

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Transit

Transit Planning

By Stephen Somerville

For most of my business career, I have had quite a hike to get to work.

I would either make my way down Hwy 400 on the way to Mississauga or Etobicoke or, for the last eleven years, make the daily commute down Hwy 404 to the Don Valley Parkway to get to my office in downtown Toronto.

When going downtown I would leave my home around 5.40 a.m. to 5.45 a.m. and hope to get to the 401 no later than 6.15 a.m. so I would be in my office around 6.30 a.m. or so.

Then, on the way home, I would try to leave between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. because my usual trek would average about two hours during the school season and, in the summer, about one hour and twenty minutes.

My wife had asked me to take the GO Train, but with my job I never know when I will need to go to a meeting somewhere outside the GTA. Besides, I like being in my car and I really don't want to hear other peoples' business at 6 a.m.

I am like a lot of other Aurorans who make a living somewhere else but love living in this community, so we put up with the long commute.

But something has to give.

Over the last few years the traffic is getting increasingly heavy even in the very early hours as other commuters also try to beat the traffic.

I am happy that the Toronto Board of Trade has championed the issue of transit in the media lately and it looks as though Premier Kathleen Wynne wants this to be her signature issue for the next election campaign ? whenever it comes.

Kind of reminds me of Brian Mulroney in 1988 making Free Trade the centre point ? really the only issue - during the federal election that year.

Ms. Wynne sure does need something to latch onto ? to change the channel as it were, from the continuing power plant saga and the ORNGE debacle.

Everyone agrees that something needs to be done about our aging transit infrastructure in the GTA, but there is no such consensus when it comes to how to pay for the \$50 billion price tag.

The Liberals like to discuss the various revenue tools (i.e. mostly tax measures) that they can use to raise the \$2 Billion needed annually. The Tories don't want to see any of these measures used until the Liberals get their own fiscal house in order.

And recent polls don't really point to a magic formula to raise the \$2 billion.

According to a May 31 Toronto Star news story, a poll by Forum Research showed that none of the four favoured new taxes recommended by Metrolinx to pay for transit into the Toronto region has more than 45% popular support.

Only 42% of respondents approved a 15% increase in the charges developers pay. 25% approved a 5 cent per litre gas tax. 43% approved a regional parking levy of 25 cents per space per day and only 27% approved a 1% sales tax hike in Ontario.

What is also interesting is the regional breakdown of the polling numbers. There is no consensus either in the 905 area, where we reside. 45% support a developer levy. 13% approve a gas tax and 33% support a parking levy. 32% support a hike in the HST.

Looking at these numbers show that gaining the political support to do anything will be difficult for the Premier.

I can see the Premier starting to send up a lot of trial balloons over the next few weeks on different sources of funding and using different messaging and then vigorously polling to see if a clearer path will emerge before the fall.

The reason I say before the fall is that I believe the Premier will go the Lieutenant-Governor in either August (just before a couple of bi-elections need to be called) or just after Labour Day and ask for an election.

The Premier will be hoping that enough time has elapsed from the McGuinty scandals that she can secure her own mandate.

One thing is certain; raising the HST on a province-wide basis to help shore up transit in the GTA is a non-starter for those outside this area.

I am interested to hear the transit plan the Premier comes up with.