

**TORONTO BOARD OF TRADE
Chair's Luncheon**

**Robert MacIsaac, Chair
Greater Toronto Transportation Authority**

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Toronto Board of Trade

Thank you for inviting me to address today's luncheon.

I am especially honoured to be addressing the Board of Trade as I have so much respect for this organization, and what it has accomplished.

I think your timing in asking me to speak is impeccable. The last little while has been pretty exciting for us at the GTTA.

Transportation is a great field to be in right now. My sense is that we are on the cusp of a sea change in transportation systems here in the GTTA.

Today, I will begin by talking about the challenges that I think are forcing us to profoundly change our approach to planning, funding, and implementing transportation across this region.

Next I will explain why I think the GTTA is well positioned to respond to those challenges.

Finally, I would like to tell you a little bit about some of the strategic directions we need to follow moving forward.

So let's start with a review of some of the principal forces driving change for us.

Key Issues

1) Severe Congestion

Traffic congestion is certainly what most people would identify as the most obvious manifestation of our current malaise in transportation.

This city region is one of the top five most congested cities on the continent.

And it's getting worse, not better. We are on a trajectory that will see us vying to be in the top two most congested cities in North America, sharing that dubious honour with the city of Los Angeles.

Now, without dampening hopes, I have to tell you that we are not about to make congestion disappear. I think everyone knows that in their heart of hearts.

And in fact, congestion is a common by-product of thriving city regions. I would challenge you to show me a prosperous world-class city that doesn't have traffic congestion.

But that doesn't mean we should accept the status quo.

We need to redefine the problem we are trying to solve. Just because we are congested doesn't mean we can't ensure people have mobility.

Our real problem is that both people and business have few choices when it comes to moving around this region. These are issues we can address. We can give people options for transport tomorrow that they don't have today.

2) High Growth

Another key issue for us is meeting the demands of population growth in this region.

We are one of the fastest growing places in North America. Looking ahead, we expect three million more people and perhaps 1.5 million more cars to arrive in the next 25 years.

That is like everyone in greater Montreal moving to this region. It is an extraordinary challenge that we need to plan for.

3) Globalization – Competing effectively

Globalization is another major driver of change for us.

The reduction in international trade barriers means that we need to compete effectively with the rest of the world.

We need to ensure our transportation systems, and more particularly our goods movement strategies, are as good as or better than other similar cities around the world.

Plainly put, we will not be economically competitive if we fail to deliver on a first class transportation system.

4) Fossil Fuel Dependence

There are two really important trends we are facing that are related to our dependence on fossil fuels.

The first is often referred to as peak oil. As many of you no doubt know, Peak Oil Theory predicts we are about to, or have already entered, into a period of steep and sustained price increases for oil.

I don't profess to be an expert on this topic. However, as far as I can tell, the debate around this theory centers on when not if we will reach peak production.

Some people say we are already there. Others say we still have as much as 40 years before prices begin rising dramatically.

When we do reach the peak, there can be little doubt that we will have to change many of our current practices surrounding transportation.

It will surely take us a long time to comfortably wean ourselves off of cheap oil. So in my view, it is only prudent for us to be anticipating the impacts of expensive oil and to begin planning mitigation strategies for our transportation system.

5) Climate Change

The other significant trend directly related to our dependence on fossil fuels is Climate Change.

The transportation sector presents a significant challenge for Canada in responding to the Kyoto Protocol.

Transportation is the single largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Canada, accounting for 26 per cent of the total.

If current trends continue, GHG emissions from transportation are expected to exceed 1990 levels by 32 per cent in 2010 and 53 per cent by 2020.

Clearly, if we are going to reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases, changes to our transportation system are going to have to play a very large role in the solution.

6) Public Health

Another set of trends that I find really compelling relate to human health. Our society is seeing dramatic and sustained increases in the rates of respiratory disease, obesity, and diabetes.

The Ontario Medical Association estimates that air pollution alone costs us nearly 8 billion dollars each year in the way of premature deaths, hospital admissions, emergency room visits, and sick days.

Transportation is one of the largest sources of air pollution in Canada. So, if we are going to improve respiratory health in this region, transportation will have to play a big role.

Beyond air pollution, we are also getting a clear picture of the impact of our continued reliance on the automobile.

Take for example, the heavy price our youth are paying for our current transportation practices.

- Less than half of Canadian children now walk to school.
- Two out of three Canadian children do not meet the average physical activity guidelines to achieve optimum growth and development.
- More than a quarter of Canadian children and youth are overweight.
- And, traffic fatalities are the leading cause of death for children over the age of one year in Canada.

Improving public health will undoubtedly require new healthier approaches to transportation.

7) Planning and Funding Problems

We find ourselves in this situation in large measure because the way we currently plan and fund transportation is inadequate.

