

Tuesday, July 28, 2015

Dear Commissioners

Re: Agenda Item #3 – Transit Planning in Toronto: Roles, Priorities and our decision making framework

With some respect to those who may read this, and Ms. Keesmaat et al, to show a sense of humour about things - can we actually use the term "transit planning" and "Toronto" together these days?? While transit has always been somewhat of a political football, increasingly it feels far more prone to politicking and not planning, now with a rather strong whiff of the facts really not mattering any more, and a pronounced distrust of whatever numbers are produced as decision-based evidence making, and not trying really hard and long to look at a situation objectively. This distrust has been honed by several other major transit projects that don't quite make the projections of riders/costs etc. despite a set of projected facts and good figures to justify the expenditures.

But first and foremost, any delusional habits start with the denial of the costs of automobility. Delusion is the solution; and it helps that the costs of the car/trucks etc. are well and thoroughly buried in multiple budgets spread out in various parts of the various governmental budgets. Or the costs are ignored. To quote Newman and Kenworthy in the Sustainability and Cities tome of 1999 p. 351 under the sub-heading Road Expenditures "This was one of the hardest data items of all to gather. The trail of road expenditures in most cities is a tortuous path, whereas expenditures on transit tend to be appear in a few easily identified publications." Our "caronic" denial of a rather huge set of avoided costs and subsidies (like drainage of roads and parking lots, and health costs, and police costs, and climate costs, etc. etc.) is arguably greater than what we spend and don't spend on transit, which is usually good for us eventually, but that eventually may be decades after opening when odds are the asset is becoming challenged.. One older Vancouver study that found they subsidized cars about 7x more than transit. So in terms of denial of realities; Caronto is right up there.

So it's somewhat less fair to be picking on transit for over-runs vs. the four-wheeled elephants that often run all around us and sometimes over us. But Big Transit is also in the running for follies, especially when governed by the more suburban and car-driving set, which we've been for a few decades, though it is a harbinger of hope to have a broad expansion of services in all parts of the City, thanks.

Yet if the system is in crisis, and money tighter, it is irresponsible to spend or commit to spend billions on less-wise to dumb things. The decision-based evidence making smells to be very apparent with the SSE, though I'm quite in favour of blowing big billions on transit, just it needs to be effective and well-placed given the many examples of big suburban projects not fulfilling the numbers and draining the system, while the core gets worse and worse, and the competition of the bike feels deliberately dissed and neglected. Yes, transit is always a bit political as railways were, but now it feels that it really is far more about consuming resources than providing transit, and qui bono?

Sure, Mr. Webster's firing for his stating of opinions about what numbers told him is now behind us by a couple of years, but the taint lives on, including in whatever numbers can be brought forward by the system, and moreso when compared to the ridership of King and Queen streetcars. There is pronounced wilfull blindness to real problems. When one gets reinforced by independent UofT researchers (eg. Sorensen and Hess in the Star of March 16, 2015, with clear numbers of relative merits of LRT vs. SSE), to have the ongoing "done deal; go away" and so what if it's a few billions, we have still a batch of extremely odious politicking, or so it feels from a core perspective.

Especially as we don't seem to have a set of clear and obvious Origin/Destination numbers, which seems like a rather obvious starting point beyond seeing transit congestion at Bloor/Yonge. Even then, if there's discernment about where folks are getting off and transferring to and from, we need to get to a finer grain of resolution of where they come from, and indeed, I think I've read somewheres that only 13% of those folks in Scarborough using transit come to the core. That's kinda lousy expenditure for their passage, but we do cater to some minorities as with the Gardiner debate, to help spend the nearbillion (but no transit), and cyclists being a large minority that we can't spend so many millions on, unless it's offroad, as mere cheap paint will often make a big difference eg. Bloor/Danforth subway assist for a half-million for 20kms.

Getting good Origin/Destination data would be a chore, and thus an expense. But surely it makes sense to really spend a few millions than to end up having at least \$3,600,000,000 in commitments?

