



Ontario wastes money building for snob value

By **Christina Blizzard**, Queen's Park Columnist - February 09, 2016

If you build it, they may not come.

Or it may fall apart.

Or it may come in late and overbudget.

That's the sad state of infrastructure construction in this province.

Take the Union Pearson Express that's running nearly empty trains.



It was a good idea to build a direct link to the airport from Union Station.

But was it a good idea to build it as a standalone service, independent of GO and the TTC? No.

Was it a good idea to turn it into a showpiece, with designer uniforms and art deco styling? No. It's ridiculous and whoever's responsible for turning this into a pretentious, overpriced, underused boondoggle should be fired.

All we needed was an efficient way to get downtown from the airport. We didn't need a fashion statement.

At \$27.50, the price was ridiculous. While UP Express has introduced new deals and kids under 13 are free, it still isn't competitive with Uber. And if you live on the Bloor-Danforth subway

line, you can get to the airport easily and cheaply on the Kipling 192 Rocket — for the price of a token.

Premier Kathleen Wynne opined Monday that the line could be integrated into the TTC and GO system for local transit users.

Speaking of Union Station, once you get there, the renovations look magnificent on the outside. Inside, the place is a mess — a nightmare for anyone with mobility issues or carrying suitcases. The project is late, \$160 million over the original budget. And, oh yes, small problem: The trains won't fit in the station.

Then there's the Spadina subway extension — an overpriced, overbudget vanity project dreamed up by former finance minister Greg Sorbara. It will, according to TTC general manager Andy Byford, be “spectacular” when finished.

We didn't need a spectacular subway. We just needed stations. It's \$400-million overbudget and two years late.

Can we get anything right?

Look at what happened with the Nipigon bridge. It was described by cabinet minister Mike Gravelle as the “jewel in the crown” of northern Ontario. Turns out it was a fold-up bridge that collapsed when it got cold — which it frequently does in northern Ontario.

Yes, it was beautiful. And it cost \$106 million. It was needed in order to make the Trans-Canada Highway four lanes. Why didn't they just use the old bridge for one direction of the highway and build a new bridge, similar to the old one, for the other two lanes? Why did we need to build a Taj Mahal for transport trucks?

It's reminiscent of the Herb Gray Parkway in Windsor, where hundreds of girders had to be replaced because they weren't built to code.

We've gone from being a proud province of nation-builders to a bunch of pompous blowhards.

Instead of building with fiscal prudence and common sense, we take the swankiest and most ostentatious option — and to hell with cost or whether it will last.

We build for the snob value, for the way it looks — and not for the way it works.

Wynne is selling Hydro One to pay for infrastructure. The money raised from the new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will be spent on bridges, subways and roads.

That's right. Your retirement funds will be spent on overpriced subways and bridges that buckle in the cold.

I smell catfood in our future.