

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should, on a priority basis:

Increase access to public GO Transit service to all communities served by the Georgetown south rail corridor;

Revive the previous GO Transit expansion environmental assessment requiring only one additional track to expand GO service on the Georgetown south rail corridor; and

Separate all GO Transit aspects of the current Georgetown south rail corridor environmental assessment from all aspects of the private, high-speed, air-rail link Blue22 environmental assessment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Ferreira, you have up to 10 minutes. The floors is yours.

Mr. Ferreira: I rise this morning to speak on a matter of significant importance, not just to my constituents in York South–Weston but to tens of thousands of Ontarians living in northwest Toronto and elsewhere along the Georgetown south rail corridor.

As members here and regular viewers at home will know, I have devoted considerable time in this House talking about the need for better public transit in my part of Toronto. Communities in my riding, and in places like northern Etobicoke and north Peel and Halton regions, are presently underserved by public transit.

I am certain that government members here this morning will point to the proposed subway extension to York University. That is a worthy project, but the geographic location of that line does not improve the public transit capacity in my riding, nor in the northwest quadrant of Toronto and beyond.

My riding is, however, served by GO Transit trains along the Georgetown south rail corridor, which covers communities along the line from Georgetown to Union Station in downtown Toronto and includes a stop in the village of Weston in my riding.

For many years now, communities along this line have been underserved and the present capacity is strained. Currently, GO Transit service along the Georgetown south corridor consists of 10 trains inbound toward Union Station and nine trains outbound towards Georgetown each weekday. Most of these trains are during rush hour. There is no weekend service along the line.

I have taken GO Transit on this line many, many times. Back when I lived in Brampton and worked out of the CBC building on Front Street, I would take the train twice each day. That was 10 years ago, and the rush hour trains even then were packed with

commuters standing for the duration of a long ride. Commuter congestion has only increased during the intervening years.

The recognition of an urgent need for increased service on this line isn't a new one. Back in the early 1990s, the NDP government of the day initiated an environmental assessment to look at improvements to GO service along the Georgetown corridor. That EA was completed in 1994 and it forecast a strong increase in demand for GO service along the line due to general population and employment growth.

The EA called for the addition of four new stations, including one in my riding to be built near Eglinton Avenue West in the community of Mount Dennis, which was to be called York City Centre. The EA also called for the construction of an additional track along the corridor to serve the increased number of GO trains and reduce the sharing of existing track infrastructure with freight trains.

The EA involved extensive public consultations with affected residents and its recommendations received glowing public review. One resident who participated in the process back then said, "A great idea, 20 years late though ... this expansion will greatly help people who need jobs." Another said, "This is a most welcome improvement to rapid transit in the northwest metro corridor. The integration with Eglinton West RT is superb planning. Let's keep moving toward implementation!"

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These residents, as it turned out, were well ahead of their time. Here now, 13 years later, the vast majority of the recommendations of that EA have not been acted upon. We had, unfortunately, in the province of Ontario a government from 1995 to 2003 that did not place public transit on its list of priorities, and thus the GO expansion plans were derailed.

We do have, today, a new EA regarding the Georgetown south rail corridor. However, this EA appears to be stalled by the present government. The EA is not only examining expanded GO service along the corridor, it is also looking at the possibility of a publicly subsidized, privately operated, high-speed train, the now very well-known Blue22, which would run between Union Station and Pearson airport.

This Blue22 would not stop in any of the communities in my riding or anywhere else along the line, save for, perhaps, a stop at the Bloor and Dundas subway station here in the city of Toronto. It would run along the line every seven and a half minutes, 20 hours a day, 365 days of the year. To hop aboard, it would set you back the princely sum of approximately \$20, give or take a buck or two. The Blue22 fleet would consist of several 50-year-old refurbished diesel cars—not exactly modern-age technology.

Blue22 would not be public transit. It would be a private service, operated by a very well-heeled private consortium led by the Liberal-friendly folks at SNC-Lavalin. Yet it would cost taxpayers upwards of \$1 billion to provide the necessary track upgrades along the

line. Residents and business owners in my riding have been quite clear in their opposition to Blue22, which would pollute our neighbourhoods, lead to greatly diminished property values—real estate brokers have estimated up to a 40% drop in values—while offering very little in the way of spinoff benefits to the local community. To add insult to injury, the initial concept for Blue22 would force the closure of three main streets in the village of Weston, cutting off the residential district from an already struggling business strip along Weston Road.