The processes of approval are of the "fix", not of considering options. For instance, with the SSE, I not only urge a quick reversion to the funded etc. LRT plan, but add a further inducement of a newer idea (I think) of using the wide Gatineau Hydro corridor for a busway starting within Scarborough near Eglinton and Victoria Park, and leading to the NE even out to the zoo. The advantages of a busway here are:

- there's flexibility to go on-road when needed to make a connection or a big destination like the Hospital or some schools
- diagonality is a time-saver
- a busway on vacant land ain't a busway on an open road
- we'd still have a lot of work and some jobs in the construction/design etc. industry
- it might be done waaay sooner and cheaper and actually make a real difference in developing system redundancy.
- same number of letters as "subway"; better view for riders...

And if we really start to think and dream, it's possible to see this busway being extended through Thorncliffe Park and to the Don Valley corridor area to get to the sub-regional near-express transit that I think is sorely missing in TO, and what many people would like to see, given the lack of busways/clearways and distances travelled. But the EAs for both the DRL and the SSE are such that this is a new idea totally out of the box, just like saving billions. Meanwhile, in Curitiba, they did a set of busways that is now legendary giving near-subway capacity for 1 % of the cost.

I also have to wonder with SSE, if it's soo crowded at Bloor and Yonge, how does extending the Danforth

line actually help that? In order to f*x the system, you have to break it??

It's possible the RER might do far more for congestion relief and transit sooner than other things, and is Mr. Tory's Smart Track just a rebranding of the RER, and how much of a difference will it make to have far more of a connection point and transit boost at the Main and Danforth station areas first.

I haven't seen modelling yet of having express buses at a regular fare doing things either, including on the DVP, which is more for the DRL stubway, as it will be a stubway I fear if it doesn't go far enough, and it likely won't. It too is a little stale, being based on a city of 60 or 70 years ago, when Thorncliffe was still a racetrack.

We thus maybe need less of the Big Silver Bullet projects and far more of the silver buckshot, which you've started to do with the broad expansion of services, and we can glean a sense of overall demands from the TTC's map of this year, which has mapped frequency of services, as a bit of a surrogate for O/D data.

The varied EAs and projects also don't contemplate having political will, especially for clearing transit vehicle space, though this is an older problem eg. the King St. RoW, including lack of police enforcement.

It's easy to see why there's been a push for big projects; but they are less-viable than usually promoted, and there's a strong tendency to bury and obfuscate unpleasant results and costs. Like the first Spadina subway extension is still not really likely up to the same levels of cost recovery as the University Line and the Yonge portions, but it all gets lumped in to the same pot and presumably money is made or not too much is lost. The Spadina first extension still was misplaced; it would have been better further west, right?

Then there's the Sheppard stubway - more poor stinky politricks than planning for sure, and I recently saw a suggested figure of about \$10 subsidy/loss per ride. And yet the King and Queen cars are making money, but the service is really less OK I gather, particularly in crush hour. The solution is far less of a subway there in my view considering everything; having transit restored to Front St. with expediting as much as possible would be wise (this is filled in later)

The King/Queen services will be further compromised with new cars as under Mr. Miller and Mr. Giambone and the guys making the decisions the overall capacity will be the same with w2 new cars as three old cars, = same service, but truly not.

There's another major fail in the transit planning and politics from that time with the Front St. Extension failure to try to have a Front St. transitway instead, aligned with Official Plans etc. vs. a stale-dated road project. Sure, the road folly was eventually knocked off, but everybody except me pretty well failed to press making a transitway instead, and gee, there's a modelling of a Front St. service in the 1993 WWLRT EA, and it was effective and faster than the milk route WWLRT. For some reason, there's really no demonstrable interest in improving east-west transit - or so it feels like, unless you can stick out a hand

for another government to pay for things, or slow down their transit operations for a bikeable distance.

It may still be possible to get a bit of expedited King/Queen/Queensway transit by ensuring that some of this current service can access land and thus new tracks on the north side of the Weston rail tracks running from south of Queen St. just past Dufferin, along to get to Front St. and then along Front St. to clear destination gold, with transfers. It's possible that the land can be more readily obtained now without the meat packers and yet, officialdumb and politicians are sooo caught up with SHETS etc., doing something real and expensive for the core is uphill, and as it means dealing with Metrolinx and, and, and... it can be understandable to prefer a subway vs. surface though we're sooo far behind and the climate crisis so advanced, we need rapid change, best done on surface.

