

Statement by  
The Honourable Harinder Takhar  
Minister of Transportation

Greater Toronto Transportation Authority  
Legislation, Second Reading

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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

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Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to lead the debate of our proposed legislation to create a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority - GTTA. First, let me point out again why it is critical to act now to curb traffic congestion in the Greater Toronto Area.

There are approximately 5.5 million people living in the GTA and Hamilton Area. Mr. Speaker, our highways are already operating at close to capacity. Yet, it is estimated that in the next 25 years we'll see an increase of nearly two million vehicles in the GTA and surrounding area.

Transport Canada estimates the cost of congestion in Toronto alone is \$1.6 billion annually. If we don't take action, by 2021 commute times within the GTA could increase by more than 50 per cent, increasing the cost of congestion by \$7 billion a year.

Mr. Speaker, I said if we don't take action. Well, our government is taking action.

If our legislation is passed, the mandate of the proposed GTTA will be to create a seamless and co-ordinated transit system that brings municipalities, the province and transit agencies together.

When commuters are travelling, they don't see municipal boundaries. People want to get from Hamilton to Richmond Hill or from Whitby to Mississauga quickly and easily.

If our proposed bill is passed, GTTA will change the pattern of development and increase the choices people have for travelling easily from Hamilton to Newmarket to Oshawa by train, bus or subway.

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which we will release soon,

encourages the development of dynamic, vibrant communities that are less car-dependent and more supportive of public transit.

GTTA supports this initiative by creating a real and reliable alternative to people using their cars. It also builds on the many steps my ministry has already taken to reduce gridlock and improve the movement of people and goods in the fastest-growing part of Ontario.

We were the first to open High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on provincial highways. As a result, the number of people who have switched to public transit or carpooling to take advantage of these HOV lanes continues to grow. There are now about 1,000 vehicles an hour on the eastbound Highway 403 HOV lane during the peak of the morning rush hour. And 1,100 on the southbound Highway 404 HOV lane.

Mr. Speaker, we delivered on our commitment and are the first government to offer municipalities a stable source of funding they can rely on to improve public transit through our hugely successful Provincial Gas Tax Program. As a result, ridership is up by 3.4 per cent across the province – the equivalent of 18 million fewer car trips every year!

And Mr. Speaker, our government continues to make significant investments in transit and highway infrastructure to keep people and goods moving. In the recent budget we launched Move Ontario - a new \$1.2 billion investment in Ontario's public transit systems and municipal roads and bridges.

As a result of our investment, communities across the province have funding they can use for projects most needed in their communities. For example we've committed \$1.9 million that could be used for the reconstruction and widening of Brookdale Avenue in Cornwall and \$670 million that could be used to extend the Toronto subway system into York Region.

Mr. Speaker, our proposed GTTA will also bring results!

If passed, the Bill will allow the agency to bring together the province, the Regions of Durham, Halton, Peel and York and the Cities of Hamilton and Toronto as well as local transit agencies to create a seamless and more convenient transportation network.

Commuters will see a difference.

Having one agency to co-ordinate planning and schedules means people will spend less time waiting for a connecting bus or train.

Having one agency oversee the GTA Fare Card system means people won't have to fumble for change or a different pass every time they cross a municipal boundary. They will be able to use a single fare card for seamless travel across the GTA and Hamilton.

And having one agency co-ordinate transit vehicle purchases means better value for all of us.

It also makes sense for GO Transit to be transferred into the GTTA at an appropriate time. As the province's largest inter-regional transit provider, GO Transit supports GTTA's mandate of planning and identifying strategic investments. It also supports our goal of integrating transit and fare systems.

The province will continue to provide annual funding for GO Transit's operational requirements.

Mr. Speaker, getting something right takes time. That's why we spent the time to consult with municipalities, regions, transit operators and other stakeholders. We consulted with the Canadian Urban Transit Alliance, Ontario Community Transportation Association, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Toronto Board of Trade and Canadian Automobile Association.

Because we have taken the time to consult with these municipalities and organizations, we are able to deliver the best possible model for the GTTA.

A fully functioning operational organization such as GTTA cannot happen overnight.

The first step is to bring everyone to the table. Our legislation does this. We have laid the foundation. This is not a "photo op" as the opposition implies. We are taking real action to ease congestion and improve transit and transportation in the GTA and Hamilton.

We are also using what we have learned from the experience in other jurisdictions. Vancouver, for example, began with a small authority, which now works very well, integrating transit and transportation over a wide area.

Mr. Speaker, here's what people are saying about our proposed legislation.

The Mayor of Burlington, Rob MacIsaac told the Hamilton Spectator, "Our economy, our environment and pocket book need a co-ordinated approach that will allow people real choices about how to get around, and businesses to deliver their

products on time."

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion told the National Post, "The time has come that we in the Greater Toronto Area recognize that we are one economic unit, that people are living in one municipality and working in another."

York Region Chair Bill Fisch told the Toronto Star, "This is a very good beginning. It means we'll all be able to work together in a more co-ordinated fashion than we have in the past."

The Toronto Board of Trade issued a statement with the following endorsement from its president, Glen Grunwald: "Premier McGuinty and Minister Takhar deserve major credit for keeping their word on creating a GTTA and providing sensible rules and priorities to get it started."

And from Len Crispino, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, "A smart move by the government."

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't have said it better myself.

Our proposed GTTA will take a region-wide approach to creating an integrated, seamless and more convenient transportation network including road, rail and public transit service.

Mr. Speaker, our goal is to reduce gridlock by creating seamless travel. Now is the time to move forward.

We cannot let traffic congestion eat into Ontario's prosperity or our quality of life. We have to keep traffic moving so that our goods get to market on time and our families get home to dinner.

Mr. Speaker, I urge Honourable Members to give this legislation their enthusiastic support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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See also:

Legislative Assembly of Ontario: Bill 104 2006 - An Act to establish the Greater

Toronto Transportation Authority and to repeal the GO Transit Act, 2001 (First Reading)