The opposition to this flawed idea is so fierce that more than 3,000 people showed up at one public meeting. The community has continued its stiff opposition to Blue22. They have been unfairly dubbed, in some quarters, as NIMBYites. That is the furthest thing from the truth. The people of Weston, Mount Dennis and other communities along the line welcome improved transportation in our part of the city, but it must be improved public transportation that serves the needs of local residents and business owners. One of the reasons they elected me on February 8 was so that I could deliver their message. That's what I'm doing here this morning and what I have done repeatedly in this House since I first arrived here.

Just yesterday, I asked yet another question of the Minister of the Environment on this very issue. She is responsible, as we know, for the current environmental assessment process. Her ministry has been stalling on its decision regarding the terms of reference that would provide the framework for the current EA. We were initially told that the decision on the TOR would come down in late January. Of course, there was the small matter of the by-election in York South–Weston in early February. The fate of Blue22 was the local key issue. We learned through an e-mail during the campaign that the ministry would release its decision on the TOR the day after the vote. When that news made the front page of the local community newspaper, the Ministry of the Environment started to backpedal. The furious backpedalling has continued for the past three months, and it would appear by the non-answers that I get here in this House that not even the minister knows when that decision will be made.

The unfortunate part of all of this is that for every day that the minister and this government stall, the longer the commuters along the Georgetown corridor must wait for improved service. The too few trains get more congested by the day, the gridlock caused by those who can't squeeze on to the trains increases by the day, pollution gets worse and Toronto gets its first smog day of the season in early May. That's the reality.

Yesterday, in response to my question, the minister urged me to “take a significant and relevant stand” on public transit. I hope the minister is at least tuning in right now. Perhaps she has missed it, but that is what I have been doing since my very first day here and it is what I am proud to be doing on behalf of my constituents here this morning.

With this resolution, I am asking this government to take a significant and relevant stand on improved public transit in a part of Toronto and the GTA that desperately needs it. I am asking this government to unbundle the GO Transit expansion plans from the deeply flawed Blue22 EA. I am asking this government to dust off the perfectly good EA that

was completed more than a decade ago and fully implement its recommendations so we can move ahead with delivering real and meaningful investment in public transit.

If this government is serious about its commitment to public transit, it will support my resolution this morning. I am afraid, however, that their commitment is rather thin—postcard and photo op thin. If that's not the case, then I challenge government members, the ones in this House this morning, to rise from their seats and vote in favour of my resolution, which would immediately provide the impetus for much-needed, long overdue expansion of public transit along the Georgetown south corridor. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in the debate today on the proposal by the member for York South–Weston relating to: “Increase access to public GO Transit service to all communities served by the Georgetown south rail corridor,” including my own community of Brampton.

GO transit is one of Canada's first—and Ontario's only—interregional public transit systems, established to link Toronto with the surrounding areas of the greater Toronto area. I understand it carries 44 million passengers a year on an extensive network of trains and buses that is one of North America's premier transportation systems. We've been truly blessed with one of North America's finest transportation networks and strongest transit systems.

But in recent years, I think we've all noticed an increase in population that changes those travel demands for Malton, Brampton and Georgetown, and it can no longer be accommodated on the existing transportation system. We all know first-hand how congested the existing roads and freeways are for both automobile travel and bus transit. GO transit can no longer accommodate the current demand on the existing infrastructure. Projected commuter ridership from Brampton to Toronto is increasing exponentially, from today's 15,000 daily trips to over 27,000 daily trips by 2015. It's no wonder that many of my constituents in Brampton Centre feel that our current transportation system has failed them and hasn't kept pace with the demands of the community and others that extend beyond my community in the Georgetown south corridor.

The present service provided in Brampton appears to me to be at or near capacity, with standing room only on very many trips. This capacity cannot be increased without significant rail infrastructure improvements in the corridor. My own experience is that in the first year at this Legislature I tried to take the GO train, not realizing how late some of the trips were. At the end of the day, we finish here so late that there is no train service. Even if you finished at 6, you'd sometimes have a hard time getting to the last train going to Brampton, which is at 6:45, so then you're stuck with the bus. Sometimes the bus doesn't make it all the way down to downtown Brampton, and I have to go to the Bramalea station and catch another bus to downtown Brampton to get a car home. It doesn't fit the lifestyle I have, and my guess is that there are a lot of businesses and business owners

that have to travel to Toronto that can't meet that schedule either. It certainly doesn't fit the needs of the kind of commuter we have now.

The present service clearly needs assistance, and that's why the expansion of GO service in the Georgetown corridor is critical to meet the current and future demands of my community and others that share that same corridor.

