

## “PUBLIC TRANSIT MATTERS” Thursday, April 1, 2010

A series of events over recent weeks have put the issue of Toronto’s public transit into a unique political frame. From the media frenzy about drivers and collectors, to the incessant griping about poor service, to the surprise announcement that much of the Transit City funding has been pulled from the provincial budget – there is a deluge of negativity crashing up against Toronto’s public transit system. Some mayoralty candidates have come out in favour of privatizing TTC routes, others are lining up to attack the salaries and benefits of the TTC employees.

Prior to the 2010 provincial budget, the McGuinty government had committed over \$8 billion to help fund the capital costs of building Light Rail Transit lines to all corners of Toronto. Transit City was to be a key legacy of David Miller’s term, providing new transit capacity to an overburdened system and making it much easier for suburban Torontonians to use public transit to move around the city.

By slashing Transit City funding, the province effectively ensures that only a small fraction of the Transit City lines will be built. That was the experience when Mike Harris cancelled all new subway construction except for the Sheppard line – it’s taken 15 years to get the next piece started. The backtracking by this government means that families in most of the inner suburbs will be denied access to rapid transit for many years to come.

The bad news doesn’t end there. The McGuinty government has consistently refused to restore a permanent funding commitment for TTC operating costs. Instead, it insists on a growing role for Metrolinx. With a governing board stripped of all elected political representatives, Metrolinx has been merged with GO Transit and is the conduit for all new funds for transit across greater Toronto and Hamilton. Much more of its business is done ‘in camera’ than with the TTC, and public deputations are discouraged.

Metrolinx is starting to look like greater Vancouver’s Translink, which was created when BC’s Gordon Campbell removed city politicians who would not support a P3 rapid transit line. The subsequent P3 construction contract saw labourers from Central America earning as little as \$3/hour, with massive employment standards complaints. Translink’s new private sector appointees then created a confrontation with its own employees that caused a four month strike over issues of contracting out. It has not been a model worth replicating.

Nobody can predict how Metrolinx will act in the future. But there are concerns about accountability and its embracing of public-private partnerships, as well as its lack of commitment to increasing Canadian content in future vehicle purchases. It is clear, however, that the TTC's role is being undermined by the new provincial approach.

Torontonians want and need a strong, public transit system that is affordable, accessible and convenient. But given all the forces battering our current system, it looks like it will take a real fight to achieve that.

The Executive Board recommends that Labour Council:

1. join with other interested organizations to create a Public Transit Coalition to fight for the integrity and expansion of our public transit system.
2. and its affiliates reject and expose all attempts to privatize or outsource transit operations in the GTA.
3. continue to work with our transit union affiliates to support the dignity and rights of transit workers in the GTA.