

January 5, 2007

Air-Rail Link Update

The Provincial Minister of the Environment, Laurel Broten, has granted GO Transit a two week extension to the 60 day timeframe for her response to the proposed Terms of Reference. Her office advises us that she will be deciding whether to approve or deny the Terms of Reference on February 9, 2007.

On December 4, 2006, members of the Weston Community Coalition held a press conference at Queen's Park to urge the minister to reject the proposed Terms of Reference. The Coalition has many objections, but the fundamental one is that GO 'snuck' a huge change into their final document, which was never discussed at any of the many public meetings. That change means that GO intends to 'scope' the Environmental Assessment. In other words, GO intends to do a smaller assessment than required by the law.

It explains, finally, how GO thinks it will get away with not studying and comparing the environmental impacts of the various routes. Instead, the principal focus seems to be whether the routes studied cost any money. Of course that will effectively render the Weston route the only one to be studied, because (despite facts to the contrary) the politicians seem to want you to believe that the Blue 22 proposal won't cost a nickel in taxpayer dollars. So the deck is somewhat stacked against us in Weston. The Coalition has asked the minister to reject this proposed Terms of Reference on the basis of the fact that GO, and various federal and provincial ministers, have promised us a 'full' EA.

Following the press conference, NDP leader Howard Hampton asked Dalton McGuinty to explain how this scoped terms of reference will meet the stated intent. The response came from the Minister of Transportation, Donna Cansfield, who assured Mr. Hampton that GO Transit would do a 'full' EA. Later that same evening, at a Public Liaison Committee (PLC) meeting in the Seniors' Centre in Weston, GO Transit advised that it intends to continue with the proposed terms of Reference, despite Minister Cansfield's assurances otherwise. In fact, GO advised that it had made the change to ask for a 'scoped' EA at the request of the Ministry of the Environment itself!

GO Transit apparently responds directly to the ministry to our letters and yours. We have asked the ministry for copies of GO's responses. The ministry refused to provide copies, but told us they were part of the public record and we could inspect them at their offices if we wished. We have therefore asked GO Transit to provide us with copies directly. We do not have a reply.

The PLC meeting in December was somewhat more heated than others in the past, due to the arrival of a contingent from a neighbourhood in Etobicoke, which borders a north-south Hydro corridor. That corridor is part of the list of proposed routes to be studied, and the residents from Etobicoke (Minister Cansfield's riding, in fact) were hopping mad that they were not informed of this possibility before now. They use this corridor as parkland near their homes, and had no idea anyone was considering using it for Transit!

Meanwhile, we have now received a copy of the Federal Environmental assessment for the \$25 Million taxpayer dollars already spent at the Airport in support of Blue 22. There was NO public consultation for that assessment. Also our MP, Alan Tonks, has written directly to Dalton McGuinty in support of the Coalition's position on the proposed Terms of Reference. We are not aware of any response yet.

The Coalition website (www.westoncommunitycoalition.ca) has copies of these documents and a copy of the full exchange between Mr. Hampton and Minister Cansfield from the Ontario Legislature's Hansard.

Mike Sullivan
Chair
Weston Community Coalition