Our government is serious about public transit and we do recognize the importance of investing adequate capital funding in safe, reliable, efficient transit systems, which is the key to building a strong and prosperous community around Brampton and across Ontario. We as a government have invested \$1.3 billion since coming to office in 2003. That sounds pretty serious to me. We've invested in GO Transit, as well as developing partnerships with both the federal and municipal governments to work with GO Transit to ensure that the expansion program, which includes the proposed project along the Georgetown corridor, is completed by 2010. The completion of these projects is essential to better accommodate the 44-million-plus current riders across this province, and these riders are expected to double in the next 20 to 30 years. Long-term funding is essential to improve public transportation that will reduce the gridlock that we all know about, improve our environment and preserve the quality of life for the residents of Brampton—the people I represent—and for everybody in this House and the communities they represent across the province.

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The proposed project along the Georgetown corridor would see improvements in rail infrastructure along GO's Georgetown line, which would see additional tracks being added between Bramalea and the recently built Mount Pleasant GO station, which I had the pleasure to be at and never thought I would see happen in my lifetime, but this government made it happen. Improvements like a new layover facility near the new Mount Pleasant station and several road-rail bridges in the Georgetown corridor increased track capacity for both the proposed air-rail link Blue22 service and future GO Transit rail service.

The additional services and improved systems would reduce travel time, increase reliability, safety and accessibility for commuters and would have a positive long-term impact on the residents of my community by reducing their stress levels during travel—which I think we all experience—and ensuring that people arrive home in a timely fashion so they have more time with their friends and families.

This proposal to increase access to public GO Transit service to all communities served by the Georgetown south rail corridor has the full support of not only myself and our government but the city of Brampton and the region of Peel. City council and staff have been diligent in their advocacy on this issue and have been following the GO Transit environmental assessment study with great interest, as it would enhance service in Brampton. Brampton city council has endorsed the environmental assessment and preliminary design study for the Georgetown north rail corridor to plan for the expansion

of the Georgetown commuter rail service to provide for eventual two-way, all-day GO train service through the city of Brampton.

The regional chair, however, has expressed serious concerns regarding the delays and potential future delays to the Georgetown south corridor service expansion project. The region is committed to ensuring that Peel's long-term needs for frequent, all-day, two-way commuter rail service and transit access to the Lester B. Pearson airport are not jeopardized and that regional staff will continue to work with the GO Transit project team on the environmental assessment study to help support and expedite the project.

The environmental assessment study has two components, as I understand it. One examines proposed improvements along GO's Georgetown south rail corridor that would meet the increasing demand and future needs for the GO train service to communities such as Brampton along the corridor running between Halton and Peel regions and the city of Toronto. The second is to examine alternatives—both within and outside the Georgetown south rail corridor—for an airport transportation link, including the proposed air-rail link service between Union Station and Lester B. Pearson International Airport.

The potential for excessive delays in introducing additional commuter rail services due to the linking of the environmental assessment for the Georgetown GO rail service expansion project with the airport transportation link project is an ongoing concern. Considerable public opposition to various aspects of the airport transportation link project has already resulted in the termination of the original class environmental assessment and a bump up to the individual environmental assessment. My concern is that the current proposed approach of combining the environmental assessment processes for the two projects into one could lead to further delays. Under this approach, problems with the airport transportation link project or part of the project could delay or even jeopardize GO Georgetown service expansion, which would have a negative effect on my constituents and our local economy.

Although GO Transit is obligated to conduct the environmental assessment work required for the GO rail improvements to the Georgetown corridor and for the air-rail link, we should remain committed to an open and transparent process that considers the communities' concerns.

It is my understanding that no single alternative has been selected at this point and that any decisions regarding the structure of the environmental assessment would have to go through the Ministry of the Environment.

By investing in the GO Transit expansion program and by expanding service along the Georgetown south rail corridor, we will enable a larger portion of commuters in Brampton to use public transit instead of private automobiles. That's why I support Mr. Ferreira's motion to prioritize access to public GO Transit service to all communities served by the Georgetown south rail corridor.

In order to avoid any future delays to the GO expansion project along the Georgetown rail line, we need to move quickly to accommodate the current and projected future ridership. This expansion is important and is key to building a strong and prosperous Peel and, in particular, the riding of Brampton Centre.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington): I'm pleased to stand to support the member from York South–Weston. As a proud previous member of the GO Transit board, I had some awareness of this project while I sat on the board. I want to say that there was a lot of discussion. The good people of York South–Weston did come to the GO board to make a presentation and the points are valid and well taken.

