



Time to move on airport link

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A long-overdue rail link connecting Toronto's Union Station and Pearson International Airport has edged closer to reality with a fair and far-sighted plan from Metrolinx. The line's impact on surrounding residents has been reduced, and start-up money seems to be available. Now every effort should be made to, in Premier Dalton McGuinty's words, "get a shovel in the ground by the end of this year."

The proposal by Metrolinx, the agency in charge of co-ordinating transportation in the Greater Toronto Area, would give travellers arriving at Pearson a convenient and quick way to get downtown using trains run by SNC-Lavalin. And GO Transit riders would also benefit from expanded service to the communities of Georgetown, Bradford, Bolton and Brampton.

To make that happen, the \$875 million plan calls for building about 28 kilometres of new track, widening 14 bridges, and new grade separations. In addition, it proposes expanded stops to serve local Toronto residents and tunnelling to allow traffic to flow above the tracks.

Sadly, to the frustration of airport rail link advocates, the most vocal of residents in the Weston neighbourhood continue to oppose the project. The opposition remains despite the planned accommodations to neighbourhood concerns, including the tunnelling to keep Church and King Sts. open and a pedestrian bridge at John St. These would address community concerns that the project would bisect the neighbourhood. The Metrolinx plan also includes expansion of the existing Weston GO stop into a full station.

"It's going to be an elite service that does nothing to get more people out of cars," says Mike Sullivan of the Weston Community Coalition.

Au contraire. It is estimated that the airport rail service would take 1.2 million car trips a year off local roads. And expanded GO train trips on the Georgetown line could induce thousands of daily commuters to leave their vehicles at home. That would cut air pollution and it would reduce gridlock – an economic inefficiency that costs the GTA and Hamilton an estimated \$6 billion yearly, according to Metrolinx.

Neighbourhood concerns deserve to be heard. And, to its credit, Metrolinx has scheduled a series of public meetings to discuss its plan. But unless compelling new evidence of harm is found, the benefits of the new rail link would seem to dwarf its drawbacks.