another way to raise money is by development charges.

Businesses situated along subway lines profit hugely when new lines go in.

Property values skyrocket.

Instead of taxpayers shouldering all the costs of construction and businesses profiting from it, those businesses should be charged development fees and that money put into new subways.

But let's just stop talking about transit — and do something.