GO Transit is probably one of the safest and cheapest commuter rail systems in North America, and we as a province ought to be very proud of it. As we're talking about the Georgetown rail corridor, I want to be sure—at the remote possibility that there are any folks here from Georgetown or who may be listening to this broadcast later in the day—that this does not mean there's going to be increased train service to Georgetown. This increase of train service, should it go forward, would be to Brampton only. I just wanted to get that out of the way.

I too feel it's important to separate the two projects, because I don't believe the air-rail link project has met its time. I think that is a project for the future, given the challenges and the priorities that exist for projects and for funding here in the greater Toronto area for GO Transit and other modes of public transit. I'm a huge supporter of public transit, but it has to be convenient, it has to be safe and it has to be the kind of cost our residents can afford.

Whose interests are being met by the air-rail link? The public has concerns. Are their interests being met? There has to be some certainty for our government that the province's interests are being met. Also, there has to be some certainty to the private sector, which is going to be involved here, that the game will not change halfway in the middle of the game.

I feel that this project has jumped the queue in a priority list. I feel there are priorities in our province, in our GO system, that stand far higher than this air-rail link. I think it would behoove the government to do an audit of exactly how many cars would be taken off the road if the air-rail link project went forward. In fact, it would behoove the government to do an audit on any grant in public transit to any municipality to make sure the money is being spent to take cars off the road. With the millions and billions of dollars we have spent for public transit, we have no idea whether or not we are in fact taking cars off the road, so I think it would be a really good idea for us to monitor how the money is spent and whether we get our money's worth.

We know that gridlock is a cost to our economy of about \$2 billion a year, and that is substantial.

I feel that this air-rail link began under the previous federal government when the Minister of Transport at that time wanted to leave a legacy as he left his office. I think this air-rail link is that legacy, but it's not well thought out. The numbers have not been crunched. We cannot be confident that the system will support taking cars off the road. I live in Burlington. Would I pack my suitcase, kids in tow, get on a GO train, go to Union Station and get on yet another train to go to the airport? I don't think so. So who is this rail link serving? How much are we going to get? What kind of bang are we going to get for our buck?

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I think that this project is out of touch and that we have been pulled into a flawed federal scheme that began with the previous government. This is one of those ad hoc projects that really jumped the queue in a list of some very serious priorities that would have made a difference in the greater Toronto area, and even the wider greater Toronto area, because we're now looking at points beyond what is known to be the greater Toronto boundary. We're looking beyond into Sudbury, Peterborough, Niagara, and even Waterloo and Guelph to see how we can service people and take people off the roads, because that's what the goal should be. This project, I don't think, does that.

Inasmuch as the EA is part of this battle, I think another very important battle is to say, why the air-rail link now? Why are we doing this now? What benefit is it to us for the cost that's going to be involved and for the disruption that it's going to cause to residents in the area? It's going to split communities—communities that have existed there for years, scores of years. So I think that if we go ahead and spend this money, it goes under the category of government waste, and it will be yet another one-off project to satisfy somebody. There'll be a great ribbon-cutting and a name on a plaque, and away we go.

In finishing my comments, I want to say that I support what the member from York South–Weston has brought forward and I'm all for public transit. I think it's very important for us to deliver on projects that get people out of their cars and into public transit. The air-rail link is not one of those projects.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I just want to speak for a short while to support the member from York South–Weston by way of his resolution and by way of his defence of his community in York South–Weston. GO Transit is proposing to lay down two new tracks, in addition to the existing three tracks, to allow a train to connect Pearson airport and Union Station. Blue22 is the name they give the train, which I suspect means the price that they charge—

Mr. Ferreira: Twenty-two minutes.

Mr. Marchese: I thought it was the charge that they pay. It's the 22 minutes it takes to get from downtown to the airport.

Mr. Ferreira: The trains are blue.

Mr. Marchese: And the trains are blue.

While it seems like a good idea on paper, nobody has talked about the impact it has on the good people in Weston region. Residents have worked around the inconvenience of the railway tracks for a long time and they did this with grace and, yes, complaining, but they lived with it for a long, long time. There was never enough money, it seems, to make bridges over or underpasses under the tracks. It seems that we didn't have enough Rosedale residents in the area to give it adequate muscle to urge the politicians of the time to build the bridges or the underpasses under the tracks. I suspect that if we had a couple of Rosedale types, with all due respect, we would get their voices heard and politicians would listen.

