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### Political leaders commit to improving GTHA transportation infrastructure

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All political parties in the 2014 Ontario election support increased transportation investment in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), but only the Liberals have a fiscal framework for implementing this plan.

“It is a good thing that in this election campaign, all the major parties are putting a focus on infrastructure, especially mass transit,” said Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

“But, it is also somewhat confusing for the public to make sense of it, because there have been too many promises at the provincial and municipal level.”

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The Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance sent out a survey to the leaders of the four major political parties on May 22, which asked them to outline their policy position in relation to increasing public sector investment on transportation infrastructure in the GTHA.

The political leaders responded positively to the survey by making a commitment to improving daily commutes through the delivery of dedicated funding for transportation infrastructure.

“The 2014-15 Ontario Liberal budget proposed a new dedicated fund to help address congestion in the GTHA,” said Liberal Party leader Kathleen Wynne in response to the survey. “If given another mandate, the Wynne government intends to pass the budget. Since 2003, we’ve also provided municipalities with \$2.7 billion for transit infrastructure under our now-permanent gas tax program.”

The 2014-15 Liberals budget was rejected at Queen’s Park on May 2. This resulted in the dissolution of the Ontario parliament and a call for the June 12 general election.

The defunct Liberal budget provided about \$29 billion in dedicated funding for transportation infrastructure over the next 10 years — \$15 billion in the GTHA and \$14 billion outside of it.

New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Andrea Horwath also supports greater infrastructure investment, but adopts the Liberal’s fiscal framework to “create a dedicated fund of \$29 billion over ten years for transit and transportation projects across the province.”

However, Horwath said the NDP would prioritize high impact transit projects and kick-start transit relief with an additional \$250 million annually.

“While the Liberals refused to allocate any funds to specific projects in Budget 2014, we will begin flowing funds immediately to the Downtown Relief Line, Scarborough transit, Clean Trains Now on the air-rail link, all-day two-way GO train service to Kitchener-Waterloo, and year-round daily GO train service to St. Catharines and Niagara Falls,” she said in response to the survey. “We are also the only party committed to fully funding the Hamilton LRT.”

Horwath has proposed a small increase in the corporate income tax rate to pay for transit infrastructure.

Ontario PC Party leader Tim Hudak failed to provide a response to the survey. Instead, he sent CivicAction a letter about his Million Jobs Plan.

In a press release, dated May 16, Hudak said “we will put scarce resources into GO service, roads and subways, instead of permanently closing lanes to put an LRT on a politician’s resume.”

The Million Jobs Plan will expand GO service with more express trains and all-day two-way service, and scrap plans for the Hamilton's LRT project.

Hudak said the PC party would build the mid-peninsula across the south of Niagara to connect with the Hamilton Airport. From there, the highway would link up to Highway 401 towards Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge.

He also opposes the Liberals plan to increase the gas tax and Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) to pay for LRT projects.

In response to all these different election promises and proposals, Manahan said long-term infrastructure planning should not be changed due to political pressure and personal preferences.

"Although politicians are well intentioned, they really need to think holistically and take the advice of the transportation and planning experts," he said.

Green Party of Ontario (GPO) leader Mike Schreiner provided a response to the survey which focused on the need for transparency and accountability in funding, so taxpayers know their dollars are spent wisely.

"The GPO will work with other parties to implement dedicated revenue tools that are fair and progressive, such as congestion charges, gas taxes and parking fees, to raise \$3 billion a year to build and operate transit communities across Ontario," he said.

The NDP will establish a Financial Accountability Office to ensure all long-term project financing options are reviewed by the Financial Accountability Officer.

A Liberal government would track new spending on projects to ensure transparency and accountability by creating an online portal that would report publicly on project funding and implementation progress.