

POLITICS AS USUAL: Weekend Service Improvements

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

As my regular readers know, I generally get around Town and the Region in one of three ways: by foot, by bike, or by transit, or a combination of all three. To me, it does not make sense to take your car everywhere. You can't do anything when driving a car (let me take that back. You should not be doing anything but driving when driving your car). But, I can work on the train or bus.

I can answer emails.

I can read a book.

In short, I prefer to use transit to get to where I am going because it is usually the most economic and efficient way of getting around. And I also get to pat myself on the back - with a healthy amount of smug self-righteousness for 'doing my part' for the environment.

Clearly, any improvement to our transit system, bike lanes and/or pedestrian pathways would be enthusiastically welcomed by me. So, it was with great delight that I learned of the recently implemented 'improvements' to the Barrie GO line; specifically, the addition of train service on weekends. And it wasn't the piddley weekend service we have been treated to the past two summers - just a few trains each way for a mere three months or so - it was touted to be all-day service. Trains from 9-ish in the morning until 7ish in the evening. Considerably greater train service than was offered in the summer trial period.

Let me say that yes, a train is better than the bus. It is more comfortable; it has more seats available; it is often quicker than the bus and it is generally just a more pleasant experience. On that basis alone, the addition of 'all day' weekend service is indeed an improvement.

But my beef is about whether or not this is, in fact, an improvement in service. If you are looking at quality of service, then yes, this is most definitely an improvement. If you are looking at the volume of folks that can now get downtown, then yes, it is an improvement.

But, if you are looking at frequency of service, then the weekend train service is most definitely not an improvement.

I hate to whine about what is otherwise a truly great transit improvement, but I dislike disingenuousness of any kind. And the fact that the announcement glossed over the fact that the price of train service is a reduced number of trips and reduced access (you can't get GO service on Yonge Street anymore as there are no buses servicing the route) irks me.

Bus service was every hour.

Train service is every hour and 15 minutes.

Cumulatively, this amounts to a reduction of two full trips each way. I found that out the hard way this past weekend when I missed a train and the options to get back home were a bit more limited than I expected.

You might say, 'Big deal. So we have two less trips each way. It's worth it to have train service as opposed to just buses.' Fair enough. It is certainly a fantastic service improvement for folks in Barrie, Bradford, East Gwillimbury and Newmarket.

But, to someone like me, who uses the GO every weekend and is used to being able to get back and forth every hour, the reduction in options is, well, annoying.