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Transport Futures summit will focus on infrastructure challenges

Congestion, environmental impacts also on the agenda

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Finding ways to tackle transportation infrastructure challenges and innovation, from vision to physical reality with the necessary political capital, will be explored at this year's Transport Futures summit in Toronto.

"From our inaugural event in 2008 to last year, the leadership question has kept coming up," said Marty Collier, director of Healthy Transport Consulting. "Every presentation from Europe, the United States or Canada, indicated that leadership is the thing that is required for these initiatives."

Healthy Transport Consulting and the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario have been the catalysts for the ongoing Transport Futures series. The day-long summits, with this year's version taking place tomorrow, are designed to explore transportation challenges such as congestion, improving environmental impacts and infrastructure funding.

The focus of this year's summit on political leadership in the pursuit of toll roads, congestion charging, building sustainable transit or transportation infrastructure is "a natural evolution" in the series, added Collier.

"We have always said we are trying to facilitate a discussion. If there are better solutions, let's find them," Collier said. "We know all the systems that are available. However, the people needing to make transportation decisions may not know everything so they can at least speak of 2010 and not 1950."

Road pricing systems have been implemented worldwide and Transport Futures has looked at many initiatives, from toll roads in France to congestion charges in London to high occupancy vehicle lanes in Minnesota. Wherever the project, political leadership is considered paramount to helping road pricing gain public acceptance.

Among the questions political leaders will help answer at the summit:

- Why would they, or elected leaders anywhere, support road pricing in the face of widespread opposition?
- How do they communicate road pricing benefits and costs to their constituents?
- What can we learn from their experiences?

Among this year's summit guests are Bruce Starr, Oregon senator and chair of the Road User Fee Task Force in the Oregon State Legislature. Oregon had some road pricing pilot project success and Starr will share how political and public acceptance was possible, from the state capital to the federal government.

Melissa Mark-Viverito, a New York City councillor, will share her city's experience in establishing municipal level support, for a three-year congestion charge pilot project for the city, but then seeing the concept stopped at the state level.

There will also be an Ontario panel discussion exploring the transportation leadership question in the province. The participants in this panel are the Progressive Conservative and New Democratic Party transportation critics and a member of the Green Party.

The provincial Liberals have not committed a representative to take part in the panel discussion.

A municipal panel discussion will also be held with councillors from the Town of Caledon and the cities of Toronto and Vaughan.