Unfortunately, the community from the area has never been so lucky, until we got people like my friend Paul Ferreira from York South–Weston, who has put up a strong defence, with the thousands and thousands of people that have gone to these meetings, urging not just an environmental review process—a thorough one—but urging them to stop something that has very little convenience to the community. What we have in the community is a lack of recreation centres; as some other writer mentioned, limited child care facilities; very few places for seniors to hang out. We know they won't even stop at Weston. They won't even get a benefit from this train, because it won't stop there. They, these poor residents, are being gouged at the pumps, with gasoline prices going up and up. They have poor transit service, as far as I understand very little public transit service, and very poor at that, so at the end of the day you say to yourself, what do the good people of York South–Weston get out of this? They don't get very much. What we know is that many roads are going to be closed. Thanks very much for getting this train to start at Union Station and cut right through the York South–Weston region and go straight to the airport. It will benefit some people; it will certainly benefit SNC-Lavalin, who is a publicly subsidized, privately owned company. They're going to make a few bucks, no doubt. But we haven't talked very much about what is to be had, what is to be gained for the working people of York South–Weston. From the looks of it, and the debate that I have witnessed over the last couple of years, we get nothing.

This resolution is an attempt to speak to the problems and to the need for public transit in York South–Weston, and to the need for federal politicians and provincial politicians to review how we help a community that in is in desperate need of public transit, rather than a train that is going to cut through their region and cause greater problems to them with very few benefits.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It was a very interesting motion. Some of my comments have been made by some of the other members. But there are three words in it that I am grappling with. They are “a priority basis.” The member for Brampton Centre, an excellent member who very diligently represents her constituents in Peel region and shares some of the same problems that I do, has made some of these points. Let me emphasize them from my vantage point living in Mississauga.

The people I serve live on the Milton GO line. The Milton GO line has five trains in the morning, five trains in the evening, and they are all full to capacity, every single one of them. Very much like the member for York South–Weston, we are also served by GO bus service. The bus service, admittedly, is very good. But if we really need to get people out of their cars, and people are willing to get out of their cars, we have to be able to get them from where they are to where they want to be and back at the times they want to get back. Many people will say, “I don’t mind getting out of my car, but I don’t want to get out of my car to get into a bus to sit in the same traffic that I would sit in if I drove my car.”

It’s for that reason that in the government’s 2006-07 budget we set out a long-term plan for developing public infrastructure, and especially public transit. There were a number of services that received a significant amount of funding—one of them in my own city of Mississauga, the Mississauga Transitway; the Brampton AcceleRide—but we also set up the framework in the Greater Toronto Transit Authority to begin to address such issues as the member for York South–Weston raises.

I ask the member rhetorically, should his project, its merits and its drawbacks notwithstanding, be the basis for GO Transit to say, “Drop what you’re doing, forget your capital plan, look after me first”? I’m not sure that’s quite the case. If indeed there needs to be an additional track, should it be on this line or should it be on the line that serves Milton? Should it be on a line for Milton and Oakville? Should it be on the line that’s serving the areas where more people are moving to, where more of those cars are getting on the road—not because people want to get their cars on the road but because there’s no other way to get downtown?

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Very much like the member for Brampton Centre, I love to take the GO train. Whenever I can, whenever this House rises at 6, I’ll take the GO train in in the morning and skip that wretched traffic. Sometimes I can make the 6:10 GO train back to either Meadowvale or Streetsville, but very often I’ll have to take the Lakeshore express to Clarkson and get my significant other to pick me up from Clarkson because there is no train back along the Milton line.

But this member says that his solution in York South–Weston should be the priority and not the area where 15,000 to 20,000 people a year are moving to in western Mississauga. That could be a problem. That may be what we should be debating. Is this indeed the priority or is it simply one of the priorities? Isn’t it something that perhaps GO Transit in its capital plan should be considering? Wouldn’t it be better if, within the framework of the GTA, GO Transit took a look at the entire region’s needs and looked at it in the form of its capital plan and said, “These are the priorities. These are the timelines”? But the member says, “Look after the Georgetown south rail corridor and do it right now.”

I have a little note here on what GO does supply in the York South–Weston area: four trains into Toronto in the morning; four trains back toward Georgetown in the afternoon.

Between Bramalea GO and Toronto there are the 10 trains, four as previously mentioned, plus an additional three during rush hour, plus an additional three in the off-peak hours. On the Milton line we get nothing off peak—nothing. We have five in the morning and five in the afternoon, and by the time you get to the third stop, which is Streetsville, you can hardly find a seat anymore. It used to be that you could get as far as Erindale and still get a seat, but it's harder and harder now to find a seat if you get on the train at Erindale.

