

Union-Pearson ARL Saga continues 11/28/08...To All Who continue to Care, Give & Share:

I hope everyone is keeping well and in good spirits!

Since a decade or more has passed since the planning for the Pearson-Union ARL has been kicking around, and we have fought so many frustrating battles in the dark, I can't help but thinking out loud about the bigger picture and how it all began for us.

The attached Ed Drass Metro news article brought back nagging memories of early local public meetings for the GO/ARL Georgetown Corridor EA ToR. In the clip, Ed & Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion remind Metrolinx to build what is needed first (rather than for example the politically embarrassing Sheppard Subway boondoggle), and to pay attention to the advice of transportation advocate Steve Munro. At a public Weston Q&A EA ToR meeting in 2005, I asked the proponents the fundamental question required of all EA's: what is the **purpose** of this ARL project, where is the demonstrated **need** for it and how can it be justified? The deflective non-answer given was that it's all in the audited background studies and the banks are behind it.

The dated background studies blathered on that world class cities have a high speed rail-link to downtown so we need one too (but fail to emphasize that most of them are electric and have the significant corresponding user numbers to justify the cost of building & operating this service). Correct me if I'm wrong, but in the background studies I seem to recall that at best only a small single digit percentage of Pearson Airport users go directly from the airport to union station...so how can you justify the need for a dedicated high-speed rail link from Pearson to Union? In fiscally responsible terms, no one could...the numbers are simply **not** there, that's why the promise of **no** taxpayers money to be spent was loudly proclaimed back then and a private for profit consortium was brought in to operate the proposed reconditioned, mothballed used diesel trains to carry a handful of passengers with a \$20.00 *fare subject to increase* as the market will bear (Hwy 407!).

We learned that, due to the speed and frequency of the proposed ARL trains, federal regulations require the elimination of all level crossings and grade separation for those that remain. In Weston, we were shown an odd bedfellow proposal to 'trench' only the CN rails, while leaving level crossings for the CP rails at the same intersections. Some streets in Weston would still be closed and it was suggested those that don't (Dennison Ave. level crossing???) would likely get intrusive humpback 'mega' bridge road overpasses (see Jane St.) requiring expropriation or restricted access to adjacent private properties...the same type of bridges the city currently refuses to accept for the proposed Strachan Avenue grade separation on the same rail corridor EA.

In the former Village of Weston, all of this is taking place in an under serviced, older, socially diverse and economically 'at risk' part of the city, with narrow streets and designated Heritage structures adjacent to the tracks. No mention has been made of the proposed treatment for 'twinning or tripling' the Humber River railroad bridge, itself an historical structure that merits designation. No mention has been made of compensation for disruption, demolition, lost business or structural damage to adjacent properties during construction, never mind any negative consequences of long term operation and service expansion.

The big unacknowledged **but** is that the public and residents who live along the corridor are paying a huge price for this elite service with our money, health, quality of life and lost potential for prosperity that affordable public rapid transit would bring. We get nothing but pollution and accusations of being NIMBY's in return.

Although Steve Munro had similar ideas, no one in power seemed to pay any attention to the WCC proposal over 3 years ago in support of truly **public** electrified rapid transit that could integrate with the Bloor West subway, finally enabling downtown, NW Toronto and east end transit users direct rapid-transit access to one another, the airport and western municipalities beyond <http://westoncommunitycoalition.ca/>.

The devil in all of this is that local (Mayor/City of Toronto) and provincial (GO/Metrolinx) politicians and agencies desperately need transportation infrastructure money and will cautiously do almost anything not to lose out on the hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money promised to support the seemingly imbedded private ARL project component of funding the GO Georgetown CN rail Corridor improvement – the **real** underlying purpose of the Georgetown Corridor EA.

In the current political climate of economic recession, everyone is looking to infrastructure investments as some sort of Holy Grail. In our dismal era of industry self-regulation, in Ontario we currently face new untested fast-track 6 month EA's – whose primary change "**will remove the requirement to demonstrate the need for a project** and to look at options other than transit" - Hon. J. Gerretsen MoE, Mar. 28 '08. A devils advocate portent is alluded to in the

Robert Silver Nov. 24, '08 blog <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/blogs/SilverPowers>. Silver sums up that it takes 12 months to 6 years or more to complete an EA for infrastructure investments, so it's not a difficult step for us to conclude that the only big announcements that federal and provincial politicians can realistically make anytime *soon* to curry public favour (with resulting job creation partisan poll boosting good news stories) are for projects whose EA's are *already under way or nearing completion*.