The jibe at Metrolinx may be somewhat unfair, but inspired by the almost certain shortfall of the UPX. It is a travesty and a waste of a corridor - and wise planning would be to figure out ways of adapting what's been built to a different service ie. sub-regional TTC based service, not necessarily going to the Airport all the time. I expect the politics will not be upright on this issue of course.

And then we have another big suburban transit project with the other Spadina subway extension that odds are will be more of a drain, but the politics won't be to be honest about costs, the fix being in with the money. Somehow, the clear "not a good idea" assessment of the TTC at the time was overcome, but will the TTC be paying for the shortfalls?

There's a further set of indications of monolithic shortsightedness with how the TTC doesn't interact with biking too. Rather than Complete Streets, it's far more of an all-ours, as the streetcar tracks dictate lane positions, and I start with two larger transit projects, Spadina and St. Clair.

Spadina was wide enough for an excessway, but they couldn't find room for bike safety, and yet, the tracks can be rebuilt but the curbs can't be. Two of the four cycling deaths were tragedies attributable to not enough width for cyclists; too bad ya'll don't get sued waaay more often for preventable negligence etc., and that the costs of design shortfalls don't fall more on those who approve them or who have profited from them.

With St. Clair, an EA hand-out of Feb. 17, 2004 had on p. 10 improved cycling as the #1 by numbers wish list by public, and yet, after construction it's gotten even more nasty to be biking on it, unless one gets on to the RofW. Yet another Fail; too bad we can't move the transit out of the centre to the side and share the side a lot better, and let the cars do whatever in the central portions.

As mentioned, streetcar tracks dictate lane positions. For those who don't like the trans*it of the core service, riding a bike on King, Queen, Dundas and College is on the nasty side with tight lanes, and yes, streetcar tracks that can throw a cyclist. As evidence of the great denial, we don't bother counting the harms to cyclists from these injuries, so any charts or maps of where we get hurt greatly misrepresent the hazards of the east-west core roads, but people keep riding them because the core transit is not good enough value as we subsidize suburbs. The TTC is happy to keep the competition endangered. If

you don't believe me, push hard for a some east-west long bike routes, and see how cyclists emerge on them, and better yet, most of you should try biking on St. Clair and these other streetcar tracked roads.

The TTC is also part of officialdumb in denying the role of bikeways as congestion relief, assisted often by the Council, which has been exceptionally hypocritical in passing resolution after resolution for study, and at least one about climate change, and then completely failing to do anything special or real for Bloor cycling, including a tiny bit of Bloor St. E in the Bike Plan of 2001 that would cost about \$20,000. The combination of engineers and carservatives is making us world-last; soon on a screen near you in Bikes vs. Cars - eg. the Bloor.

There isn't enough concrete use and millions in a painted bikeway to get things done. The true nature of the Council including the progressives is seen just with the Pan Am hoopla where a proposal for a cosmetic light-up of the Viaduct surged ahead for \$2.8-ish million, while gee, can't find the \$ to do that Bloor EA, and that was curtailed from extending to the Danforth for an alleged lack of funds. Oh, the lightup was done with borrowed money.... and the first study of Bloor and other east-west roads was done in merely 1992, and, like the Bike Plan, time for another study I guess.

So even if you begin to get to legitimate numbers, the taint of the decades of indifference and fudging make me still a very strong opponent of the SSE, with strong reservations about the DRL, and a strong sense that there's a set of better deals and options for taxpayers and those in Scarborough with GO, and different thinkings about what possible transit there is and where it could go, and absolutely this includes a new corridor for transit, starting within Scarborough. As the odds are won't be listening, (two year terms please) maybe I should to be in touch with the credit rating agencies, and maybe start up a petition to change the City's name away from Toronto. Unsure if it should be Caronto, or Moronto.... let the public decide?, and then be ignored?

As a thought: for all capital projects over a billion; how about a 2/3 council majority to proceed with? Include intervenor funding too; it's hard for citizens to react to juggernauts, and chase the details. And if you don't like that idea, should we have voter approval in a referendum for things over a billion? We did have the Queen St. subway approved by voters in 1946 I think it was - so there is precedent, including of course, not building things. Too bad Eglinton was filled in eh?

Meanwhile, there's a developing bad bus knuckle in the southbound Sherbourne bike lane immediately south of Bloor. Please shave off/fix ahead of a cyclist being thrown.

Thanks

Hamish Wilson