

## Toronto and Ottawa looking for ways to fund transit growth

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Construction of the Yonge subway line at Yonge and Carlton in 1950 at the beginning of the subway boom that saw the construction of the Yonge-University and Bloor-Danforth subway lines. The City of Toronto is searching for ways to fund the next major transit expansion.  
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Toronto is looking to expand their transit, and they are asking residents how to pay for it.

At a series of public meetings entitled Feeling Congested, the City of Toronto gauged public reaction on how the expansion of the Toronto Transit Commission can be financed.

“Metrolinx has requested municipalities in the region that we provide them with feedback on funding tools,” said Jennifer Keesmaat, Toronto’s chief city planner.

Some of the feedback has resulted in several proposals, listed on the Feeling Congested website. Some of these options include raising funds through various taxes, including income taxes, a municipal sales tax and the return of the vehicle registration tax, axed by Rob Ford in 2010.

The woes of Toronto's transit riders have made it to Parliament Hill, with members from both sides of the aisle offering a solution.

"These days, it's hard to rely on any sort of transit to get you anywhere on time, anywhere in the city," said Olivia Chow, the NDP MP for Trinity-Spadina, and opposition critic on transport, infrastructure and communities.

On Jan. 31, Chow spoke to a crowd of nearly 100 people at Vanier College at York University to discuss her plans on how to end gridlock. Chow's solution is to change how the federal government funds infrastructure projects.

According to Chow, the Conservative government funds projects only on a short term basis, meaning the project from conception to completion can last a maximum of two years.

Chow told the students and onlookers at Vanier College this is part of the reason Toronto won't see federal dollars for transit projects, but that they will be "more than happy to be there for the ribbon cutting."

"The TTC can run a lot better if there's support from all levels of government."

Chow said to fund transit projects, governments need to look at various funding tools and partners, ranging from government involvement to private partnerships to placing tolls on local roads and highways.

The latter is also supported by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, who released a report last month looking at various methods of funding transit projects in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

One particular type of tolling advocated by the article is the implementation of "hot lanes" whereby certain lanes of a multi-lane road or highway would be tolled while the others would remain free.

This option gives drivers the choice of whether to pay or not depending on their specific needs on that given day, according to one of the reports authors.

"If you look at the utilization of the hot lanes in the U.S., you don't see people driving a Lexus in the hot lanes all the time and you don't see people in economy cars in free lanes all the time," said Robin Lindsey, a transportation economics professor at the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business.

"It depends on that particular day, and how valuable their time is. It's good to have an option for everyone."

Lindsey said the idea of hot lanes can be rolled out slowly, allowing Torontonians to grow accustomed to the idea.

“What you should do is take one little step. Try tolling in a noninvasive spot, like hot lanes. You try that out, you fix any wrinkles, and then you take another step,” said Lindsey.

“People would be recognizing the impact of the congestion relief, and they’d be recognizing what the money is buying.”

Another suggestion of the report, although not as highly recommended as hot lanes, was the idea of introducing a distance-based fare system to the TTC, similar to the system already in place in Vancouver, Paris and Sydney.

This discussion of a major transit expansion is nothing new to Toronto.

In 1911, a Queen St subway line was proposed by the City to be run by Toronto Civic Railways, a predecessor of the modern day TTC. The plan was overlooked at the time, before being revived in a city-wide referendum in 1946, before being abandoned. The plan stayed on the city’s books until 1975 before being officially turfed.

In 1985, the TTC launched their ‘Network 2011’ project which would see the construction of a downtown relief subway line and subway lines along Sheppard Ave and Eglinton Ave W. The plan was bounced back and forth between different provincial governments until finally being killed by the Mike Harris-led Progressive Conservatives in 1995 as a money-saving measure.

The Eglinton line, despite having already started construction, was cancelled and ordered to be filled in. The Sheppard line, originally planned to reach as far as Scarborough Town Centre, now stopped at the current Don Mills station.

The problem of finances is a main focus of why the City of Toronto hosted the Feeling Congested meetings.

“We don’t really have enough money to do what we need to do for maintaining our existing assets – transit and roads,” said Rob Hatton, an official for corporate finance with the city.