But the member says, on a priority basis, “Me first.” There are indeed others of us, and I think the best solution would be not to say, “Me first before anybody else,” but to say, “Let us all co-operate,” because this is private members' time and we are not here to put on our party colours. We are here to ask, “What is the best thing for the province of Ontario?”

While the member relates some needs which, from what I have heard this morning, seem to be perfectly legitimate needs, my suggestion to him would be, would it not be better to sit down and look at the entire area served by GO Transit and decide, if we are going to build an additional track, where that track should be built first? Undoubtedly, we need a lot more capital expansion, but this one is perhaps a little bit too narrow, saying, “Look after York South–Weston.” Why not look after Peel, Halton and Durham regions and consider that in the same plan that we are in looking after York South–Weston? Other than that, it seems to be a fine resolution.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): The previous speaker seems to be suggesting that we need an overall commission to look at this, maybe an authority, and I could come up with a name. I think maybe we should call it the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. Oh, maybe one was announced by the Liberal government. Maybe we already have one. I think we have a chairman, the former mayor of Burlington. However, I don't believe it's doing anything. I don't think they have a budget and I don't think they have any employees.

It's a sort of authority because it doesn't really have any authority and it doesn't have any budget. It does have a chairman, but the chairman is not all that busy. I would agree with the member from Mississauga West that that's kind of what we need and we kind of have one, but it's not going anywhere. Nothing is happening with it.

But this proposed resolution from the member for York South–Weston is indeed a good one, especially as it deals with increased capacity on the Georgetown south GO rail corridor. Although that increased capacity doesn't go to Georgetown yet, it certainly has the potential of going to Georgetown at some time in the future.

Increased public transit, of course, is one of the solutions to the gridlock that is costing business, commuters and family life. Stress and health care and everything else in the greater Toronto area are costing them a great deal in dollars and in the well-being of individuals within the public. It's costing us in every way.

Of course, public transit is one of the solutions to that gridlock. It's one of the solutions that has to be looked at very carefully, and in this particular project, looking at it very carefully has taken an inordinate amount of time. That is one of the problems we have. When these projects come along, everybody says, "Yes, yes, we need them. They're a good thing," and as the member for Burlington pointed out, when you take the cost analysis of it—how much does it cost to pry someone out of their car?—this project, obviously, the GO Transit project, would be a good one that I think would come out well in that cost comparison. Whereas the so-called Blue line link—Blue line, I think it's a mine actually. Somebody's going to mine some money out of it, but I don't think it's going to take very many cars off the road. It's perhaps not as much a line as it is a mine, and with the number of studies that have gone on with this particular project, that mine is kicking out lots of returns for people doing those studies. I don't think it's going to provide a very realistic alternative.

A high-speed rail line would be a wonderful thing for the GTA, but I would suggest that the heaviest commuter traffic we have in the GTA is along the 401. If you're going to have a high-speed, high-capacity public transit line, certainly the 401 corridor would be the highest priority for me. As you're sitting in your car on the 401, watching a high-speed train, or rail, or some public conveyance going by at high speed, I think it would certainly encourage you very quickly to reconsider your options and perhaps leave your car at home, or at least leave your car in a very large parking lot somewhere and get on the high-speed train that would take you to your destination.

Having all of those facilities coordinated, of course, is another wonderful thought. It would require an overall authority to coordinate those things, and if the GTTA—Greater Toronto Transportation Authority—were ever to be given a mandate and a budget and a staff to do those kinds of things, I think it could probably do a very good job of it. But as it sits in its infancy, it doesn't seem to be moving ahead very quickly or with very much enthusiasm from this particular government.

Talking of public transit as a solution to gridlock—yes, that is a solution to gridlock, or one aspect of that solution. I know that Ontarians have a long-term love affair with their cars, and it's always popular from a political point of view to talk about building more roads. I think anyone who has studied the problems of gridlock would agree that it would be absolutely impossible to build enough roads to handle the kinds of traffic generated in high-density populated areas such as the New York to Washington corridor, the Los Angeles area, Chicago area, or indeed, the Toronto area. I think those four areas are the four highest-density areas in North America. So the GTA problem of gridlock is one that is mirrored in the other three huge metropolitan areas in North America.

