



In Transit

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Everything you need to know about the GTA's transit systems, and a chance for readers to have their questions answered.

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New rail link route bus services under scrutiny

With the recent controversy about increasing trains through the Weston area of Toronto, there is now more scrutiny of one of the new services along the route — a rail link between Union Station and Pearson International Airport.

Former federal transport minister David Collenette first touted the line as a way to provide a fast, direct connection between these two major transport hubs.

In late 2003, there was plenty of discussion in the media over the plan to have a private company operate the line, and also about who would pay for construction and how the service would link with existing transit.

At the time, I asked to learn more details of the decision-making process. In addition to interviewing Collenette, I had also hoped to see reports justifying the project. Perhaps I did not ask the right questions, as very little public information seemed to be available.

This month I submitted a list of questions for Transport Canada. You can [click here](#) see the responses. Last week, I spoke with Helena Borges, the ministry's executive director of rail policy. She says that decisions on what kind of service should be used, where it would go, and how often it would run were evaluated by the federal government, and that all affected governments and entities were consulted. The three main stakeholders are GO Transit, Canadian National Railway (CN) and the Greater Toronto Airports Authority.

As part of a multi-million dollar government funding program, GO Transit is upgrading many of its rail lines across the region. GO is co-ordinating the studies and public meeting process along the Georgetown line, where both its trains, and the airport service rail vehicles will travel.

The rebuilt train corridor will remain the property of CN. The privately owned airport line, called "Blue 22," will get access to the shared corridor, without having to pay the construction costs.

Has the federal government calculated the value of public investments to the private sector? Says Borges, "There isn't a specific accounting of a dollar value, saying, 'This is the benefit derived to CN, or to the air-rail link, or to GO.' It's an accumulation of benefits ... "

While the Blue 22 service must have agreements with other municipalities and agencies, including the airport, it is not responsible to the federal government. The Transport Canada official says, "We do not have a contract with the operator. We don't need it, because we're not offering, we're not giving this entity anything."

She also says, "It is the intent that the private sector will operate this, and if it deems that there isn't enough demand, and it wants to change the schedule it will have the flexibility to do so- much like GO does."

Borges also states, "It's not meant to be a transit service."

It appears that this decision, and others related to this important project, have already been made. A few years into the process, the general public finally has a chance to comment.

What's your take?

