

Skip the Scarborough subway and modernize the SRT, says transit expert

A Toronto Region Board of Trade transit conference will look at whether renovating the Scarborough RT might actually be the better way.



MARCUS OLENIUK / TORONTO STAR Order this photo

The Scarborough Rapid Transit system is slated for replacement by a subway (and earlier, by a planned LRT). But at least one expert thinks it would make more sense to just rehabilitate it.

By: Tess Kalinowski Transportation reporter, Published on Sun Nov 15 2015

It's the obvious option and the least discussed. But the idea of refurbishing the [failing Scarborough RT](#) — instead of building a replacement subway or LRT — is about to get another airing.

A Transportation Summit organized by the Toronto Region Board of Trade on Monday will present a paper by one senior transportation consultant, University of Toronto professor emeritus Richard Soberman.

He argues that [buying new SRT vehicles](#) would be vastly cheaper and faster than the replacing the failing SRT with an extension of the Bloor-Danforth subway northeast from Kennedy Station.

The idea is not without its problems. The newer version of the SRT cars being used in Vancouver may not be compatible with the existing Scarborough route. As well, continuing the SRT to Sheppard, where it could connect to the future Sheppard LRT would require building a fully separated right-of-way.

But Soberman says these issues could be overcome for far less than the \$4 billion he estimates as the cost of a subway extension built on some of the [easterly alignments](#) the city has lately considered.

The **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** (RCCAO) is bringing Soberman's paper to the business event even though it doesn't normally comment on individual projects. Executive director Andy Manahan said he is making an exception because the Scarborough subway is such "an egregious error."

"The mayor (John Tory) has publicly stated he doesn't think it's appropriate to flip-flop on these things. But when you're talking about a few billion dollars, it's worth a sober second look," said Manahan.

Soberman is clear that the SRT technology — an orphan in the TTC subway and streetcar system — was never the right fit. It was foisted on the city in the 1980s by the province, looking for a demonstration for technology it wanted to sell further afield.

It worked, too. It is being used around the world, from Vancouver to South Korea.

The city's original plan to build light rail in Scarborough was probably the best solution.

"LRT would have provided similar speed, capacity and reliability at far less than the RT's capital investment," he said.

In 2006, when the TTC dismissed the idea of modernizing the SRT, it was estimated to cost \$360 million and involve an eight-month service disruption, said Soberman.

"Abandoning a 30-year-old capital investment in rail rapid transit would probably make Toronto unique among major cities in the world and probably the universe," he concludes.

The transportation conference is designed to look at financing and leveraging the unprecedented public transit investments planned for the Toronto region in the coming decade, according to the business group.

The Ontario government is investing \$15.5 billion in projects ranging from GO regional express rail to the Hurontario LRT in Mississauga. Toronto is looking at committing about \$8 billion in Mayor John Tory's SmartTrack rail plan.

"It's to re-emphasize the importance of getting this on time and on budget and making sure everyone benefits from the investment," said a board of trade spokesperson. "This investment allows us to create jobs and prosperity in communities that are not receiving a lot of attention."