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Toronto Transit Zine - Issue 2

Questions? Contributions? torontotransitzine@gmail.com

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FREE AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT CAMPAIGN

Transit platform for Toronto's 2014 election

- Freeze all fares and plan to gradually reduce them. Begin by undoing the most recent increases.
- Eliminate fares for seniors, students, low-income people, people receiving social assistance and the unemployed.
- Low-income passes -- tied only to incomes, age and student status -- should be low-cost and allow full mobility (like current Metropasses).
- Immediately eliminate fares during non-peak hours.
- Progressive taxes on incomes and other provincial, city and federal sources -- not transit users -- should fund low-income passes.
- Suspend fare collection during extreme weather alerts (hot and cold).
- Demand that the provincial government provide at least \$700 million annually for TTC operations, to lower fares and increase service.
- Demand that the federal government introduce a national funding and development plan for public transit.
- Maintain full public ownership of all transit services, stock and maintenance. No private operations (such as P3s) that distort the goals of public transit.
- Create neighbourhood-based, short-distance public transit to link people lacking access to the main urban network.
- Demand that the province and city commit to building promised rapid mass transit in working-class neighbourhoods.
- Replace Metrolinx with a democratic planning body

Beyond the Gridlock: Public Transit Struggles from across Europe & North America

PUBLIC FORUM

Thursday, October 9th 2014
7:00-9:00 p.m.
@ Beit Zatoun
612 Markham St., Toronto
Subway: Bathurst

Struggles to expand public transport and to block privatization are central to overturning neoliberalism and addressing climate justice. This forum brings together some of the leading public transit activists in Europe and North America.

Chairs: Greg Albo (Socialist Project/York University) and TTCRiders

Speakers: Allan Alaküla (EU representative, Tallinn); Marcus Finbom (Planka.m, Stockholm); Joanna Erbel (Congress of Urban Movements, Warsaw); Jaron Browne (POWER, San Francisco-Bay Area)

Presented by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Berlin and New York Offices, Socialist Project, Centre for Social Justice, and York University



John Tory: masquerading as a transit candidate

It's not hard to see why John Tory wants the transit vote – it is arguably the most important issue in Toronto's municipal election this fall. Here is why his plan falls short:

- **Tory has rebranded an existent plan as his own**

The provincial Liberal government has been planning GO line electrification for years. Tory's SmartTrack basically involves prioritizing electrification of two of these lines, hence the 7-year timeline. Essentially, most of SmartTrack is already in the works without Tory needing to win the election.

- **Tory's plan means less transit in more time**

If everything works according to "Tory's" plan, in the next ten or so years, Toronto would be left with a single "above-ground subway" line that leaves out much of the city – except this "subway", at best, will run every 15 minutes. This is a sorry excuse for a "new" urban transit plan. If you have ever been on a TTC subway platform at rush hour, you know how hard it is to crowd into an already-full train with service every 2 minutes 40 seconds. Tory's promise of an infrequent commuter service will not solve Toronto's transit woes.

- **Tory's funding strategy has been rated 1 out of 5 stars by transit experts**

Tory's plan to fund SmartTrack is Ford-like in its shaky financial assumptions. It claims that Toronto's contribution to the plan (almost \$3 billion) can be financed by means of *tax-increment financing*, a proposition that has an 89% failure rate.

- **Tory has all the wrong intentions**

Tory's "commitment" to transit is centred on providing the best deal for motorists, *not* for people who actually ride the TTC. He has repeatedly emphasized that his transit plan will ease traffic congestion and will cut down on "unnecessary" construction.

Tory's spokesperson Amanda Galbraith has been quoted as saying:

"The key to SmartTrack is that it will be built without disrupting traffic on Eglinton Avenue".

This is but one of many instances in which the Tory camp has put convenience for car traffic ahead of transit planning. On top of all this, Tory missed his chance to participate in the major transit debate organized by TTCRiders at Ryerson University. His official statement was very revealing:

"With Doug Ford entering the race and less to six weeks to go until Election Day, we have entered a new phase of the campaign. John has extraordinary demands on his time and, unfortunately, we are unable to accommodate every event and request."

Toronto: Don't be a pawn in Tory's election game. As public transit riders, we should be respected and catered to – not manipulated for political gain. On October 27th, don't give Tory your vote for transit. SmartTrack doesn't come close to covering our needs.



Union Station to Pearson Train Fiasco: No Two Tiered Transit!

Herman R.

Imagine the nerve! The cost of taking a direct train from Union Station to Pearson might be around 25-30 dollars – ten times the cost of a TTC token. A spokesperson from Metrolinx (the provincially-appointed transit authority) called it “a boutique service for business people going to the airport”. And the train will be using polluting diesel fuel, and not integrated into the larger transit grid.

For workers trying to get to work at the airport, or ordinary working people who want to get to or from the airport, this is ridiculous, and is – in the words of the Toronto Airport Council of Unions, representing over 20,000 workers at Pearson – nothing less than *Two-Tiered Transit*.

They, and other groups, such as the Clean Train Coalition (which has been waging a challenge over the past few years), TTCriders and the Free and Accessible Transit Campaign, also have been fighting together to lower the fares, electrify the service, and integrate it into the public transit network, making it accessible to thousands who need it.

In an unusual show of agreement, the Toronto City Council called on the unelected Metrolinx board to lower the fares for the U-P service to the level of the current GO train (\$6.00 a pop).

A leaflet from the Toronto Airport Council noted:

Clearly Metrolinx has botched this file and its refusal to even disclose its pricing, furthers our concern that their agenda is not a public one.