I think one of the alternatives to gridlock and public transit is also the ability to decentralize this province. Ontario is a very large province. The fact that we have focused our growth in the GTA area is one that has brought about continuing, growing problems in the ability to move people from one side of the city to the other, to move freight in and out of the city. We've seen most of the industrial base of Toronto move out of Toronto because they can't get their supplies into their factory in just-in-time delivery, and they

can't get their product shipped out of the city with anywhere near efficient time use. So you've seen most of that manufacturing base move out into the suburbs or into the nearby towns, in order to accomplish that just-in-time delivery or the meaningful or reasonable communications with the road links and rail links that exist in those areas.

So probably a decentralization of the province in general, moving it into the London-Chatham-Windsor corridor, into the Peterborough-Belleville-Cornwall-Kingston corridor, moving it north into Barrie and north of Barrie, into those areas to encourage growth in those areas, to decentralize the Toronto area, the GTA, would be a longer-term solution to what is going to continue to be a growing problem until it is faced square on.

As with most of the issues that face us today, there is no single issue, there is no single solution, but there are multiple solutions. I would suggest that doing what we can with roads and encouraging the efficient production of growth and building of public transit and the decentralization of the GTA would be the solutions to those problems.

1150

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): It's my pleasure to speak in support of the resolution put forward by my colleague Mr. Ferreira.

It's interesting to look at this whole issue from two angles. One is what I will refer to as fun with environmental assessments. The other is the whole question of transportation and the need for transit—adequately funded, properly planned, put-in-place-on-time transit.

First, in terms of fun with environmental assessments, this environmental assessment that Mr. Ferreira's motion refers to is one that seems to keep getting put off. It was certainly my understanding at the end of last year that this environmental assessment would be announced in February. Then the by-election came down and that date for the environmental assessment was pushed off. We have a provincial election coming on. It may well be that it's pushed off again. Clearly, this is a hot issue.

But it isn't just this issue where environmental assessments have been pushed off. The integrated power supply plan—the Minister of the Environment exempted one of the largest decisions Ontario is ever going to make in its history from a full environmental assessment, so that the decisions that will have to be made in as intelligent and rational and environmentally friendly a way as possible will be deprived of the forum that in fact the decision should take place in. I see that decision around the power supply plan being solely politically driven, and the same in this case; I see another politically driven decision.

In my riding, on the Portlands Energy Centre, which was proposed starting at the end of 2003, we in our community asked for an environmental assessment. We were told that, no, it was impossible; the time was too short. But lo and behold, in the initial RFP process, the Portlands Energy Centre failed to make the cut and then it was another nine

months to a year before a decision was made to go ahead—nine months to a year, when in fact an environmental assessment could have been held and frankly, in my opinion, a decision could have been rejected that will be seen to be a problem for the long term for this city.

So those are two significant areas where environmental assessments have been pushed aside when they were needed, and yet again we have another. There is an environmental assessment. It was done, completed in 1994. The facts at hand, the arguments that were made, are all on the record. What remains, given the transit crunch that we have in this city, in this region, is to proceed with the environmental assessment and not have us knocked off kilter, not have us knocked off track, as it were, by this Blue22 proposal, which frankly is, on the face of it, very questionable. If it's going to have an assessment, by all means convene an assessment and get rolling on it. But we have an assessment on the GO trains already in place; we have a need already there. We need to move forward.

I was in estimates over the last few days. As part of the estimates, we were looking at the transportation needs in the greater Toronto area. The Neptis Foundation, in 2002, did a study of transit needs in the GTA, a study of transportation issues in the GTA, in the period 2000 to 2031. On a business-as-usual basis, assuming that the way we've continued to approach things over the last decade will continue on into the future, they show a very dramatic increase in greenhouse gas emissions in this region over the next 25 years. As we all know, we're looking at dramatically increased travel times—another way of putting that is dramatically slower travel times—for people in this region.

We need the GO Transit to go ahead. Blue22 is not going to address those key issues. Ms. Savoline addressed that, the fact that we're looking at a spread-out demand for access to the airport. If we have a route to the airport and a rail route, and a rail route makes sense to me, let's have an environmental assessment. Let's look at multiple options. Let's look at one that has the best impact in terms of benefit for the environment and benefit for the population as a whole. Let's not hold this community in suspense forever, saying to them, "Well, after the next election we'll get around to the environmental assessment. No, after the next election we'll get around to the environmental assessment." It doesn't make sense.

I understand that there is an interest on the part of the proponent to have their assessment bundled in with GO train assessment. Obviously, you get to surf on, to ride on, the shoulders of a project that already has approvals, support, and analysis that shows that it's useful and makes sense. So why not try to ride on those coattails?

