



## Time for GTA super-agency

Oct. 2, 2006. 06:08 AM

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They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but in the case of Ontario, and in particular the Greater Toronto Area, it's littered with promises of better public transit.

Cast to the side and lining the ditches are reports and newspaper articles talking about what could be, projects that looked beyond the smaller scope of local transit authorities and sought to strive instead for something bigger.

Ideas such as high-speed trains that will get you from Windsor to Quebec City in a few hours and make regular stops in the GTA; an ambitious plan — unveiled in 1983 by then Conservative transportation minister Jim Snow — to have a continuous transit loop around Metro Toronto; GO Transit expansion to link the GTA and the Niagara region better. And what about a rail link from Pearson airport to downtown Toronto? You know, the kind that many other big North American cities have joining their airports to the city core.

It was originally to have been completed by 2008, but that's now wishful thinking. Residents of the former community of Weston have rightly kicked up a stink because a rail line from Pearson to Union Station would essentially cut their area in half and be of little benefit to them.

In an area underserved by public transit, is this high-speed service going to assist Weston's needs? "Not one whit," said one observer. The proposal is undergoing a full environment assessment rather than an EA-lite.

A subsidiary of engineering giant SNC-Lavalin is to operate the link. Some people have rightly pointed out that it would make much more sense to have a bus-only lane roadway from the airport to the downtown. Adding stops along the route would greatly increase its value to other neighbourhoods and help connect transit-poor communities.

Bus-based alternatives are nothing new. York Region has introduced a successful bus-based rapid transit system called Viva. Brampton wants to do the same with its Acceleride program. And even car-mad Mississauga is shifting its priorities toward a bus-based rapid transit corridor along Highway 403.

There are other good ideas but the missing ingredient is a body to co-ordinate it all, an agency that can think and act big.

Sure, the province says, "Wait for the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority — It's going to work miracles knitting together the various municipal transit systems from Burlington to Clarington."

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But it likely won't have the clout needed to force municipalities to play ball. So far, despite suggestions it would be operating by fall, there is no chair and no mandate. When and if it ever gets off the ground, one of its first tasks will be to create a GTA-wide fare-card system.

But Transportation Minister Donna Cansfield assures me that a chair — my money is on Rob MacIsaac, who is not seeking re-election as mayor of Burlington — and a vice-chair will be named within two weeks.

"This needs to get up and be going," Cansfield said.

Here's hoping it doesn't end up like so many other promises.



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