

Ontario Line slammed at Transport Futures debate

Don Wall September 23, 2019



Toronto Liberal MP Adam Vaughan landed the sharpest blows at the Transport Futures federal election debate held in Toronto Sept. 17 but his main target wasn't either of his two opponents on the stage but rather Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

Asked if the governing Liberals would help fund the Ontario Line subway concept unveiled by the premier in April, Vaughan slammed the practicality of the proposal and the way, he charged, the Ford government creates big-city transit plans without evidence.

“The Ontario Line is a joke,” said Vaughan, member of parliament for Spadina-Fort York in Toronto and parliamentary secretary with responsibility for housing and urban affairs. “It is a two-and-a-half-page document they submitted for \$11 billion in funding.

“Someone needs to tell Doug Ford that magic markers aren't magic. You don't build transit this way.”

Doug Ford is dragging us backwards....,

— Diana Yoon

NDP Representative

Moments later, after he had outlined a full 10 different reasons why the Ontario Line would be difficult to build and would disrupt the current TTC system, he added, “The questions that cascade from this ridiculous proposal are why we as a federal government just look at the provincial government and our jaw drops. It’s insane. We will fund real transit projects that are based on real evidence that come from cities.”

Neither of the other two debaters, Diana Yoon representing the New Democratic Party nor Tim Grant of the Green Party, said they supported the Ontario Line over the previously planned relief line.

Yoon, who’s running against Vaughan in Spadina-Fort York and works as a climate change advocate, noted the relief line was almost shovel-ready.

“Doug Ford is dragging us backwards...and starting from scratch to support an agenda that we don’t really understand,” she said.

Grant, running in University-Rosedale in Toronto and a publisher of environmental and educational publications, acknowledged Vaughan’s “dozen” criticisms and also lamented that the Ontario government was attempting to “derail a well-planned relief line.”

A fourth candidate who had accepted Transport Future’s invitation to debate, Renata Ford of the People’s Party of Canada, was a no-show. The Conservative Party had previously declined to attend.

The three debaters frequently ventured into discussions of whether the federal government should attempt to influence provincial and municipal transportation policy. Discussing federal funding for the Scarborough subway expansion in Toronto, both Vaughan and Yoon said the federal government should not interfere with municipal planning decisions, with Vaughan saying, “I have told the prime minister...we should not draw lines on municipal maps.”

Yoon said, “Our role is to provide a direct and stable and sustainable funding mechanism so that municipalities can build the transit infrastructure we need.”

Grant disagreed. Noting he was not specifically addressing the Scarborough project, he said, “I think the federal government does have a role here. For example, the federal government could say, we are not going to give money to any municipality for any rapid transit project unless you can show you have developed plans to build density around each transit stop.”

Higher density around transit provides ready-made customers, he said. In contrast, each ride on the new Vaughan line cost \$24 when it opened.

Vaughan took another shot at Ford when he addressed Queen’s Park’s plan to upload TTC capital projects.

“The biggest job we have in the next four years is making sure Doug Ford doesn’t destroy the city with his inane plans,” he said. “That is why the federal spending authority and federal standards will be used to protect the city.”

Later in the evening, during a discussion of P3s (public-private partnerships), Grant took a shot at the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

“The most shocking aspect of that controversy was not the headlines...but the fact that that corporation had its tentacles not just into the political parties and the government but into all the major ministries,” Grant said.

“When we talk about P3s in that kind of political atmosphere, allowing the CIB (Canada Infrastructure Bank) to support P3s is a recipe for disaster.”

Vaughan said some P3s are bad deals but said P3s and the CIB would be instrumental in rebuilding the St. Lawrence Seaway, which he says is crumbling.

Yoon said an NDP government would discontinue P3s and transit ridership would be free.