

POLITICS AS USUAL: Highway to Hell

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I have been reading the hysterical media reports about the impending traffic chaos about to overtake the City of Toronto. The countdown to the Pan Am games has begun and, as the days tick down, the panic ratchets up. Breathless reports in virtually all major media indicate that all modes of transport ?save walking and, perhaps, a donkey ? will be useless in the face of the coming tsunami of cars, team buses and the like that will be taking over the roadways for about six weeks in July and early August. I can attest to the fact there will most definitely be utter chaos on the roads. I work at a location where one of the events is to be held. Suffice to say that traffic in and around the facility is already a nightmare. I cannot even imagine what it will be like a few weeks from now where it is expected that we will receive upwards of 20,000 visitors a day!

The subway to the venue is nowhere near complete. Similarly, the roads around it are still a complete and unmitigated mess. Just getting to work right now requires an extra half-hour of travel time (and some Xanax to calm the nerves and suppress the daily bout of road rage that bubbles up). With greatest respect to the poor folks trying to make transit ?plans? (and I do truly feel sorry for them), there is no way on God's green earth that you are going to be able to move that many people in, on or about the facility given the current state of the roads. And the lack of the subway. No way short of a miracle.

Quite frankly, I am not clear why the panic has started now. Personally, I think the pundits are a bit late to the panic party. The alarm bells should have rung loudly years ago when these ?games? were awarded. The GTA is already notorious the world over for our torturous commuting times.

How could the powers that be think that adding hundreds of thousands of extra people over the period of a few weeks, to roads already stuffed like sausage casings, was in any way a good idea?

According to the Toronto Board of Trade, of 19 major metropolises surveyed ? including Los Angeles! ? ??Toronto has the worst average commute in the world?. So, there are already too many people using the roads. There is virtual gridlock on all main access points into the city. And the plan is to add more? Where exactly?

Ah, use public transit they say. Natch. That too is already at max capacity. Anyone who endures a daily commute on public transit will tell you that there's simply no room for even more people. Maybe the plan is to use those ?pushers? like they do on the Tokyo subway? I wouldn't be surprised.

The bottom line is things are going to get mighty crowded no matter what way you try to get around the city and its environs. My advice: Don't even bother. Just close up shop and go fishin'.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.