

FUNDING TRANSIT

Revenue tools

To pay for much-needed transit infrastructure, the province should employ a combination of the 16-revenue tools that will generate \$500-million to \$1-billion annually, according to a discussion paper released by the Toronto Board of Trade this week.

The paper entitled, *The Move Ahead*, plays on Metrolinx's regional transportation plan "The Big Move" and states that there are many tools available to fund the regional vision.

The provincial transportation agency has until June 1, 2013 to prepare an investment strategy for the ministry and talk about the tools has been building momentum over the last few years.

Most recently, talk has been centered on the agency's first five priority projects and how they will be funded following the provincial budget announcement that dedicated \$4-billion less to the pot.

On Wednesday, the Metrolinx board of directors approved a revised plan that states the five priority projects York Region's VIVA Next bus rapid transit, Sheppard LRT, Finch LRT, Eglinton Crosstown LRT and the refurbishment of Scarborough rapid transit—will be completed in two phases over the next 10 years.

The province has to approve the revised plan and funding for the second phase depends on the agency's investment strategy.

"The delay and disputes over provincial funding are a distraction from the bigger issue and underscore the need for dedicated revenues to build our regional transit system," said Toronto Board of Trade president and CEO Carol Wilding.

"It's time that we recognize the real debate and start getting realistic about how we are going to pay for it."

The board's paper outlines 16-funding tools which include: a dedicated parking surcharge; dedicated gas tax; regional sales tax; employer payroll tax; dedicated lane road pricing or tolls; and congestion pricing. For each one, the board lists benefits, drawbacks, where it is implemented already and potential revenue.

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The suggestions are not new to the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, which has hosted numerous panel discussions and has commissioned reports in an attempt to start a dialogue around the "politically charged and poorly-understood" issue of road tolls and other tools.

"The momentum to accelerate the dialogue is increasing," said Andy Manahan, executive director of the alliance and member of the board of trade's infrastructure committee.

In Toronto, the mayoralty candidates seemed primed to address the issue, Manahan added, which is a big change from when Mayor David Miller ran in 2003.

As well, local leadership groups and policy think tanks have been examining the topic, whether by holding panel discussions or dedicating workshops at conferences to the issue. (See NRU GTA Edition May 19.)