



Airport link plan tackles fears in Weston area, premier says

But rail from Union to Pearson would be diesel-run at first, which will 'hurt community,' opponents say

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Metrolinx has released a new plan to build a privately operated rail link from Union Station to Pearson airport that should address the concerns of Weston community residents who have long argued that the project would be a disaster to their neighbourhood, says Premier Dalton McGuinty.

The transportation agency announced six open houses next month to present the \$875 million plan that it says would provide all-day, two-way service on the GO Georgetown line and offer the capacity to run a train service to the airport.

It would add about 25 kilometres of new rail between Malton and Union Station and expand the Weston GO stop to a full station to serve riders on both services. It also suggests an additional station could be built at Woodbine, where there is a very small GO stop now – but there's no target date for that one.

"Metrolinx has revised (its earlier) proposal. They're now putting something forward which includes ... a stop in the Weston community, which is something the people of Weston have been looking for," said McGuinty, acknowledging opposition to the "Blue22" rail link that was originally to have barrelled through Weston without stopping.

"There's a proposal to build a tunnel to minimize ... the traffic interruptions that would otherwise take place," the premier added.

Infrastructure Ontario is negotiating the capital financing and operations of the airport rail link with SNC-Lavalin, the proponent of Blue22, said Metrolinx chair Rob MacIsaac.

Until the rail is electrified – still at least 15 years away – the airport link would be a diesel engine pulling old Budd cars that would be restored for the premium service, expected to provide 4,000 trips a day. The Georgetown GO line is projected to carry 34,000 passengers at the peak morning rush by 2031.

The Union-airport trip shouldn't take more than 25 minutes. Finer details such as the fares aren't yet known, but would probably reflect the fact that it's a premium express service, with stops at Bloor St. and Weston only, MacIsaac said.

To address community concerns that a busy rail line would cut off streets and bisect Weston, the Metrolinx plan recommends tunnelling below the neighbourhood to keep Church and King Sts. open at their existing grades and reduce the number of rail crossings. John St. would still be divided but a pedestrian bridge would allow foot traffic. "John St. will not be open to vehicular traffic, but we're trying to mitigate in what we think is the most reasonable way," MacIsaac

explained, saying that expanding commuter rail along the Georgetown line would take 1 million cars a year off the road.

The plan also calls for widening 14 bridges with grade separations at Strachan Ave., Denison Rd. and Carlingview Dr.

"If we are going to spend public money, let's spend it on public transit," said Weston Community Coalition chair Mike Sullivan. He says the latest plan would still split John St., and that the idea of creating a world-class service to the airport based on diesel is laughable.

"Diesel is going to hurt the community. It's going to be an elite service that does nothing to get more people out of cars," he said.

"The whole air-rail link is obviously a very interesting part of building a transit network in Toronto," said TTC chair Adam Giambrone. "The Eglinton LRT (to be built as part of the Transit City plan) also provides that rail link that serves the entire city. They're not mutually exclusive."

Giambrone cited London's premium-fare service from Heathrow Airport to the downtown Paddington station as a prime example: "There's no reason Toronto can't have something like that."