June 23, 2016

Metrolinx
Mr. R. Pritchard, Chair of the Board
97 Front Street West
Toronto, ON
M5J 1E6

Dear Chair Pritchard and Board Members:

RE: ITEM 6-Regional Express Rail, 6.3 New Stations Analysis-Appendix 2

Lakeshore West Corridor - Parklawn Station

I have had the opportunity to review your report and recommendations for new stations. I am writing to you to request your reconsideration of the business case for a new Parklawn GO Station and the need for immediate further analysis and review of this location. I have had discussions with Metrolinx staff and I do understand they have concerns about the existing low GO Rail ridership in south eastern Etobicoke and the projections for possible new ridership.

There is a pressing demand to provide rapid transit to the existing close to 20,000 residents of the area and the thousands more that will occupy new approved developments in the next several years. Also to provide further rapid transit options to the residential areas immediately to the west and north of the Parklawn area.

While I am the current Member of Provincial Parliament for the area I was previously a Toronto City Councillor, Vice Chair of the Toronto Transit Commission, and Chair of Toronto’s Planning and Growth Management Committee which affords me a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities for rapid transition expansion in the area as well as the benefit of a long corporate memory of the many iterations of transit planning for the area.

I respectfully submit the following recommendations to the Board for your consideration;

1. Defer consideration of a new Parklawn GO Station as part of the RER 10 Year Program until the first quarter of 2017 to allow for further analysis.
2. Review more fully the potential of the Christie Lands for employment purposes, including office uses that could be attracted with the addition of a GO Station, in conjunction with the City of Toronto.

3. Canvass and engage the local community to assess the number of individuals who would utilize the GO Rail service if access was conveniently available at a Parklawn GO station.

4. Release publically the data utilized in the review of a business case for a Parklawn GO Station.

The Humber Bay Shores neighbourhood was first proposed in the 1970’s on what was then known as the Motel Strip. Only one building was constructed at that time, Palace Pier. Notably from its first day that building has provided express private bus service to Union Station for its residents due to the historic lack of reliable rapid transit in the area.

In the 1980’s and early 1990’s as the area lay dormant Metropolitan Toronto in conjunction with the Province planned for a Waterfront LRT to serve south east Etobicoke. This plan was never advanced due to lack of funding. During the same period the City of Etobicoke proposed to the Province that a new GO Station should be built at Parklawn to support employment in the area. That project was never advanced.

In the late 1990’s and early 2000’s as development in the area started picking up pace there was no transit planning undertaken for the area other than minor incremental service improvements by the TTC.

In the mid 2000’s as the demand for better transit options began to become clear and was voiced by residents there was no new rapid transit proposed by either TTC or GO. Finally residents began a push for express, premium fare TTC bus service to Union Station. TTC staff opposed the service vociferously claiming it would not attract sufficient riders. The service was launched in 2005 and the TTC made no effort to promote or market the service. Initially TTC staff used this to validate the lack of demand, however once the Humber Bay Shores Residents Association began to promote the service ridership increased to the point where it is now very well utilized.

Transit planners do sometimes misjudge the latent demand for a transit service. These services like most other things must be effectively marketed. I respectfully suggest Metrolinx projections for Parklawn GO new ridership are too conservative and that insufficient detailed knowledge of the local market was collected.
The City of Toronto only began to undertake its first post amalgamation transit plan, known as “Feeling Congested” in 2013. As Board members are well aware the public transit deficit in the City of Toronto and throughout the GTHA has reached epic proportions. We are now playing catch up.

It is not reasonable to further delay the provision of effective rapid transit to a heavily congested, growing, and underserviced area such as south east Etobicoke and Humber Bay Shores. Delays will only exacerbate existing conditions and important opportunities to secure lands for a station or transit supportive employment may be lost.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconsider the recommendation for a Parklawn GO Station, direct your staff to do further analysis, to work with the City of Toronto and the local community to develop a more robust business case for this project, and report back to your Board in a timely manner.

Yours truly,

Peter Milczyn
MPP- Etobicoke Lakeshore

cc. Hon. Steven Del Duca
    James Maloney, MP Etobicoke Lakeshore
    Mayor John Tory, City of Toronto
    Councillor Mark Grimes, Ward 6
    John Livey, Deputy City Manager -Toronto
    Jennifer Keesmaat, Chief Planner -Toronto