It's time to derail Metrolinx's caviar dreams and turn this public investment into a rail link that benefits us all!



(Image via Metrolinx)

City Council Elections

Herman R.

The GTWA Free and Accessible Transit Campaign is following the elections for city council on October 27th. In particular, two city council candidates are featuring transit issues that reflect our perspective, Mike Laxer and Paul Boeking.

Mike Laxer is running for a city council seat in Ward 6, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, as a socialist. He supports Free Transit.

Check out this comment from his website (<http://electmichaellaxer2014.blogspot.ca/>):

As Ward 6 City Councillor I will fight to see the Waterfront West LRT plan brought back to connect our Ward with Toronto's downtown in a faster and easier direct route.

I will work to see transit expanded city wide and to have revenue tools put in place to finance and maintain this expansion.

I will work to integrate GO Transit and TTC routes within the city so that people can use the Lakeshore line as if it was a subway.

I will also fight against any agenda to raise fares and will work towards FREE transit, which should be the environmental and social goal of any government.

If Tallinn (the capital of Estonia) and other cities in the world can have FREE or basically free transit, so can Toronto.

"I live on a tight budget since I don't have too much work right now," said Mare Tulp, who recently registered as a Tallinn resident. "I need to save money wherever I can, so I'm very happy with the free public transit scheme. This is a good thing for the common person."

On March 30, 2014 The Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) a large civic party in Vancouver, also came out in favour of Free Transit.

It really is an idea whose time has come!

Paul Boeking, is running for a council seat in Ward 35 in Scarborough. On the transit issue, he writes:

"Expanding public transit is vital, especially in the underserved inner suburbs like Scarborough. Equally important but less glamorous, is the need to improve how our existing system functions -such as by increasing the frequency of our bus routes and introducing two hour transfers. However, TTC fares have risen by 70 percent since 2003, while our wages and salaries have not. To make transit accessible and affordable to all residents of Toronto, we must freeze and lower fares."

Paul Boeking: <http://paulboeking.com/>

Premier Wynne's Rapid Transit Sell-off

Alice B.

On April 14, 2014, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced that Ontario would invest \$29 billion in roads and transit. She did not make this announcement from the premier's office at Queen's Park, or at Metrolinx (Ontario's transit authority) headquarters on Bay Street. She spoke at the Toronto Regional Board of Trade at an event sponsored by global, mostly foreign, multinational corporations.

The significance of Wynne's choice of a private venue sponsored by an elite group of powerful multinationals, was lost on mainstream media. None mentioned that these multinational corporations stand to reap a huge financial benefit from the \$29 billion investment.

Most of the money will be funnelled into public-private partnerships (P3s). Small, local construction, engineering and architectural firms are unlikely to receive contracts for designing and building the Eglinton Crosstown or the Sheppard and Finch LRTs. Unionized, skilled mechanics and electricians will not be eligible for any of the maintenance jobs required to keep the LRTs running smoothly and safely. And ten years after the Eglinton line is built, TTC workers may no longer be allowed to operate it. All these jobs will be handled by a global consortium under a 30-year contract with the province.

This is nothing new. The Liberal government had a similar arrangement with TransCanada when it cancelled gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga at a cost of \$1 billion. Global multinationals have been very successful at convincing former premier Dalton McGuinty and his successor to open up new markets in public health, energy and transit infrastructure. Corporations like P3s because the public bears all the financial risk while the private partner is guaranteed a hefty profit.

So while more than half of Torontonians struggle with precarious employment, unemployment, underemployment and austerity, it's bonanza time for corporate CEOs and their shareholders. What's worse, many multinationals involved in P3s in Ontario have a reputation for unscrupulous business and labour practices around the world.

SNC-Lavalin, one of the key players bidding for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, also built Vancouver's Canada Line. Cost overruns of \$500 million must be recouped by taking revenue from the city's existing bus service. And five years after the line's completion, the B.C Human Rights Tribunal awarded \$2.5 million to forty temporary workers from Latin America who sued SNC-Lavalin, SELI Canada and SNCP Seli for paying them lower wages than European workers on the construction site got.

Thales, a French multinational weapons manufacturer, won a P3 contract from Metrolinx to build the Presto Fare Card system. In 2006, the company was banned from World Bank projects for winning contracts through bribery, and later was fined 630 million euros by the Taiwanese government.

With a provincial government unwilling to contribute its fair share toward existing TTC service, privatization of new rapid transit infrastructure will only make things worse. That's not the way to "move Ontario forward."

An Open Letter to the Metropass

Dear Metropass,

I love you so. You take me places I wouldn't ordinarily go. I hop on and off at different stops, run errands in different neighbourhoods, observe people of all kinds. Winter, summer, it doesn't matter.

But every month, it's the same ordeal. The end of the month stirs up anxiety as I calculate in my head, on my phone, in newspaper margins, my estimated transit use for the upcoming month.

Will I make up the cost? Maybe the weather will be nice enough to walk more, maybe I'll leave work early, maybe I won't visit my parents as often. Or maybe I'll only buy a few grocery items at a time.

Oh, Metropass. You're not exactly cheap. \$108 a month is steep for a privileged student like me - privileged enough to receive a discount, imagine that. What about the underprivileged "regular fare adults" who pay \$30 more than I do? Do they do the math every month? Feel the anxiety? I know some who do, at least. We all take the plunge. Insert the bank card in the machine and clutch the piece of plastic that comes out - disaster ensues if it gets lost.

Is it so much to ask to be able to get around in your own city? To be free-moving for school, work, play, and aimless wandering? Unlimited travel should not be a luxury.

Yours (only 'cause there's no other way at the moment),

A long-time user

