

Candidates spar at Transport Futures debate

Don Wall May 18, 2018



DON WALL — Gathered following the May 14 Transport Futures debate were (from left) debate organizer Martin Collier of Transport Futures, Steven Del Duca of the Liberals, Tim Grant of the Green Party, Jessica Bell of the NDP, Rod Phillips of the Progressive Conservatives and debate mod-erator Steve Paikin.

While representatives from Ontario’s three major parties quarrelled on P3s, infrastructure costing and the Scarborough subway extension, it was the candidate from the perennially fourth-ranked Green Party who offered the most outside-of-the-box vision as [Transport Futures](#) held a pre-election debate on transit and transportation May 14 in Toronto.

In a typical exchange, the University-Rosedale Green Party candidate Tim Grant suggested the government had not planned rapid transit stations well enough to benefit from potential land value capture — ensuring governments reap revenues from the future earnings of developers.

With the new subway station in Vaughan, he said, the TTC has to pay \$24 for each rider.

Former provincial minister of transportation Steven Del Duca responded there is major building going on in the vicinity of the new Vaughan station with towers of 20 to 50 storeys and the line and station are a major boost to York University students.

“It is literally transforming the city of Vaughan from what it has been historically to a properly densified community,” he said.



DON WALL — New Democrat Jessica Bell urged reform of Metrolinx

The other two participants were University-Rosedale NDP candidate Jessica Bell and Rod Phillips, the Progressive Conservative candidate in Ajax. Del Duca of the governing Liberals took on the role of defending his government's performance on the files over its last 15 years in power and was frequently put on the defensive.

The convener was Steve Paikin, host of TVO's The Agenda.

The Ontario election has been called for June 7.

Both Grant and Bell accused the Liberals of poor planning in co-ordinating broader transportation needs.

"Until we start getting regional co-ordination with the different players talking to each other, investments are going to be wasted," Grant said

Bell, the co-founder of the advocacy group TTCriders, targeted Metrolinx, whose public meetings she said were "dog and pony shows" where decisions are cooked up in advance.

The UP Express, launched with an initial fare of \$27, was an example of a project that was not planned based on evidence, she said.



DON WALL — Liberal cabinet minister Steven Del Duca (left) exchanged barbs with Progressive Conservative candidate Rod Phillips over PC costing of its platform

Del Duca, running in the riding of Vaughan, seized an opportunity to turn the tables in addressing Phillips on the PC costing of its programs. Paikin had asked how the PCs would find \$5 billion for subways while promising personal corporate tax cuts.

"This is an opportunity to talk about Liberal waste," said Phillips.

The PC subway pledge, issued the first week of the election, would see funding to close the Sheppard loop, undertake the Yonge extension and build the downtown relief line, Phillips reiterated.

“How you pay for it comes down to how you run your government,” he said, noting Liberal spending snags such as the Presto program that went 50 per cent over budget and “upside-down pedestrian bridges.”

It was trusses on the bridge, Del Duca interrupted, adding, “Facts still matter in Ontario.”

Del Duca continued, saying the PCs had yet to release a fully costed election platform.

“We modestly calculate \$6- to \$10 billion worth of cuts,” he said. “As much as I like Rod personally, I will not sit here and let him suggest he will be able to fund \$5 billion of public transit here in the GTHA until he has accounted for what he will cut.”

Additionally, Del Duca charged, the province is still paying for the “disastrous” transit decisions of Mike Harris “when they killed and filled the Eglinton subway.”

Addressing northern issues, Phillips promised to bring back the Northlander train and said the government can follow a dual track in supporting Ring of Fire infrastructure. It can pilot complex stakeholder negotiations including with First Nations and it can facilitate discussions to ensure the right investments get made.

Del Duca pointed out his government had already pledged a billion dollars towards roads to kickstart Ring of Fire investment.



DON WALL — Green Party representative
Tim Grant called for alternative pricing
mechanisms to pay for public transit

Only Grant spoke in favour of road tolls and new parking fees to limit congestion and change consumer behaviour. Phillips said people still need cars to buy groceries and take their kids to hockey and thus tolls were not feasible until there were alternative transit methods in place.

Grant then mentioned that London, England had 3,000 buses in place the day the city started its congestion charge.

Bell spoke against P3s as a waste of taxpayer money and supported community benefits agreements as a way to ensure local communities benefit from spending on megaprojects.

While she was the head of TTCriders, the organization supported LRT instead of a subway for Scarborough but, she said, given the NDP believes in partnering with municipalities and the City of Toronto supports a subway, the party says the subway should go ahead.

Debate organizer Martin Collier of Transport Futures commented after the debate, “Del Duca knows the file but the Greens brought in issues, about land value capture for example, he was looking at the broad brush.

“Mobility pricing is one of those measures that you can use to manage demand and parking is another one. I think the Green Party made those points,” said Collier.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, an event sponsor, said he was pleased the parties seem to support long-term project planning.

“I was really glad to hear all four parties here, and every party recognized that in the past when we have started with project planning and stopped it, we have delayed things too long. I have heard in varying degrees we will continue and in some cases, let’s do more than one project at a time.”