The Georgetown GO/ARL EA corridor improvement and subsequent Union Station redevelopment are therefore likely approaching critical mass. I have to keep reminding myself: that this is a federally proposed project (albeit a former Liberal government one) with a federal funding promise and federal jurisdiction over railways; that the province's GO and Metrolinx RTR need CN to add tracks to improve service on the Georgetown rail corridor to separate or buffer freight and passenger trains for future regional expansion (see GTA West attachment); and that without private partners, the City of Toronto seems unable to maintain, let alone redevelop Union Station (under new pressure from adjacent GO property redevelopment plans recently in the media).

So, what is the winning scenario?

I don't believe that anyone involved with this project in a position of power believes for a second that there is either an absolute **need** or justifiable case for taxpayers to foot the bill for the infrastructure to support an *exclusive* (53 year) piggybacked private for profit high-speed elite ARL service running old inefficient polluting diesel trains. In my view, 10 years ago the ARL was viewed politically as a good news 'win-win' private partner bonus for the feds kicking in infrastructure funding for Georgetown GO Corridor rail/service improvements with an imbedded calling card for private partnership investment in the City owned Union Station redevelopment. Today, the original ARL/GO proposal is indefensible, inadequate, irresponsible transportation planning...it is far from visionary or 'world class', a dated and underwhelming missed opportunity to redevelop the potential of one of the GTA's *most significant radial rail corridor alignments*.

To me, it can be argued at all levels and most importantly (in spite of any ambitious new rules) at the EA level that the ARL as proposed is more of a politically motivated **want** than a **need** - essentially that the EA **fails** to pass the first test - to adequately **demonstrate the need** for the proposal. Without all day service, airport access and full municipal (TTC) fare integration, I believe it can be further argued that current proposals for improved GO service on the Georgetown corridor fall far short of being an efficient use of the same infrastructure improvement funding that the stalled EA purports to address - itself a condition of multi-level government discord and myopia.

I believe it can be argued that the ARL proposal to run high-speed, high-frequency, for profit, reconditioned diesel trains through residential portions of the city slated for Official Plan intensification is environmentally irresponsible and a potential liability to the operators for their failure to consider the health and well being of both current and future generations. I further believe that at this juncture in global village economics, any failure **now** to *seriously* consider electrification / bio-diesel / dual mode / bicycle or other alternative combined propulsion systems on this corridor will represent a serious step backwards - a regrettable **lost** technology / manufacturing futures / quality of life development and job creation **opportunity** for Ontario and Canada.

I believe it can be argued that if the Liberty Village / Strachan Avenue rail underpass for **all** CN & CP tracks is approved, the real taxpayer costs for this project will skyrocket. I believe that, if such a significant investment of public money is committed to the Georgetown corridor infrastructure improvement to eliminate level crossings and build additional tracks, bridges, layovers, spurs and stations, it would be a borderline criminal no-brainer act **not** to have **both** fare-integrated all day local TTC interfaced public rapid-transit service *in addition to* any premium (demand driven) commuter express service to the airport and points beyond - *sharing the same tracks*. I believe that any proposal which grants **exclusive** private service rail access into the airport is similarly suspect.

Before it's too late, we need to get facts on the table and find out what the province and private ARL partner are currently planning *behind closed doors*. This is about getting the most bang for our buck...and getting it right the *first time*. Hwy. 407 failed toll increase regulation and the empty Sheppard subway remind us that there's no accountability for cronyism. **Getting it right the first time** includes having the chutzpah to invest in environmentally responsible infrastructure improvements and technologies...solutions that invest in the future well being of our children's children and **place the needs of the many before the needs of the few**.

I believe it was President Obama who recently asked 'Does anyone *believe* in the possibility of government *by the people for the people*?' I believe Canada is respected for this to be true...

Neil