

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Gas Tax Funding for Municipalities

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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It has been a busy couple of weeks. At the top of the list, I'm pleased to say York Region will receive \$15.3 million in funding from Ontario's Gas Tax program for transit improvements. This is a great program that helps local transit systems improve their services and increase their ridership year over year.

Public transit is vital to those living and running businesses in Newmarket-Aurora and it has become an important fixture in our daily lives.

As I said at the announcement in Newmarket, as the province increases the frequency of GO Train service, the 'last mile' solution using local transit becomes more important to both residents and businesses that rely on transit for customers and employees.

In total, our government is providing more than \$334 million in Gas Tax funding this year to 99 municipalities ? a \$1.6 million increase over last year. This is the largest number of recipients since the program started. With this year's allocation, the Ontario government has provided more than \$3.8 billion in funding through the Gas Tax program since 2004.

We know how important public transit is to improving mobility, managing congestion, curbing emissions, and building strong communities. Our government will continue to make these kinds of strategic investments that will help us keep up with Ontario's increasing growth and demand for transit infrastructure.

December Job Numbers

I recognize the employment challenge too many residents in my riding face. Too much part-time employment, short-term contracts and low wage jobs are not how to build a strong community. However, I have good news to report on this front: Statistics Canada reports Ontario gained 80,600 jobs in 2016, and we had a significant increase in full time work in December.

Since the devastating recession of 2008, Ontario has created 669,100 jobs. Ninety per cent of those are full-time positions, we are told by Statistics Canada, with 79 per cent in above average wage industries, and about three quarters in the private sector. Our unemployment rate of 6.4 per cent continues to be below the national unemployment rate, as it has been for the past 20 consecutive months. Of course, one person unemployed or underemployed is one person too many, but the government's plan to grow the economy and create good jobs in every region of the province is working.

There have been more than 51,600 jobs created this year across the province and the unemployment rate fell significantly. The Ontario government is committed to building Ontario up by creating a positive climate for business that attracts long-term investments and creates good jobs now and for the future.

We want to ensure that the province continues to be a leader in creating jobs and in competing in an increasingly competitive global economy. We will continue to build Ontario up, by creating jobs and prosperity for all Ontarians in communities' right across this province.

Investing in the Auto Sector

In-line with growing the economy, last week both the provincial and federal government announced they would be partnering with Honda Canada to help the company modernize its Alliston assembly operations. Ontario is contributing \$41.8 million to the plant to help ensure it remains competitive and secure the next generation of vehicle production.

Many residents from our area work either work at the Honda plant or a factory that makes parts for the Honda plant. Automotive experts tell us our investment will help secure 4,000 direct jobs. We also know the benefit to Ontario will be significant, through job creation, increased tax revenue and small business opportunities. Supporting the auto industry is part of Ontario's economic plan to create jobs, grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives.

OSAP

The province is making college and university more affordable for students and families by making tuition free for over 150,000 students.

This is great news for residents in Newmarket-Aurora.

The new OSAP will make average tuition free for students whose families make less than \$50,000 a year. Students from families that earn more will also benefit from more generous grants and loans. Education experts tell us under the new program, about 80 per

cent of all OSAP recipients will graduate with less provincial debt. Today, more Ontario students are graduating from post-secondary programs than ever before, but some people hesitate to apply for college or university because they worry about the cost.

It's my belief the new OSAP will help more students seek a post-secondary education regardless of their family's income. Students will now be able to focus on their education, and not on the debt they are racking up while attending school.

New Year's Levee

Thank you to everyone who attended my annual New Year's Levee. It is great to meet so many new people from the community and to catch up with old friends. 2016 was a great year in our riding of Newmarket-Aurora and I am excited to see what the New Year holds for us.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.