

"Big Move" proposals are unacceptable, says MPP

By Brock Weir

MetroLinx formally released their recommendations on how to fund tens of billions of dollars' worth of transportation improvements in the Greater Toronto Area Monday and they fall to the taxpayer.

The "Big Move", the transit plan which covers numerous improvements across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), includes rapid transit bus lanes, subway extensions into York Region, significant improvements to GO Transit, and improvements to local transit projects, highways, roads, and active transportation options, including trails and cycling lanes.

"Congestion is getting worse every day," said Robert Prichard, Chair of the MetroLinx Board, in a statement. "The \$16 billion of new transit being built today will deliver real results for commuters, but we cannot stand still. We need to continue to invest in The "Big Move" and get the GTHA moving again."

Their seven recommendations to get enough funding to make it a reality, however, have left some politicians seeing red. These include a one percent tax increase to the HST, a 5 cent per litre Regional Fuel and Gasoline Tax, a business parking levy, high occupancy toll lanes, pay parking at transit hubs, a 15 per cent increase in development charges, and land value capture.

For Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees, these are measures that people in the GTHA, including here in Aurora, simply can't afford.

"We can dress up taxes as revenue tools but they are still taxes," he says. "I know that most Ontarians are already taxed to the limit and what this proposal really is, when you analyse its effect on families and businesses, simply is not on."

Mr. Klees said he and the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus will be rejecting the proposal. Plans already in place in York Region and beyond that encompass the goals, including incoming all-day GO service and the subway extension, and while these are improvements he says would be beneficial to the area, the funding is not acceptable to residents.

He rejects the idea put forth by MetroLinx that the impact to the average Ontario family will be approximately \$477 per year. Based on the average in York Region where many residents are part of two car families, add in the relevant taxes, and people could be facing an impact of between \$1,200 and \$1,500 per family.

"There are very few families I know, the average working family, that can afford that," he says, noting in particular the effect of a possible 5 cent per litre regional gas tax hike.

This will particularly have an impact on people on fixed incomes who already have a difficult time affording fuel to get to and from doctors' appointments and grocery trips, families trying to make ends meet, and students trying to ensure they have enough to make their way to and from classes.

Increases in development charges too would have a trickledown effect, he adds, saying it could have an impact of up to \$10,000 on the price of a home

"And you ask why we don't have affordable housing in the GTHA?" he asks. "All of those costs will find their way down to the consumer and they can't afford it."

From his perspective, Ontarians are already taxed enough, so the bottom line is for the Provincial Government to "get its fiscal house in order" and not waste millions through what he describes as "mismanagement."

"Rather than spending the amount of time figuring out how to tax people, we should have had a panel to figure out what we can save as a result of saving on scandal, on waste and inefficiency," he says. "In this province we don't have a revenue problem. We have a

spending problem. We have an accountability problem. We have an oversight problem. Fix them and we will have the money that infrastructure needs.?