

POLITICS AS USUAL: GO?down the middle

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Politics have always been a bit of a family affair in my house.

Having an opinion is expected, as is being able to defend that opinion.

My dad and I have near-weekly spirited debates (if one is polite) on all manner of topics. We are most often on opposite sides of the debate given that my father is a diehard NDPer and I am most definitely not. However, one issue we are in absolute agreement is the need for better transit options in the GTA.

York Region is Canada's fastest growing region. And yet, as anyone who had tried to get from Aurora to Toronto can tell you, getting around by any mode of transport is a difficult proposition. There are days when I think that a horse and buggy would get me there faster, but I digress.

Buses are not efficient. They are too often held hostage by the vagaries of Toronto traffic. We need trains. Lots and lots of trains. Residents have been clamouring for more transit options for years and it seems that their plaintive cries have been heard. The Liberals have announced an enormous transit boost to take effect over the next decade, with literally hundreds more trains on the tracks to service commuters in the GTA. Yippee!

But there are a few roadblocks that are a bit troublesome: the most problematic to my mind is the fact that Metrolinx doesn't own the rail lines upon which the GO trains run. CN and CP still own approximately 25% of the tracks, which means that any increase in service will have to be negotiated around the freight train routes that currently operate on the same lines.

The trains have to go somewhere. So, either more tracks have to be laid or all day service on all GO lines will remain something of a pipe dream.

And that's where my weekly discussions with my dad factor in. He had an interesting idea that I hadn't thought of: why not run a rail line down the middle of the 404? There's a sizeable grassy north/west divider that could hold an elevated rail line that could whizz commuters back and forth from Barrie to Union, without need for using existing tracks.

At first I thought, well, that's just crazy. But as I was sitting in bumper to bumper traffic on the GO bus this weekend, I looked out at the grassy median and thought, why not? Could it work? How much would it cost? Has anyone even considered it?

I did a quick search of Metrolinx documents and found nothing. In fact, I have not found anything about considering an alternative to purchasing or negotiating access to existing CN or CP rail lines.

When we were looking for a house after we got married, transit options were a key consideration. I hate being reliant on a car to get around.

Driving anywhere is not an option for me. Aside from the fact that it is inefficient and less than environmentally friendly to drive around in a car all day, it is a tremendous waste of time. If you are driving, you can't (or shouldn't) do anything else but drive, but on the train, you can read, catch up on work emails, knit, do a crossword, learn Finnish. Lots of different things. You can use your transit time for something other than simply sitting in traffic.