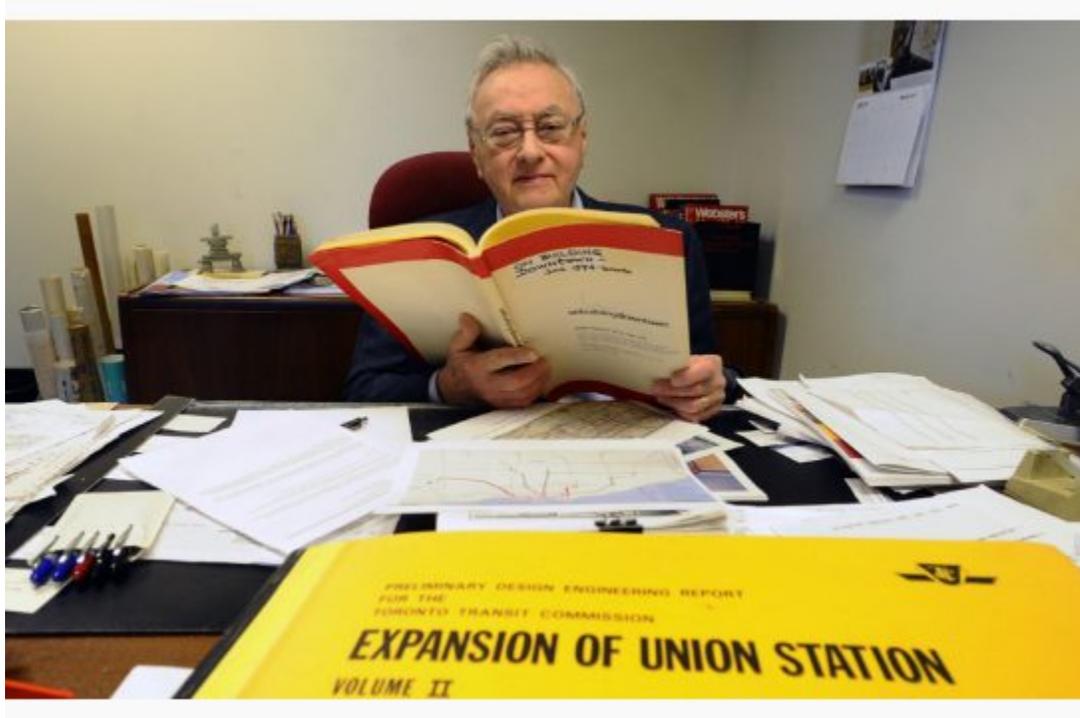


Transit guru pushes for central rapid transit network: James

After decades of studying, designing, building and advocating, Ed Levy can be forgiven a rant or two about the state of transit building in his hometown.



COLIN MCCONNELL / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO
Transit historian Ed Levy insists the GTA needs a central rapid transit network.

By: Royson James Toronto Politics, Published on Mon Mar 02 2015

Ed Levy has seen a lot of transit in a lot of places around the world. And after nearly a half century of studying, designing, building and advocating he can be forgiven a rant or two about the state of transit building in his hometown.

I sat with the octogenarian for a stimulating two and a half hours last week. He kept returning to his central point:

The GTA needs a central area rapid transit network. Network. A number of lines that link and connect commuters to various destinations across the region. Levy believes the key is the hub city, the core, the main destination, the great attraction for jobs, culture and entertainment. And he is befuddled that narrow-mindedness and false city-suburban biases have derailed every effort to create a substantial network of rapid transit lines downtown. That, he says, is the missing building block.

And it's setting us up for disaster.

“What happens when inevitable operational breakdowns occur, as they do even on superbly maintained/operated lines? With our primitive layout of lines (a meagre system rather than a network offering essential redundancy, well-distributed interchanges and route choice) chronic problems are a certainty. The vulnerabilities will dog us far into the future.”

Levy doesn't hold out much hope for an unbiased study of SmartTrack, Mayor John Tory's proposed solution to crowding on the Yonge Subway, relief 10 years ahead of the [DRL](#).

One of [SmartTrack](#)'s obvious failings is a route that takes it through Union Station.

“It would be a bad idea to concentrate the growing central area's commuter arrival/departure activity at a single location, on what amounts to a single corridor, including the two-track Union subway station regardless of its current improved capacity. It is, again, little more than a marginal improvement.”

But SmartTrack has political currency. Studies are underway. It won't surprise anyone if the studies find the project favourable. That likely means DRL delay. How would Levy stomach that??

“OK — let's assume we will not, in the next decade or two, find a way to finance the first phase or two of a real DRL, in view of the narrow perspective of so large a contingent of our leading financial and political leaders. After all, this ain't Hong Kong.

“So do we virtually guarantee the eventual stagnation of our potential growth and simply throw up our hands and depend upon second-best or marginal measures? At the risk of sounding masochistic, I say NO.

“Even under the best of conditions, this being Toronto with its policies of studying things to death, and slavishly soliciting the input of a sometimes (but not always) naïve public, I feel strongly that preparations for a DRL-level of improvement should not ever be deferred if only because it takes so damned long to get anything actually built.

“Let us assume that SmartTrack actually did some of what its promoters promise, allowing us to defer consideration of the DRL or its equivalent. The result would be that we would never see the real potential of this city, and that would be a tragedy for this place and for all of Canada, in my respectful view.”

Cities have a stark choice, he says. Encourage and welcome continuing growth, or stagnate and decline.

“A century or more ago, growth and influence was the choice of important cities such as New York, Paris and London, and massively improved infrastructure was a key factor in achieving their leaders' aspirations.

“If we continue to ‘rationalize away’ such visionary prospects, Toronto WILL reach the point at which it can grow no longer, and stagnation could well be our fate.

“The DRL is, sadly, out of reach now, but we must uphold the vision. Political and fiscal decision-makers once realized this was the way to go, and I for one can never forget that, in a modest-sized and rather “ordinary” town, 10 miles of subway, including 25 stations, a three-level junction and a state-of-the-art maintenance complex at Greenwood; i.e. the University-Bloor-Danforth lines; were conceived, designed and built within LESS THAN 10 YEARS!!

“The fact that we seem incapable of emulating this in our present metropolis is more than sad, and we continue to accept this situation at our peril.”

Tears are not enough.

“I apologize for the increasingly dramatic, desperate tone, but as you can see, I feel rather strongly about this, and after more than a half-century of deep involvement in this “crusade,” I damned-well think I have a right to feel the way I do.

“Enough ‘political subways’! Enough lines on a map! Enough! GET ON WITH IT!!”