In terms of planning, our regional economy has transcended municipal boundaries over time resulting in a lack of coordinated planning and service delivery.

And we have under funded transportation infrastructure, especially public transit, for decades.

So, enter the GTTA into this complicated and troubled scenario.

Our raison d'être is to plan and develop an integrated multi-modal transportation system for this city region.

That means developing:

1. A multi modal transportation plan that both integrates modes of transportation as well as transit systems,
2. A rolling capital budget that prioritizes projects within the plan,
3. And an investment strategy that will suggest funding sources for both capital and operating costs.

Ultimately, beyond our planning responsibilities, we will also be a service delivery agency responsible for:

1. GO Transit,
2. A region-wide fare card that will allow public transit users to seamlessly traverse different municipal systems,

3. And transit vehicle procurement for municipalities across the Province to take advantage of purchasing as a collective.

All of which gives us an immense opportunity to address many of the challenges I spoke about earlier.

If we get this right,

- we can make this a more liveable city by improving people's mobility and giving them more time with their families,
- we can position our economy as a strong competitor on the world stage by making sure that businesses get their supplies just in time and their products to market with ease,
- and we can protect and enhance our environment by reducing GHG emissions and reducing air pollution.

But to fulfill that potential, we are going to have to become an agent of change. So, how might we change the paradigm moving forward?

Strategies

Well, we have only just started thinking about what strategies we will pursue.

In fact my board is attending a retreat this coming weekend to formally begin developing a strategic plan and strategic directions. In my view, however, some of the strategic directions we need to be pursuing are pretty apparent.

A) Biking and Walking

To begin, I think we need to take walking and cycling far more seriously than we have in the past. If we can get people incorporating these physical activities into their daily lives, the public health impacts will be enormous.

Exercise has an enormously positive impact on issues like obesity and diabetes. And by biking and walking we will be using our cars less thereby assisting in both climate change efforts and air quality improvement.

That means investing in the infrastructure that will allow people to be more oriented to active transportation methods.

We need to develop the policies and the systems that will make biking and walking safe and convenient. Things like bike lanes and bike lockers at Go stations could make a huge difference. And they don't cost a fortune.

B) Transit

Public transit will also be fundamentally important to our efforts going forward.

This is not about being anti-car. It's just that, looking forward, we simply can't build enough roads to accommodate all the cars that are coming. Last Friday, Premier McGuinty and Minister Cansfield made it clear they expect public transit to play a key role in our plan.

Last week the Premier committed 17.5 billion dollars to the GTTA to implement a rapid transit plan for Greater Toronto and Hamilton.

The funding was linked to a concept plan for a multitude of new public transit routes across the region. Some 52 candidate rapid transit projects were identified totalling over 900 kms of new or improved routes.

An ambitious goal of a 12 year build was put forward. The Province intends to finance these works over a 50 year period which in my view is entirely appropriate.

The GTTA will review and recommend necessary revisions to this plan. We are to report back to the province early in 2008 with a final plan and recommendations surrounding which projects should go first.

The impact of such a build-out will be enormously positive. It will improve mobility for people throughout the region. It will reduce GHG emissions massively.

So the Province has given us very strong guidance that it expects a bold plan for public transit and is prepared to pay for it.

C) Other Key Components

As a multi-modal plan intended to integrate various modes of transportation, our plan will also have to look at roads across the region.

And I have every expectation that some new roads and highways will be called for in our plan. But frankly, as I said earlier, there isn't much room left for significant new road infrastructure in our region.

Beyond roads, our plan needs to address ways to better integrate modes of transportation.

That means taking a systems approach. We need to identify key intersects between modes of transportation and ensure they are operating seamlessly.

In Europe, they have taken a very thoughtful approach to connecting walking, biking, public transit, and automobile use to each other using something called mobility hubs.

It's something our plan needs to address.

D) Consultation

As tight as our timelines are, we need to be thoughtful and inclusive in our process. We will be establishing a series of Advisory Committees that will allow broad input and dialogue. We would like to have these up and running by this fall.

Because, ultimately our plan needs to be developed in consultation with the broadest possible range of stakeholders. If we do this well, we will have allies from business, labour, the environment, and social justice for our plan.

Accomplishing this will mean innovative, leading edge, public and stakeholder participation in our planning process along with the more customary approaches.

So, we will spend the next months diligently working to deliver on these ambitious targets.

Closing

As I started out saying, this is a really exciting time to be in transportation. I think it is a time when we can make some really positive changes for our communities. That is certainly the kind of thing that gets me out of bed in the morning.

And at the end of the day, I intend to deliver on a plan that leads us to a Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area that competes effectively with the world because of its healthy environment and its strong communities.