

# All-day, two-way GO Trains will be "biggest development in Aurora for 100 years"

By Brock Weir

Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard renewed his campaign commitment to secure all-day, two-way GO Trains for the riding last week to members of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

At the lunch, which was held last Tuesday, he told the room of business and community leaders that these transit improvements would have multiple benefits to business and industry in both Aurora and Newmarket.

"It is really at the core of what this government has committed to do, and what I have committed to do for Newmarket-Aurora," said Mr. Ballard, predicting all-day, two-way, electrified GO Trains to be "one of the biggest developments in Newmarket-Aurora for 100 years."

Backing up this bold prediction, Mr. Ballard cited test runs undertaken by the Province on the GO Train corridor between Ajax and Oakville. In this two-year pilot project, Metrolinx, the department overseeing GO services, ran 30 minute GO train service between the two municipalities. Within six months, ridership was up over 32 per cent and, in turn, the amount of government subsidies required to keep the corridor going went down due to increased revenue.

"Politicians and economic development people from Ajax and Oakville started showing up at Queen's Park and [asking for] a guarantee that it was not a two year experiment," said Mr. Ballard of benefits to business recognized by stakeholders during the test run. "The Province looked into it and agreed to make that a permanent service and now you can see wonderful things happening in Ajax and Oakville."

"It is simply because the companies that are located there can get their workers there and they can get their workers home. It has brought significant tax revenues to those communities as well, so much so that even consultants that were advising the government were pretty stunned because it was bigger than they anticipated."

The same things can happen in Aurora and Newmarket if the transit proposal gets off the ground, he said. Businesses will soon start looking to intensify, looking for redevelopment opportunities, and taking advantage of land still available for them to build on in Aurora.

"I think we will see some really good things," said Mr. Ballard. "Not only will it help the people who asked me what I can do for them, not only will it make their commute to Toronto, for those who work in Toronto, much easier, it will make access to [post-secondary] school education easier."

"Ultimately, what I would like to see is those high-paying jobs people have to commute to Toronto [for], located right here in Newmarket-Aurora."

Ultimately, however, this expansion of the GO service will come at a price. Any spending will have to be found through efficiencies, he said, and the Government is committed to eliminating the deficit by 2017-2018, and there will be decisions that have to be made.

"I am not daydreaming," said Mr. Ballard. "This can be done and it will be done."

Beyond the benefits of attracting business to the community, Mr. Ballard also extolled the benefits such a move would have on existing businesses. With more GO Train service, more cars will be taken off the road, not only reducing the commute times of those braving the highways into Toronto but also making it easier for raw products travelling Ontario's highways to get to their ultimate destination.

"I have had people say to me, 'I don't take the GO Train, so it doesn't really matter,' but if we can take 10,000 cars off the road ahead of you or your truck, suddenly the penny drops and people realise what we're really talking about is the easier transportation of goods, services and people and that has a significant impact on our manufacturing businesses here in Town."