Let's adopt the resolution that's been put forward by my colleague. Let's make sure that those GO trains get built, get put in place. We've already heard people speak this morning about the need for the existing transit. Let's put them in place and let's go forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for York South–Weston.

Mr. Ferreira: Mr. Speaker, I will use the remainder of our time and then wrap up with my two-minute summation.

I want to use the next few minutes to respond to some of the very thoughtful comments that were made by members from across the greater Toronto area. We heard from the members from Brampton Centre, Burlington, Trinity–Spadina, Mississauga West, Halton and Toronto–Danforth. I think it's quite evident that we all believe there must be greater investment in public transit across the region of greater Toronto. In fact, there is tremendous economic benefit to be gained by investing in public transit. We know the negative effect that gridlock has on our economic development, on the economic standing of our region, and we know the positive impact that investment in real public transit can have.

The member from Brampton Centre acknowledged in her very thoughtful comments the tremendous growth—I believe her word was “exponential”—that she has seen in the need for and the use of GO Transit services in her community of Brampton, a community that I grew up in. As she well knows, by having the Blue22 proposal bundled in with the GO Transit expansion plans on the Georgetown line, what we've seen is unnecessary delay.

The public has been in an uproar over the possibility of private trains—publicly subsidized to the tune of almost \$1 billion—running through their community without stopping in that community, without leaving any tangible benefit behind in that community except for diesel fumes. And that's not acceptable to the people of my community. That's why they have been so concerned about this issue and why they have come out in such large numbers. It's also why we are seeing this unnecessary delay in expanding service along that line.

This leads me to my response to the member from Mississauga West. His concern was with the words “on a priority basis,” and perhaps feeling that I was suggesting that the Georgetown line be bumped ahead of all of the other projects. In fact, expansion plans are under way across the entire GO network, and in some places that expansion is near completion. The unfortunate reality is that along the Georgetown line, because of the bundling with the Blue22, that line and the commuters on that line are being penalized. They're being forced to wait, and we are all ready. Just on the acceptance of the terms of reference, the TOR document, that has already caused a delay of several months. That document was submitted to the Minister of the Environment late last year, in late November. A response was expected back within six weeks. I outlined the timeline earlier. We were expecting a response in late January; it did not come. We were told a response would come in early February; it did not come then. We are now in the middle of May and we still have no indication whatsoever on when this government is prepared to act on the terms of reference for the environmental assessment, which is why I say, “Let's take that 1994 assessment, let's pull it off the bookshelf, let's blow the dust off and let's utilize that environmental assessment.”

1200

It calls for the added infrastructure of one track along the line. That is all we require to be able to deliver expanded GO train service, not just for the people of York South–Weston in the station in Weston but also to Bramalea, Malton, Etobicoke North, Brampton and further into Halton, into Georgetown, into the riding of the member from Halton. That's why this is so important and it's why I think I am about to receive the support of members from all parties on this initiative.

I want to say, before my initial time runs out here, that I know the good work the member from Burlington, who sat on the GO board, did and other GO board members did in raising concerns about how the Blue22 plans would unfairly impact—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: I have to hear the member speak and I'd like your co-operation in doing that.

Mr. Ferreira: I want to thank the member from Burlington for her presentation and her fine work when she served as a member of the GO board in expressing her concerns about Blue22 and its impact on expanded GO service.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you—

Mr. Ferreira: I thought you were going to pause, Mr. Speaker.

I want to close by thanking the people of York South–Weston who have, over the past two and a half years, engaged themselves on this issue. As we know, the various levels of government were trying to sweep this project under the rug. It was initially announced as a federal government initiative in 2000 by then-federal Transport Minister Collenette.

Our community was kept in the dark for almost five years, but when activists in the community raised this issue and brought it forward to the community, the community rallied like I have never seen it rally before. We had meetings where thousands of local residents came and expressed their opinion, and they applied a little bit of political pressure. That's why we now have a full-fledged environmental assessment process.

It's also why we have a government now that is trying to avoid dealing with this issue. They've had a number of months to deal with it. All indications are that they may decide this is too hot a political potato to deal with anytime soon, and that means perhaps after October 10. They may not have the chance to deal with it after October 10, and the unfortunate result is that the people who need the Georgetown GO service to be expanded will be forced to wait and wait and wait.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MINING TAX

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 8, standing in the name of Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Hardeman has moved private member's notice of motion number 64. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members after dealing with the next item.

GO TRANSIT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 9, standing in the name of Mr. Ferreira.

Mr. Ferreira has moved private member's notice of motion number 61. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1205 to 1210.