

POLITICS AS USUAL: Transit Options

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

As a daily transit user, the announcement of all day two way GO train service was certainly welcome news.

As folks who take transit will know, prior to this service change, getting downtown during the week during off peak hours ? so any time after 8 am in Aurora ? or back home ? anytime before 3:40 pm from Union to Aurora ? was a less than ideal experience.

You had the option of taking a bus from the Union terminal, which left once an hour and took about an hour in good traffic, to get to Aurora. Not that bad really but it would often be jam packed, with people standing in the aisle the entire ride. Also, there's no bathroom on the bus which has led to some interesting escapades shall we say.

The other option you had was to take the subway to Finch and then take the VIVA Blue all the way to Aurora ? a decidedly unpleasant option. First, it takes forever ? and second? Well, suffice to say, if you jam people like cattle into buses you are going to trigger some rather uncivilized behaviour.

So, all-day two-way train service is like going from ground chuck to filet mignon. Pretty darn amazing.

All day two way train service to Aurora. Fantastic!

I am a details kind of person. I like to know the what, the why and the how of everything. So when the announcement was made I of course eagerly examined the new schedule to see what changes had been made.

Imagine my dismay when I realized, it isn't all-day two-way train service.

Even without the daily schedule changes (and more on that in a minute), the actual schedule as printed makes clear that we do not have all-day two-way service.

There are no trains going south between the hours of 2:40 and 8:40 daily. If you want to go downtown during that period you have to take a bus. So folks who expected to take the train downtown to see a show will be disappointed to know that you are still going to have to take a bus. And anyone who has tried to take GO to a Jays game on a Friday afternoon will know that those buses are insanely packed...So, not good news.

And, there are no trains going north to Aurora in the morning until 9:40. Anyone downtown hoping to go to Aurora for work by GO train are still out of luck. They will be trapped on the DVP like the rest of those poor souls.

What we do have is enhanced GO train service. Again, a good thing, but it isn't what is advertised.

Why make an announcement about a service that cannot actually be currently provided? We know the extra tracks aren't laid yet, so those freight trains that currently occupy the tracks during the mid-day aren't going anywhere, so why pretend otherwise?

I get the alerts on my phone (an excellent service offered by GO. It lets you know the status of your train.) Every day I get multiple alerts telling me the 11,12,1 and/or 2 p.m. trains from Aurora have been cancelled due to freight train traffic. Aurorans will have to take a shuttle bus to Maple and get on the GO train there.

What should have been a really good news story ? and improved and enhanced transit options for Aurorans is a really good news story ? is now soured by the reality of a bit of a bait and switch.